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**Well-being of children and labour markets in Europe
Different kinds of risks resulting from various structures and changes in the labour
markets**

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**"Part time work and patterns of balancing family and work": The need for
a blending of sociological and psychological perspectives**

Andreas Lange, *German Youth Institute (DJI) Munich*

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ABSTRACT:

The debate about the “blurring boundaries” (“Entgrenzung”) among work and family touches also the connections between employment, the conduct of life and the development of children. Whereas the “new sociology of childhood” argues in terms of the perceptions and agency of the children on the topic of themselves (see for review Lange 2004), developmental psychology looks at the “effects” of different work-family arrangements. The thesis of the paper is that only a combined sociological and psychological approach, an integration of qualitative and quantitative studies on the topic, is useful for decoding the implications of working conditions. Working time is an important example (see Crouter et al. 2005), but the volume of work hours is only one indicator for the challenges of new forms of production – and it is an ambiguous one. Part-time work for instance can mean a voluntary reduction of working-hours, but it can also mean a forced arrangement (for instance for men who get no other job). After a review of existing studies on working arrangements, family life and children’s development an outlook of necessary new research is given.

1. WHY BOTHER OR THE RELEVANCE OF PART-TIME WORK FOR THE DISCUSSION OF CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING

Why is part-time employment a topic for a social scientific approach to children's well-being and development? I think, there are the following reasons for reflecting on differential work arrangements and their impact on children's everyday lives and their future life chances:

1.1. Argument Nr. 1: Family time, and especially time with children, is a highly valued good

Time of working parents with their children is a highly valued, but simultaneously precious commodity. Parents, especially the highly educated ones, firstly know about the necessity to interact with their children on a regular basis. Secondly, they rate talking with, caring for and playing with their children as their favourite activities.

1.2. Argument Nr. 2 Working time is also a highly valued good - for men as for women

Great parts of the European population (West-Europe) on the other side also appreciate and value the time they spend in their work-life. There is a bundle of motifs behind these aspirations. Beside the necessity to be able to nurture the family and children, in the sociology of work and occupations there have been detected "subjectivations" of work. By this term is meant, that more and more people, in more and more branches of the industry, but mainly in the service and knowledge sectors, have an intrinsic interest in doing their jobs well. According to the data of the Institute for Opinion Research in Allensbach, more people in Germany say that they feel well at their work place (Noelle/Köcher 2002: 192). This quota rose from 53 per cent in 1960 to 72 per cent in 1999. They experience their working as enriching and are prepared for the sake of their working achievement to blur the boundaries between work and the rest of life – this issue is in Germany known as the "Entgrenzung" of Arbeit. They tend to work longer, than they have to according to their contracts, utilize their personal networks for getting new projects and so on. Work has become an integral part of the identity of many men and women.

1.3. Argument 3: The clashing of two time-preferences

As a consequence of the clashing of these two powerful forces, people, especially women, are torn, under the existing sociocultural regimes, between the two axes of family and work time. Because of this high commitment for their children and their jobs, they come often in situations, in which they feel they cannot do enough in either of the two domains. This ambivalences have been shown in carefully designed qualitative studies, for instance by Blair-

Loy (2003). She has interviewed women in high position jobs in the financial service sector and reconstructed the “competing devotions” of career and family.

1.4. Argument 4: Consequences of the time famine and ambivalent feelings for the children

1.4.1. The view from developmental psychology and socialization models.

Children are touched by these competing devotions and more concretely by the work-arrangements mainly via the following three routes:

Firstly, they are influenced by their **parents’ general satisfaction** with the work-life arrangement, which has an impact on the family climate. The later in turn influences the child’s well-being. Secondly, they are touched by the **day-to-day spillovers** from work to home (see Kupsch 2006 for a detailed literature review and sophisticated statistical models from the European FamWork Project), which are transmitted by their parents on them (s. the work in the USA by Larson et al 1994 and now Schneider et al 2005 for the emotional cascades in families of adolescents). Important features of these transfers from work to family are the temporal aspects of the organization of work which impinge on the organization of the everyday life conduct of the families. The regularity of events in the home, e.g. homework and bedtime schedules as well as levels of unpredictability and confusion in the home are related to children’s socioemotional functioning. Children in households with more structure and routines have better academic achievement and fewer behavioural problems (for a review on these topics see Evans 2006). Are there any implications for children’s well-being when parents work non-standard work schedules? There has been virtually no investigation of how children are faring in these around-the-clock households, despite evidence that nonstandard work times affect family functioning and are stressful for parents. Using data from a representative sample of 4433 dual earner Canadian families and their 2-11 year old children (N children= 6361), Stradzins et al. (2004) compared families where both parents worked standard hours, with families where one or both worked non-standard times (evenings, nights or weekends). The authors found associations between children’s well-being and parents work schedules, with higher ratios for child difficulties when parents worked non-standard times. These associations persisted after adjusting for several confounding factors including socio-economic status, parent part-time or full work, and childcare use, and were evident whether mothers, fathers or both parents worked non-standard times.

Thirdly, children participate from **the resources their parents** garner from their inclusion in the work-force – especially from the earnings of their parents.

These paths of influence have been researched in studies with great samples and standardized instruments for documenting the impacts on children. Child effects are to speak in a technically manner the “dependent” Variables, whereas the working conditions of their parents are the dependent variables. Here a long research tradition exists which tries to figure

out the effects of different aspects of the parents work situation for the children in terms of their cognitive and emotional functioning. Today, there is an intensive debate about the detailed ramifications of the **duration** and flexibility of the parents' involvement in the labour market for children's development. Researchers as Bianchi (2000) and Hoffert (2000) have shown, that there was astonishingly little change in the amount of time mothers spend with their children from the 1970 to 2000. They reallocate others parts of their time budgets, concerning their own sleep and so on. Another important finding is, that there is little consistent evidence that maternal employment has positive or negative effects for children's development – with one conceptually relevant exception:

1) „In summary, there is an emerging hypothesis of developmental mismatch suggesting that an early and extensive resumption of employment, for some groups of families, provides a social context in which (a) it is slightly harder for mothers and infants in some groups to become attuned to each other and may potentially lead to less mutual engagement when they are together, and (b) children are exposed to care of lower quality and to more home-based nonfamilial care (which is not as positively related to language and preacademic outcomes as center-based care). Even if differences in environment are small and do not result in less secure attachment, a decline in quantity, quality, or both, of mother-child interaction And difference in type and quality of child care may be sufficient to contribute to less positive cognitive and social development.” (Zaslow/Jekielik/Gallagher 2005: 268).

This line of thinking now is supplemented by another perspective :

1.4.2. The new look on work-time arrangements: The sociology of childhood

In the last five to ten years some researchers in Germany and other European countries have, inspired partly by the pioneering work of Ellen Galinsky in USA, asked: What do children think about the working times of their parents? How do they perceive their parents jobs? What is their perspective on the positive and negative spill-overs from job to parents and family life? And what is their contribution to this connection? (cf. Klenner/Pfahl 2005; Lange 2004 a, b; Roppelt 2003; Zeiher 2004, 2005).

The first result: Children from the age of six years are able to contemplate about the job conditions of their parents, but there are great differences in the details and ramifications children report. Elisabeth Näsman has shown that for children the temporal connotation of their parents works is the most important frame of referring to it.

The second result: Children articulate very different needs of care and time. The main point they want from their parents, and this is an important hint for social and work policy: Reliability. This means, that they want to know, when their parents come back from work and they can rely on this (Roppelt 2003).

The third result is that they perceive very subtly, the effects of work on their parents: Lorna Mc Kee/Natascha Mauthner/John Galilee (2003: 37) report from their study on children's perspectives on middle-class work-family arrangements: “Children were able to see

and appreciate the contradictions of their parents' work and care experiences, and were also able to assess the pros and cons of their particular work-family arrangements The children's pragmatism and adaptability were evident in many of the accounts with children appearing to understand and accept external constraints on their parents' lives. They could also identify the contradictory effects of work on their parents, for example the children could describe their parents as feeling simultaneously happy and stressed or angry and excited in relation to work."

Fourthly, children appreciate the combined care-work of mothers and fathers.

Fifthly, children need not only the everyday times of their parents, but there is a great demand for them being accompanied in special times, such as school transitions, important sport events and being ill.

Sixthly, children in their middle childhood plea for a certain autonomy of their times and places. So they see the work commitments of their parents as a certain resource for their autonomous life conduct (s. Christensen 2002). For example, they complain about overprotective mothers, who are all the day at home looking and caring for them. One girl framed this as follows: "I have said to her, she should search for a job and go to it some hours every day" (Roppelt 2003).

On the basis of these building blocks of the sociology of children, the family and sociology of work, I now turn selectively to the literature on part-time employment. My intention is not to give a full picture about the prevalence and distribution of this working-arrangements, but to show some elements of part-time work which could have the potential to soften the time-famine, ambivalences and negative spill-overs.

2. SELECTED ASPECTS OF PT WORK OR WHY PT IS NOT PT

2.1. The positive aspects of new-concept part-time employment

PT-Time work can be seen as one of different adaptive strategies for people, especially women in professional careers to allocate time and energy in the family, the job (and other commitments). Another hot debated strategy is to delay/postpone motherhood. But as we know from many survey studies on youth, most young people want to integrate work and having children.

Looking at the mothers, they develop **further adaptive strategies** to manage successfully both work and family responsibilities. Some "try to do it all" (s. also Hochschild 2005 for a typology). That means, they continue to work long hours in their professional careers, while simultaneously investing heavily in their families. Hochschild observed that such patterns can be characterized by a busy style of living, which is transferred partially from the world of

work to the world of the family. The other strategy is to go to the Mommy Track, modifying their work intentions and career aspirations.

In this tableau, the reduction of working hours is a desirable option to facilitate work and family. However, most professional women, women who are working in form of subjectivated work, normally do not use the part-time options, because there are costs: in the form of reduced compensation, marginalization on the job, and fewer career aspirations. So, part-time jobs usually are lower status jobs with less money and fewer career options. But now some companies have begun to offer new-concept part-time employment options. These are variants, which enhance job prestige, job satisfaction, because often the professional employee remains in his/her position. The interest of the great companies which are implementing such strategies is to “win the war for talent” by retaining professional employees with their skills.

The **potential benefits** of such a **variant of part-time arrangements** have been recently demonstrated by Jeffrey Hill, Vjocalla Mårtinson and Maria Ferris (2004). They reanalyzed data from the IBM Global Work and Life Issues Survey. The analytical strategy was to compare female new-concept part-time professionals and female full-time professionals. It could be shown that

a) NPT professionals reported less work-to-family conflicts in terms of interference and strain.

b) NPT mothers reported significantly more success in coping with the demands of their work and family lives.

c) It could be shown, that the 20 additional nonwork discretionary hours per week were not completely invested in household chores.

In the words of the authors: “As expected NPT work was associated with reduced work-to-family conflict. Our findings clearly show that work activities of NPT professionals do not interfere with valued activities in the home as frequently. ... In addition, our findings show that sensitive family processes are less likely to be interrupted when a professional woman is in an NPT job.” (Hill/Mårtinson/Ferris 2004: S. 290).

3. SUMMARY AND INTEGRATION: RESEARCHING PART-TIME ARRANGEMENTS LONGITUDINALLY AND INTERDISCIPLINARILY, QUANTITATIVELY AND QUALITATIVELY

Now I try to put these three very fragmented parts of the puzzle together. I have shown, that we have to understand part-time work as one adaptive strategy, which is chosen by some families and women. Then we have heard that there are privileged forms of part-time development, which have very strong positive effects on family interaction and other variables. Before this, we have got an impression of the possible effects of work-arrangements on children's development and the wishes of the children themselves. Synthesizing these three strands of evidence, we can develop questions and strategies for further elaboration and research:

a) To be **able to evaluate the impacts of new developments in European labour markets** on children's well-being we have to work together interdisciplinarily. Especially we have to blend the perspectives of the established developmental sciences and the new social studies of childhood. James/James (2004) recently in this sense have voted for childhood as an interdisciplinary field. "Given the theoretical, conceptual and empirical complexity of the processes that the cultural politics of childhood attempts to unravel – to identify the ways in which social, economic, legal and political systems position children in society, and children's and adult's responses to that positioning – it is clear that no single discipline could claim this topic as theirs by right. However, although the virtues and virtuosity of interdisciplinarity are often held up as the mantra of contemporary research, there remains, in practice, a certain coyness within the academic community about admitting the potential fecundity of such. "

b) Very important is the funding of longitudinal research on the differential impact of different forms of part-time work on families and children in different welfare regimes. Ideally, this design should combine qualitative evaluations from the perspective of children and their parents on the one side and standardized measures of well-being and competencies on the other side. To get a grasp of the complex fabric of everyday life, attention has to be put into the description and analysis of proximal and mediational processes (Bronfenbrenner/Morris 2000), which link work life, family interaction and children's development.

c) A coherent typology of part-time work and other work-time arrangements has to be developed. This typology must include not only the hours worked, but also elements of the optionality of the arrangements, the possibility to change this work status and so on. Not to forget one has to control for the family type and form and the SES (Caspi/Bianchi/King 2005).

d) Such a research design could be a very useful tool for applied issues in the fields of work and family policy, but also for education. So we could learn from such research how children and their families cope with the 24/7 society (Presser 2003), for instance, how they develop special time competencies: „To have a say over one's time is of great importance for

children and policy makers need to ensure that children can develop time management and planning skills. Finally it is important to see these questions in relation to how children's views and values of family time change over their life course." (S. 87).

e) Summarizing: Such research efforts would be important contributions to the much needed ongoing social reporting on children and family in Europe, supplementing the work for instance of COST 19. (Jensen et al. 2004). The wishes of children and families, as they were reported here exemplarily concerning their time preferences, have to be confronted with the realities of the work regimes in Europe – especially in terms of their effects on well-being (Veenhoven 2000) and the competencies of children.

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