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Constraints or Preferences? Identifying Answers from Part-time Workers' Transitions in Denmark, France and the United Kingdom

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This paper investigates whether women work part-time through preference or constraint and argues that different countries provide different opportunities for preference attainment. It argues that women with family responsibilities are unlikely to have their working preferences met without national policies supportive of maternal employment. Using event-history analysis the paper tracks part-time workers' transitions to both full-time employment and to labour market drop-out.

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Abstract

This paper investigates whether women work part-time through preference or constraint and argues that different countries provide different opportunities for preference attainment. It argues that women with family responsibilities are unlikely to have their working preferences met without national policies supportive of maternal employment. Using event-history analysis the paper tracks part-time workers' transitions to both full-time employment and to labour market drop-out. The paper compares the outcome of workers in the United Kingdom, a country with little support for maternal employment, relative to Denmark and France, two countries with a long history of facilitating workers' engagement in both paid employment and family life. It finds evidence of part-time constraint in the UK, relative to the other two countries.

Keywords: cross-national comparison/ event history analysis/ part-time work

1. Constraints or Preferences?

In 2007, 30 years after the principle of equal treatment was enshrined in EU legislation, female participation rates still lag behind those of men, while female full-time employment rates reveal an even greater discrepancy (OECD 2006, 2002). Why do women have such different forms of labour force participation? And should women's disproportionate involvement in part-time work be taken to reflect their weak work orientation, suggesting that further policy investment will be a sunken cost, or does it reflect the ongoing incompatibility of modern styles of work with family life, suggesting that targeted policy will affect behaviour? This debate is ongoing, with some insisting that women in part-time jobs are *less committed* to paid employment than their high work oriented male and female colleagues in full-time posts (i.e Fortin 2005, Hakim 2002). Others underline the difficulties women face in their negotiation of paid employment with family responsibilities (i.e. McRae 2003, Rose 2001, Ginn et al. 1996). Here advocates claim that part-time workers are *structurally constrained* in their jobs due to the ongoing incompatibility of full-time employment and family life, rather than less committed to paid

employment. Essentially, the debate asks whether preferences or structures account for female market outcome, and its resolution can only be established once we have an adequate understanding of how preferences and institutional structures, as well as their interaction, affect outcome. While we have a good grasp of the institutions and policies likely to structure female market outcome, with considerable investment by supranational institutions and researchers in the area (i.e Plantega and Remery 2006; Jaumotte 2003; Vlasblom and Schippers 2004; Rubery, Smith, Anxo and Flood 2001), there is comparatively less research on the impact of preferences on outcome (with the exception of work by Catherine Hakim, various years).

There are also numerous problems with the information currently available on working preferences, the most important being the inability of current data to distinguish between ‘real’ preferences, i.e. women who want to work part-time due to their preference for fewer working hours, versus ‘accommodated preferences’, women who want to work part-time given the impossibility of balancing a full-time job with family care. The latter group are very likely to respond to policy investment in childcare provision, the former are not. We also need to be able to identify whether preferences are independent of institutional context or whether they merely reflect the options available for preference attainment. This paper calls for a theoretically grounded assessment of institutional structures on preference attainment and formation. We expect different countries to provide different opportunities for preference attainment, with feasibility of attainment, in turn, influencing preference formation. If worker carers want to engage in both paid and unpaid work the means by

which they do this, by working full-time or part-time for instance, as well as their desire to do so, will reflect national structures supportive of their preferences.

Cross national research in this area reveals consistent differences across countries in; working preferences (Crompton and Lyonette 2005; Fagan 2001), gendered attitudes towards employment (Cooke 2006) and in policy provision for worker-carers (i.e. Jaumotte 2003, Gornick, Meyers and Ross 1997). We also know that the availability and quality of part-time work varies by national context (Fagan and Rubery 1996) with the poor quality of part-time employment a recognised disincentive for both men and women in pursuit of reduced working hours (Fagan 2001). Consequentially, this paper suggests that different countries offer different opportunities for workers to realise their working preferences. Countries supportive of maternal employment are expected to have higher proportions of chosen, as opposed to constrained, part-time workers. This paper will assess the question through analyses of part-time workers' transitions as well as the variables which support or impede transitions. We look at transitions to full-time employment and labour market drop-out allowing us to engage with the expected heterogeneity in the part-time workforce with part-time workers who make transitions to full-time expected to differ from those who drop out of paid employment.

Previous research on part-time workers' transitions has assessed its role as a 'stepping stone' to further employment (O'Reilly and Bothfeld 2002) and its role in maintaining a foothold in the market over the life course (Drobnic, Blossfeld and Rohwer 1999). While both these papers sought to determine the impact of care responsibilities on part-time

workers' transitions the countries analysed (the United-States, Germany and the United-Kingdom) provide little public childcare, even though women's access to childcare is considered pivotal to their ability to work full-time. Consequentially, here I use the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) to compare Denmark, France and the United Kingdom. Denmark and France, with high levels of public childcare, are frequently categorised as countries supportive of maternal employment (Jaumotte 2003, Crompton 1999, Warren 2001), while the United-Kingdom is not (Rostgaard and Fridberg 1998, Stier, Lewin-Epstein and Braun 2001). Previous analyses have been unable to test the impact of proxies for preferences on labour market transitions with few panel datasets containing this information, again, the ECHP provides us with this information. The dataset used and the countries chosen provide us with an interesting test case of whether support for maternal employment influences; (1) differences in the market transitions of full-time 'high work oriented' workers and those in part-time jobs, and (2) the extent to which part-time workers' transitions appear to be structured by preferences or constraint.

2. Preferences or Structure as Competing Explanations of Individual Outcome.

Essentially, preference type theories assert that women's gender role attitudes and 'lifestyle preferences' explain their social and economic outcomes with individual agency overriding institutional structures such as; national policies on employment and work-life reconciliation as well as market rigidities. For work orientation/working preference theories to convince, they have to argue that preferences and attitudes are independent of institutional and market structuration, if they are not, institutional structuration becomes a competing explanatory mechanism of outcome. One means of asserting the dominance of

preferences over structuration, as well as its independence from structuration, is the claim that attitudes and preferences are formed early on in life, predominantly through childhood socialisation (i.e. Fortin 2005; Hakim 2000) – with strong links found between parents' and childrens' working attitudes (Starrels 1992). Another means of asserting the dominance of preferences over structures is to claim that preferences are stable, that overtime they will not be influenced by structural contexts. Gendered working preferences have been used to explain the persistence in the gender gap in pay and forms of female participation (Fortin 2005) as well as the traditional division of labour within households through time (Raley, Mattingly and Bianchi 2006). While research has found a decrease in traditional gendered norms regarding paid and unpaid work, these norms have been found to persist even in younger cohorts (Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001).

The second perspective tends to regard part-time work as a 'constraint' or as an accommodated choice given the absence of alternatives (i.e. Himmelweit and Sagala 2005, McRae 2003, Fagan 2001). Given the difficulty of combining the demands of childcare with the demands of a full-time job, womenⁱ have tended to sacrifice their careers to bring up their children. From this perspective it is the structures of both the market, the incompatibility of working life with family life, and the home, in the form of traditional divisions of unpaid labour, which limit the forms of employment women with families can engage in. That part-time work is 'chosen' by some workers as a means of achieving work-life balance does not imply women's preferences for part-time jobs, but rather underscores the absence of alternative solutions to paid work given family responsibilities in certain societies (i.e. Burchell, Dale and Joshi 1997). Theorists of part-time constraint underline

the different; labour markets, institutional structures as well as gendered divisions of paid and unpaid labour within families, which are likely to influence both preference formation as well as attainment.

A difficulty with the evidence within this debate concerns suitable measures of preferences. Even with longitudinal data it is very complicated to determine whether preferences are stable overtime. If we do not have data on preferences before and *ex post*, it is impossible to determine whether preferences determine outcome or whether preferences shift to reflect outcome. There is considerable research which suggests that preferences and attitudes change across the life course in response to changing social situations (Simon 1955, 1957, Simon Krawczyk and Holyoak 2004).ⁱⁱ For instance, we have evidence that part-time workers change their stated ‘reasons’ for working part-time to reflect their economic situation. Galtier (1999) using panel data finds that workers with decreased probabilities of moving out of part-time employment are most likely to change the reasons they offer for working part-time. Part-timers who *initially* defined themselves as underemployed, that is those who were unable to find/obtain a full-time job at time period 1, were quite likely to claim that they chose to work part-time at time period 2. We also have evidence of working preferences shifting to accommodate social constraints from qualitative analyses. By interviewing respondents at two points in time Himmelweit and Sagwala (2005) found mothers changed their attitudes and intentions concerning their childcare and employment arrangements when external constraints made their plans impossible to achieve. They also found instances where personality traits, i.e. being highly committed to paid work, changed to accommodate inflexible external constraints.

Even without the concerns of reverse causation in preference formation, we also need to consider whether working-time preferences can be met. Empirical evidence reveals considerable mismatch between preferred and actual working hours suggesting market rigidities (Boheim and Taylor 2004, OECD 2001, Fagan *et al.* 2001). Fagan *et al.* (2001) find mismatch between preferred and actual working hours across the European Union, with women less likely to have their working-time preferences met. Boheim and Taylor (2004), using different data, found that preferred working hours were more likely to be obtained after a job move rather than within a workers' current post. This suggests that worker-carers are likely to encounter difficulties in their pursuit of preferred working time, given their competitive disadvantage in market outcomes (Harkness and Walvogel 2003).

Employers' provision of good quality part-time employment is also likely to influence the proportion of workers who work part-time through preference. Some employers are known to offer reduced hour contracts to valued employees who seek them, so called retention part-time posts (O'Reilly 1994, Tilly 1996), however, until recentlyⁱⁱⁱ, and certainly not for the data window available to us, workers seeking a reduction in their hours are more likely to have to leave their job for a different one (Boheim and Taylor 2004). Some researchers attribute women's excess supply to part-time work as an explanatory mechanism of the poor quality of part-time jobs (Jaumotte 2003, p. 21), with lack of support for worker-carers effectively pushing them into and reinforcing the existence of a poorly remunerated and low quality part-time labour market. Nonetheless, not all countries provide poor quality part-time work (O'Connell and Gash 2003; O'Reilly and Fagan 1998) and while

worker-carers' competitive disadvantage is consistently revealed in cross-national evidence of a wage penalty for families (Harkness and Waldvogel 2003, Gornick 2004) and part-time workers (Bardasi and Gornick 2000) countries supportive of maternal employment are found to have lower penalties (Harkness and Waldvogel 2003).

To conclude, preferences are very difficult to convincingly measure in social scientific research and both market rigidities and family care responsibilities are likely to impede working-preference attainment. But different countries offer different opportunities for preference formation and attainment, we argue that worker-carers' ability to lead their working lives according to their preferences is severely constrained by their care responsibilities. Central to whether part-time work reflects personal preferences, as opposed to unavoidable constraint, is the extent to which nation states provide policies that support worker-carers in their dual pursuits. The absence of such supportive policies decrease choice and increase the probability that part-time work is involuntary. Structures that allow worker-carers to engage in the market according to their preferences include; public childcare and working-hours culture. National variations in the quality of part-time employment also need to be considered.

3. Different Institutions, Different Outcomes

Both female employment rates and part-time employment rates vary in the three countries analysed. Denmark has the highest female employment rate at 71 percent with few women in part-time jobs, 21 percent. The UK has a relatively high employment rate of 66 percent with a large proportion of women in part-time jobs: 40 percent. Finally, the French female

employment rate is the lowest at 55 percent, though of those women who do work only one in five work part-time (OECD 2001, 2004).

Public Childcare Provision- The provision of good quality and affordable childcare is pivotal to worker carers' ability to work full-time. Countries with reduced access to childcare are likely to have a greater proportion of constrained part-time workers. Denmark and France are two countries with considerable state investment in childcare. Denmark invests 2.1 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) and France invests 1.2 percent of its GDP, meanwhile state expenditure in the UK for the same time period was comparatively low representing 0.4 percent of its GDP (OECD 2005). These figures were similar at the beginning of our observation period, with Denmark spending 1.9 percent, France spending 1.5 percent and the UK spending 0.3 percent in 1996 (Rostgaard and Friedberg 1998). The proportion of children below national school going age in public childcare reflect the differential rates of investment described, with 74 percent of Danish children, 38 percent of French children (though this masks a strong differential by age with 99.2 percent of children between 3-5 yrs in *Maternelle* schools in France) and 6 percent of UK children in publicly funded childcare (Rostgaard and Fridberg *ibid*).

Working Hours Culture- Worker-carers with a preference for full-time employment are unlikely to be able to work full-time and to bring up a family in a culture of long working hours. Therefore, countries with a long working-hours culture are more likely to have worker-carers working part-time through constraint. Denmark and France have national policies on working-time and have average working days of 37 and 39 hours per week with

little variation around the mean. While the UK has an average working week of 40 hours, it also has a strong tendency for long working hours with 40 percent of men working more than 45 hours per week. The corresponding figures for Denmark, 18 percent, and France, 12 percent, are less than half that (OECD 2004). The UK also has the greatest gender differences in working time; while men and women report similar working hours in France and Denmark (Bishop 2004).

The Quality of Part-time Jobs- Previous research has found part-time work in the UK to be of inferior quality relative to part-time work in either Denmark or France on a range of indicators, including: wages, access to employer provided training and on the job autonomy (Gash 2005). This is reflected in the characteristics of our sample (table A1 in the appendix). We find UK part-timers to be less educated, to have had less formal training, and to be less likely to be in the higher and lower professional groups than is true of Denmark or France. This leads us to expect a higher proportion of constrained part-time workers in the UK, with workers less likely to prefer inferior working conditions.

Both Denmark and France provide childcare, above average quality part-time work and a working hours culture compatible with work-life balance. The UK provides little childcare, poor quality part-time work and a long working hours culture. We expect evidence of constraint among UK part-time workers relative to those in France and Denmark. We test this assertion in the following manner: First, we look at variation in the transition rates of part-time workers to full-time employment relative to full-time workers' transitions to a second full-time job. Differences in these transition rates can be taken as evidence of

preferences for, or constraint in, part-time jobs whilst controlling for national differences in job-to-job mobility. Similarly, we provide a test of differences in labour market drop-out rates between part-time and full-time workers. Again this allows us to gauge differences in the market behaviour of women in part-time and full-time jobs for less successful transitions. Second, we assess the variables which precipitate and impede part-time workers' transitions to full-time employment and to labour market drop-out. Here we examine whether a variable measuring workers' reasons for engaging in part-time work offers reasonable predictions of part-time workers' transitions. This variable is frequently used as an indicator of preference (i.e. Petrongolo 2004, Hakim 1991) though its ability to adequately capture preference is contested (i.e. Burchell, Dale and Joshi 1997; Ginn *et al.* 1996). We also test whether the presence of children in the household constrains part-time workers' future transitions, and if they do, whether there are differences between countries. Here we examine differentials in the structuring effect of family responsibilities on worker outcome and reveal whether countries supportive of maternal employment remove this constraint.

Hypotheses

1. We expect a greater proportion of constrained part-time workers in the UK relative to Denmark or France and attribute this to the absence of affordable childcare, the long working-hours culture as well as the poor quality of part-time jobs in the UK. For these reasons we expect greater evidence of time-dependence among UK part-time workers relative to UK full-time workers and expect this of both transitions to full-time and to inactivity.

2. We expect the reasons workers give to structure their future market transitions and expect workers who claim to want to work part-time to be the least likely to make a transition to a full-time job. Similarly, we anticipate chosen part-time workers to be more likely to make a transition into inactivity. While we expect a different distribution of chosen part-time workers by country, as can be seen in table A1, we expect chosen part-time workers to be the least likely to leave part-time work across countries.

3. We expect a greater tendency for UK part-time workers' transitions to be constrained, with constraints (as a result of institutional structure) over-riding preferences. We therefore expect the number of children within the home to decrease transitions to full-time in the UK only (where institutions are expected to constrain workers). In our analysis of part-time workers transitions to inactivity we expect the number of children within the home to increase transitions in the UK only.

4. Data and Methodology

The analyses are run on all eight waves of the ECHP, a standardised comparative cross-national survey conducted in the Member States of the European Union under the auspices of the Statistical Office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT). The samples were drawn by each member state as simple random samples, with information collected from respondents in interviews in each panel year (1994-2001). The panel was not supplemented by new samples to counteract sample attrition given its relatively short data window.

The statistical technique applied, event history analysis (Allison 1984; Blossfeld and Rohwer 1995), allows us to examine the transition rates of part-time workers to different labour market states. The methodology controls for *right censored* data, data which allows us to determine when an event began but not when it ended. Failure to control for right censoring, or truncated data, can produce biases in statistical estimation (Tuma and Hannan 1978). Event history analyses also allow for time-varying variables, such as the number of children within the household, permitting greater precision in the estimations and full use of the panel data. The key statistical concept is of the hazard/transition rate, which is the conditional likelihood that an event takes place at time interval $t \rightarrow t+1$, conditional on it not having occurred before time t . We apply ‘competing risks models’, models that treat all exits other than the one we are interested in, to unemployment for instance, as censored. We chose to apply the piecewise constant exponential model as it relaxes the assumptions concerning the distribution of the hazard function, allowing the hazard to vary between specified segments of the time-axis. The models presented have robust standard errors to control for clustering within person years.

Dependent variable

The dependent variable measures the duration of the individual in a part-time job. The *first recorded job start date* was set as the starting point of the dependent variable, while the date at which the job ended was collected in later waves of the panel, as was the event at job-end, be it inactivity or full-time employment.

The variable measuring part-time and full-time status uses a combined measure of the objective and subjective definitions available in the ECHP. Part-time workers were defined as those who work less than 30 hours a week in their main job and who self-describe as part-time workers. Full-time workers are those who work more than 30 hours a week in their main job. Transitions to inactivity only include transitions to the status of housewife and other economically inactive. It does not include transitions to education or training, nor to retirement, as these categories tend to reflect different market strategies. Finally, the ECHP does not ask respondents if they are on maternity or childcare leave. It does, however, differentiate if people currently working, are temporarily absent from a job. If they are temporarily absent from a post, they are classified as employed.

Independent variables

Respondents' reasons for working part-time is used as proxy for worker preference, with respondents offered the following options: 'under going education or training, housework, personal illness, want but cannot find a full-time job, chosen working hours and other'. While this variable does not control for the reverse causation in preference formation, part of this exercise is to establish the predictive power of this variable for empirical research. If the variable appears to 'work' in the right direction, we will at least have an idea of its relative use for future discussions. We place those who want a full-time job in the reference category to maximise the possibility of establishing differences between workers' reasons for part-time work. Cell size restrictions resulted in a combined category of those who are in education or training, those who are ill and those who gave 'other'

reasons. Attempts were made to include a time-varying version of this variable but data restrictions did not allow it.

Given that inability to balance care responsibilities with paid employment is seen as a primary source of constraint for worker-carers, constraint is operationalised as the number of children within the household. The variable varies with time and is categorical, with the age of the child classified as 0-3 years, 4-12 years and 13-18 years. The reference category is women with no children. The age categories were chosen to reflect different childcare needs by child's age, we expect very young children to have the strongest effect. Other household level variables were included in the analysis, we include information on whether the woman is either cohabiting or married, and also tried to test the impact of household income. This variable never reached statistical significance however, so was not included in the final models.

The models also control for a series of demographic, human capital and labour market variables. The details of which can be found in the notes to Table A1 in the appendix. The models select female respondents between the ages of 18 and 60, which is a common age selection in the literature. We do not select on women of childbearing age as the research questions are not solely about the constraining impact of childcare.

While the ECHP is a comparative panel, slight differences exist on certain variables. Unfortunately one of our key explanatory variables: reasons for working part-time, was only asked of a subsection of the UK sample provided by Eurostat. The UK sample

consists of three years of a new ECHP panel sample, started for the first time in 1994 and ending in 1996, as well as a panel based on the pre-existent British Household Panel Survey (BHPS). As the BHPS does not ask part-timers their reasons for working part-time, the multivariate analysis only draws on the original UK ECHP data, which did ask the question of respondents. Sensitivity tests were carried out on the data to ensure that the BHPS and the UK ECHP samples did not differ on key covariates.

5. Findings.

Figure 1 presents the *difference* in the Kaplan-Meier survival estimates of part-time workers' transitions to full-time employment, relative to full-time workers' transitions to a second full-time job. Any variation in part-time workers' transitions relative to full-time workers' will deviate from zero, with lines above the central line indicating an increased tendency for part-time workers to make a transition relative to full-time workers. Both preference type theories and theories of part-time worker constraint predict reduced transitions from part-time employment relative to full-time employment. Preference type theories assume that part-time workers have a strong preference for part-time work making their transitions different from women who work full-time. Meanwhile worker constraint theories predict reduced transitions from part-time employment as a result of part-time workers' inability to obtain other jobs given their competitive disadvantage relative to those without family responsibilities.

<FIGURE 1 HERE>

We find that part-time workers in both Denmark and France have fairly similar job-to-job transitions as full-time workers, though there is a slight tendency for French part-timers to make more transitions at the end of our observation period. UK part-timers, however, are the clear outliers exhibiting considerable state dependence relative to full-time workers.

<FIGURE 2 HERE>

Figure 2 presents the difference in the Kaplan-Meier Survival estimates of part-time workers transitions to inactivity relative to full-time workers. For transitions to inactivity preference type theories offer strong predictions of part-time workers' greater tendency for labour market drop-out as a result of their weak work orientation. Meanwhile, theories of constraint suggest that certain lower quality part-time jobs may discourage workers from employment leading to labour market drop-out. Figure 2 shows that it is again part-time workers in the UK who exhibit the largest difference in their market transitions relative to full-time workers, nonetheless the difference in this transition is not as stark as in the previous figure. Again the supposed difference between 'high work oriented' full-time workers and 'low commitment' part-time workers is not supported in the evidence for Denmark and France.

Figures 1 and 2 suggest that there is considerable segmentation in the UK part-time market that is not replicated in either Denmark or France. Danish and French part-timers do not behave that differently from their full-time counterparts. This suggests either that UK part-timers are considerably constrained in their market transitions, while Danish and French

part-timers are not, or: that there is something culturally unique about UK part-time workers which makes them unwilling to accept a full-time job and considerably more likely to leave these posts for labour market inactivity. Given the institutional barriers many UK worker-carers face relative to French and Danish workers, this paper argues that it is more likely to be evidence of worker constraint.

Tables 1 and 2 present equations of the transitions of part-time workers by country and presents the variables that increase or decrease part-timers' transitions to a full-time job and to labour market inactivity. Here we hope to reveal whether the variables we have used to operationalise preferences and constraint structure part-time workers' future transitions.

<TABLE 1 HERE>

In table 1 we find that the reasons part-time workers give for working part-time are predictive of their future transitions to full-time employment. Nonetheless, we also find the variable to have less explanatory power than hoped. We also note that 'chosen' part-time workers, are no different to the reference category, those who want but could not find a full-time job, in either Denmark or France.

In Denmark women who work part-time so they can engage in childcare or housework are less likely to make a transition to full-time employment as well as the amalgamated "other" category. In France, we found no statistically significant difference between women who gave different reasons for working part-time, suggesting either that preference

are of little consequence in part-timers' transitions to full-time, or that the variable used is a poor means of operationalising the concept. The United-Kingdom is the only country where our hypothesis of reduced transitions for chosen part-time workers is confirmed.

In Denmark, we find that women with young children are not constrained in their transitions to full-time employment, and even establish a higher rate of transition to full-time employment for these workers. In France the presence of young children within the home has no effect on part-time workers' transitions. In the United-Kingdom, our country with little support for maternal employment, we find the presence of children within the home has a strong negative effect on part-time workers' transitions to full-time employment and find, as expected, that younger children have the strongest constraining effect.

We ran nested log-likelihood tests to determine the relative explanatory power of the variables measuring worker constraint as opposed to worker preference. We found the variable measuring the number of children in the household to have greater explanatory power for the UK model than the variable measuring workers' preferences, while the opposite was true in Denmark. This supports our claim that the UK market would be the least likely to offer the opportunity structures for worker-carer preference attainment.^{iv}

While the variables which we have operationalised as preferences or constraints are of primary interest, the other covariates are also found to be predictive of workers' transitions. In both France and the United-Kingdom, it is both younger workers and more

educated workers who are most likely to make transitions to full-time employment. In Denmark, neither age nor human capital variables are found to have a similar effect.

<TABLE 2 HERE>

Turning our attention to table 2, we look at the variables which are predictive of part-time workers' transitions to labour market inactivity. Here we find that part-time workers' reasons for working part-time were only predictive of transitions to inactivity in France where chosen part-time workers, as well as the category of other, are more likely to make transitions to inactivity than under-employed part-time workers. This finding supports the assertion that some part-time workers are less committed to paid employment, though it is surprising that the variable did not reach significance in either Denmark or the United-Kingdom. The impact of children within the home on workers' transitions to inactivity was also only predictive in France. Here we found young children increased the rate of transition to inactivity, while older children decreased the rate of transition. It is worth noting that the education of children in maternelle schools in France begins from the age of 3 years onwards, so women with young children are more likely to experience difficulties in balancing paid and unpaid work and therefore more likely to drop out of the market if they have children of this age.

The other variables predictive of future transitions to inactivity include the following: in Denmark we found older women, those with lower levels of education as well as manual workers considerably more likely to make a transition from part-time employment to

inactivity. In the UK, the model as a whole is weakly predictive. In an effort to ensure the robustness of the model we re-ran the analysis for the UK using the BHPS sub-sample within the ECHP (results available from the author on request). As explained in section 4, we do not use this sample for this analysis as the BHPS sub-sample does not contain information on part-time workers' preferences. The test revealed a similar model to the one presented here, though it was more predictive.

6. Discussion

This paper contributes to the ongoing debate concerning women's disproportionate involvement in part-time work, one group argues that some women have a preference for part-time employment, the other underlines the constraints these women face in their negotiation of paid employment with family responsibilities. One of the departing features of this paper was the suggestion that the opportunity structures for preference attainment and formation vary by nation state, with women with family responsibilities particularly influenced by national policies and practices which support maternal employment. This is an important departure as it questions whether current measurements of working preferences merely reflect national opportunity structures for working preference attainment.

Using comparative panel data we examined whether part-time workers differ from full-time workers in their market transitions and whether this difference could be attributed to either workers' preferences for working part-time or constraint. The analysis was comparative with the institutional features of the UK compared against two countries more supportive of maternal employment: Denmark and France.

We found the greatest part-time/full-time difference in the UK, with UK part-timers showing considerable time dependence. Meanwhile, part-timers in Denmark and France behaved relatively similarly to their full-time counterparts. We attribute this to the comparative absence of support for worker-carers in the UK relative to France and Denmark. The UK was also the only country where the presence of children in the household constrained part-time workers' transitions to full-time work. This paper contributes to the mounting evidence which argues that inadequate childcare is a constraint for full-time participation for worker-carers (i.e. Jaumotte 2003). It should come as no surprise that the countries which have no/little public childcare provision, and where private provision is only financially feasible for high earners (Viitanen 2005), appear to push their maternal workforce into low quality part-time employment. It is worth noting that previous research has found the UK to exhibit the largest gender gap in pay, and the largest family gap in pay relative to six other advanced industrial nations, including the USA, Australia and Canada (Harkness and Waldfogel 2003).

This paper also drew attention to the paucity of credible data concerning respondents' working preferences. Given the considerable risk of reverse causation in preference formation, it argued that preferences should only be used as a causal explanation of outcome if it is clear that preferences have not been affected by outcome. Nonetheless, the paper did try to assess whether workers' reasons, a frequently used indicator of preferences, offered sensible predictions of worker outcome. We found that preferences offered weak predictions of worker outcome with other labour market and household level

variables providing considerably better predictions of part-time worker outcome in all countries. Nonetheless, preferences were found to matter, and this was particularly true for our analysis of Denmark, the country expected to provide the best opportunity structures for preference attainment.

This paper proposes two avenues for future research. The first concerns the policy response to future needs for elder care, given increases in the age of citizens in most advanced democracies. This paper looked at the constraining impact of national context and children on women's transitions, future research would do well to assess the impact of responsibilities for elder care. The second avenue concerns an improved assessment of national and socio-economic variation in both preference formation and attainment. It appears important to generate data that allows us to credibly determine whether women, and men, have different preferences for labour market attachment before they enter the labour market, and then to determine the impact of market rigidities and institutional structuration on preference stability overtime.

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ⁱ Women, rather than men, for cultural and economic (Oppenheimer 1997) reasons still tend to take primary responsibility for childcare. This tendency is slowly changing, however, with men investing more of their time in childcare across the European Union (Smith 2004).

ⁱⁱ In the psychology literature it is standard practice to collect data at two points in time to determine the impact of a controlled experiment or test on a group of respondents. In their measurement of job related preference formation, Simon, Krawczyk and Holyoak (2004) established that respondents changed their preferred job attributes to reflect the job attributes of the jobs they chose.

ⁱⁱⁱ In the UK the right to request flexible working, including part-time jobs, was introduced under the Flexible Working Regulations 2002. The first version of this act allowed workers to request a change in their working hours if they were responsible for the care of their children. The Netherlands brought in similar legislation in 2000. There is currently no similar legislation in either Denmark or France.

^{iv} Results available from the author on request.

TABLES

Figure 1. Difference in the Kaplan-Meier Survival Estimates of Part-time Workers' Transitions versus Full-time Workers' Transitions to FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT. The Y axis shows the difference in the proportion of workers surviving a transition.

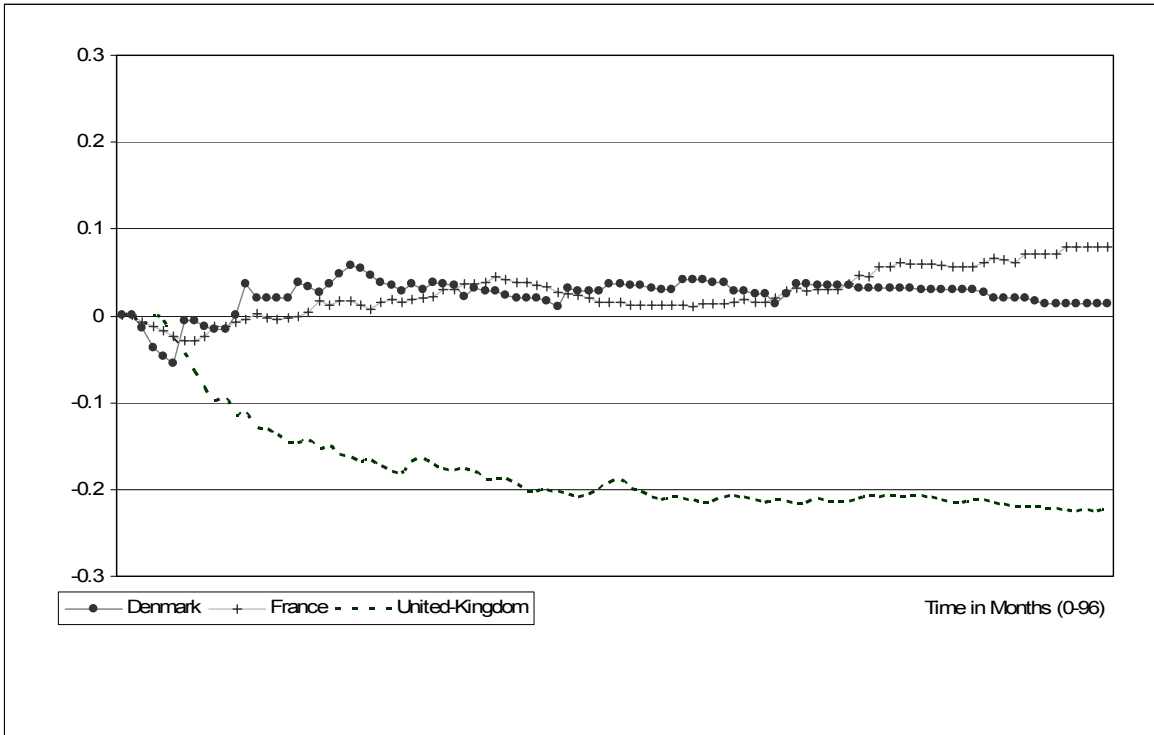


Figure 2. Difference in the Kaplan-Meier Survival Estimates of Part-time Workers' Transitions versus Full-time Workers' Transitions to INACTIVITY. The Y axis shows the difference in the proportion of workers surviving a transition.

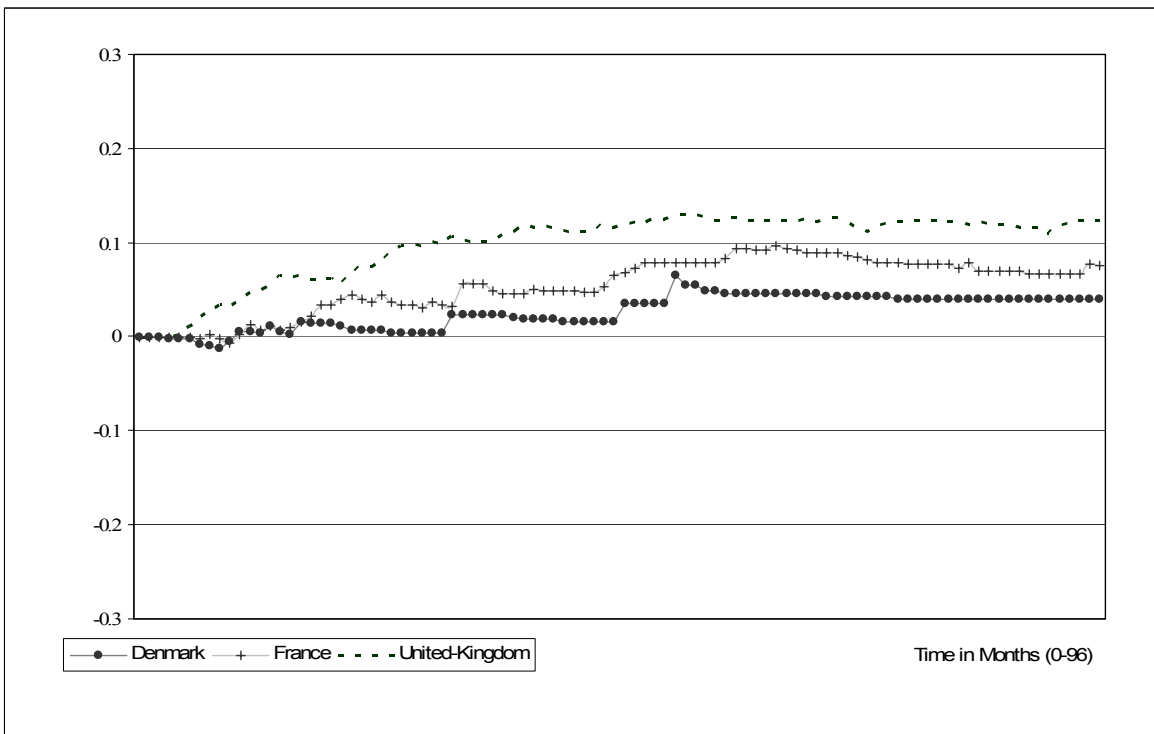


Table 1. Female Part-time Workers Transitions to FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT, waves 1-8 of the ECHP, Piecewise Constant Exponential Model run with Robust Standard Errors (RSE)

	<i>DENMARK</i>	<i>FRANCE</i>	<i>UNITED-KINGDOM</i>
	Coef. (R.S.E.)	Coef. (R.S.E)	Coef. (R.S.E)
<i>Reasons for Part-time</i>			
Housework/Childcare	-1.88 (0.62)***	-0.51 (0.34)	-0.30 (0.50)
Chosen	-0.78 (0.66)	-0.88 (0.56)	-1.26 (0.60)*
Other (ref- underemployed)	-1.55 (0.62)*	-0.41 (0.39)	-0.62 (0.50)
<i>Household Variables</i>			
N. of Children (0 -3 years)	0.90 (0.47)*	-0.50 (0.39)	-1.15 (0.59)*
N. of Children (4 - 12 years)	-0.22 (0.42)	-0.09 (0.19)	-0.56 (0.31)*
N. of Children (13 -18 years)	0.55 (0.28)*	0.01 (0.15)	0.03 (0.15)
Cohabiting	0.77 (0.70)	0.13 (0.31)	-0.54 (0.32)~
<i>Age Category</i>			
less than 25	0.64 (0.80)	1.38 (0.47)**	1.03 (0.43)*
25 to 29	0.63 (0.69)	0.93 (0.37)*	0.91 (0.47)*
30-39	0.98 (0.61)	0.91 (0.35)*	-0.31 (0.45)
55 years plus	-0.66 (1.11)	-0.32 (1.01)	-0.91 (1.06)
<i>Human Capital Variables</i>			
University Education (ref)			
Upper Secondary Education	0.37 (0.59)	-0.36 (0.35)	-0.79 (0.34)*
Lower Secondary Education	-0.32 (0.82)	-0.24 (0.40)	-1.34 (0.44)*
Formal Training	0.65 (1.09)	1.84 (0.50)***	0.69 (1.07)
<i>Labour Market Variables</i>			
Higher Professional (ref)			
Lower professional	-0.79 (0.68)	-1.21(0.45)**	-0.41 (0.63)
Clerical	-1.15 (0.55)*	-0.34 (0.53)	-0.29 (0.46)
Skilled	-	-0.09 (0.96)	-0.63 (0.80)
Manual	-1.09 (0.87)	-0.51 (0.60)	-0.58 (0.67)
Workplace Size 1-19 (ref.)			
Workplace Size 20-99	-1.64 (0.69)*	-0.47 (0.40)	0.42 (0.43)
Workplace Size 100-499	-1.98 (0.72)**	-0.32 (0.44)	0.06 (0.50)
Workplace Size 500+	-0.45 (0.92)	-1.53 (0.87)~	-0.63 (0.59)
Private Sector	-0.54 (0.52)	0.09 (0.29)	-0.09 (0.37)
Previously Unemployed	-0.60 (0.54)	-0.37 (0.27)	-0.01 (0.38)
<i>Baseline Hazards</i>			
Duration 12-24 months	-0.50 (0.66)	0.158 (0.44)	0.06 (0.44)
Duration 24-48 months	-0.81 (0.69)	-0.45 (0.47)*	0.59 (0.38)
Duration 48-72 months	-1.69 (1.07)	-1.25 (0.70)*	
Duration 72-84 months	-2.04 (0.74)	-0.29 (0.40)	
Constant	-2.87 (1.60)*	-6.24 (0.90)***	-3.88 (1.37)**
<i>Model Summary</i>			
Wald	196.27***	88.77***	102.23***

Notes: ***p<=0.001, **p<=0.010, *p<=0.050, ~p<=0.100

Table 2. Female Part-time Workers' Transitions to INACTIVITY, waves 1-8 of the ECHP, Piecewise Constant Exponential Model, run with Robust Standard Errors (RSE)

	<i>DENMARK</i>	<i>FRANCE</i>	<i>UNITED-KINGDOM</i>
	Coef. (R.S.E.)	Coef. (R.S.E)	Coef. (R.S.E)
Reasons for Part-time			
Housework/Childcare	0.36 (1.19)	0.66 (0.41)	-0.13 (0.73)
Chosen	1.18 (0.74)~	1.24 (0.45)**	0.37 (0.69)
Other (ref- underemployed)	0.93 (1.31)	1.46 (0.46)**	0.26 (0.74)
Household Variables			
N. of Children (0 -3 years)	0.59 (2.09)	1.22 (0.30)***	0.48 (0.38)
N. of Children (4 - 12 years)	-0.84 (0.79)	0.31 (0.22)	-0.01 (0.24)
N. of Children (13 -18 years)	0.58 (0.56)	-0.49 (0.26) ~	-0.05 (0.20)
Cohabiting	0.15 (0.74)	1.19 (0.58)*	0.09 (0.47)
Age Category			
less than 25	2.18 (1.11)*	0.67 (0.54)	0.46 (0.71)
25 to 29	1.24 (2.13)	-0.27 (0.44)	0.87 (0.50) ~
30-39	-0.94 (1.63)	-0.17 (0.39)	0.32 (0.44)
55 years plus	2.38 (0.77)**	-	0.30 (0.52)
Human Capital Variables			
University Education (ref)			
Upper Secondary Education	-1.73 (0.87)*	0.53 (0.57)	0.69 (0.65)
Lower Secondary Education	-1.23 (0.68) ~	0.63 (0.67)	0.71 (0.60)
Formal Training	-2.89 (1.31) ~	-0.78 (0.33)*	-0.04 (0.37)
Labour Market Variables			
Higher Professional(ref)			
Lower professional	-0.57 (1.69)	-0.36 (0.78)	-1.90 (1.13) ~
Clerical	0.06 (1.18)	0.13 (0.75)	-0.41 (0.62)
Skilled	-	0.18 (0.41)	-0.76 (1.03)
Manual	-0.40 (0.92)	-0.06 (1.00)	-0.17 (0.67)
Workplace Size 1-19 (ref.)			
Workplace Size 20-99	-0.54 (0.79)	0.97 (0.91)	0.81 (0.42) *
Workplace Size 100-499	-	0.18 (0.97)	0.27 (0.49)
Workplace Size 500+	-0.35 (1.55)	0.74 (1.10)	0.10 (0.69)
Private Sector	-0.71 (1.16)	0.49 (0.37)	0.00 (0.38)
Previously Unemployed	-0.53 (1.36)	0.47 (0.31)	-0.27 (0.42)
Baseline Hazards			
Duration 12-24 months	0.726 (1.09)	0.04 (0.496)	0.60 (0.54)
Duration 24-48 months	0.041 (1.32)	-0.71 (0.53)	0.80 (0.37) *
Duration 48-72 months	1.16 (1.05)	-0.35 (0.58)	
Duration 72-84 months	-0.66 (1.20)	-1.05 (0.47)*	
Constant	-7.03 (1.77)***	-9.15 (1.18)***	-5.83 (1.09)***
<i>Model Summary</i>			
Wald	270.42***	246.51***	37.13*

Notes: ***p<=0.001, **p<=0.010, *p<=0.050, ~p<=0.100

APPENDIX

Table A1 Descriptive Statistics of the covariates for our female part-time worker samples by country.

	DENMARK	FRANCE	UNITED-KINGDOM
	Percent	Percent	Percent
Reasons for part-time:			
Housework/Childcare	29.48	27.49	51.62
Under-employed	19.91	39.22	10.71
Chosen	33.29	7.77	24
Other	17.32	25.52	13.84
Cohabiting	82.42	77.71	83.44
Previously Unemployed	30.58	34.16	19.01
University Education	33.12	29.54	15.77
Upper Secondary Education	41.07	33.06	40.24
Lower Secondary Education	25.81	37.41	44.0
18-25 yrs of age	10.60	11.68	7.31
25-29yrs	7.56	14.60	10.24
30-39yrs	23.14	30.45	33.81
40-54yrs	47.19	39.48	39.73
55-60 yrs	11.51	3.78	8.9
Higher Professional	7.72	11.96	11.94
Lower Professional	18.06	16.92	7.6
Clerical	56.15	48.75	59.98
Skilled Manual	1.70	2.22	3.41
Unskilled Manual	16.36	20.15	17.06
Private Sector	42.34	55.97	66.87
Formal Training	54.09	47.59	39.95
Mean N. of Children (0 -3 years)	0.06	0.10	0.13
Mean N. of Children (4 - 12 years)	0.43	0.55	0.65
Mean N. of Children (13 -18 years)	0.36	0.49	0.50
Total N	1547	3911	1,934

Notes: The variables measuring workers' human capital measure the highest level of education achieved, the categories correspond to ISCED codes: 5-7 (third level education) 3-4 (upper secondary education) 0-2 (lower secondary education). A second human capital variable was introduced to the model testing whether the respondent had any formal skills training. The precise question asked was: Have you had formal training or education that has contributed to your present work? Y/N/NA. Firm size is presented in the models in an altered form as it was not asked of public sector employees in the first wave of the ECHP. Missing information on this variable was imputed in an effort to retain cases in the analysis which would otherwise have been dropped. It was thought important to include firm size given that part-timers opportunities for upward transitions tend to vary by firm size. The occupational classification used is based on the ISCO occupational categorisation.