

Working time flexibility : challenges and opportunities for childcare in France

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Introduction

- Parents increasingly expect flexible childcare services
 - They prefer collective services (together with grand parents) for children's well-being
 - but find their time schedules too rigid
 - They tend to choose individual childminders whose services are more flexible
- Family policy promotes flexibility in childcare services, by
 - Developing supply and demand for individual services (childminders or family employees at home)
 - Encouraging collective services to offer flexible services (part-time, short-time, atypical hours, *etc.*)
 - Encouraging firms to invest in childcare
- What are the challenges and opportunities of such a policy ?

Parent's demand for flexibility

- The norm of working time remains strong in France, however
 - part-time work has considerably developed since the 1980's
 - more and more workers face a slow flexibilization of working schedules (irregular hours, predictable or not, see table)
 - it makes their work and life balance more complex to organize
- Change in family structure and organization leads to increasing demand for childcare
 - couples aged 25-49 are mostly dual full-time earners
 - single parent families represent 17,4% of French households in 1999
- These change lead, in a complex way, to increasing demand for flexible childcare, especially when
 - both parents have the same atypical hours
 - parents cannot rely on family solidarity (esp. single parents)

Working time schedules for men and women (%)

	Regular (same schedule every week)		Irregular (predictable)		Irregular (variable)	
	1995	2001	1995	2001	1995	2001
Men	66	66	12	12	22	22
Women	73	70	10	10	17	20
Men + women	69	68	11	11	19	21

Source: Insee, Working Time Surveys, 1995 and 2001

Field: All wage earners

Organisation of work of couples aged 25-49 where at least one partner has a job (% of couples)

	<i>EU 25</i>	France	Italy	Germany	UK
Man and woman both full time	45	52	38	37	44
Only man working	29	25	45	26	21
Man full time/woman part time	19	16	13	28	30
Man and Woman both part-time or Woman full time and man part time	2	2	2	2	2
Only woman working	5	5	2	7	3
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Eurostat, European Labour Force Survey, 2003

Childcare supply in France

- Childcare services are regulated by the State and segmented
 - Collective services (“crèches”, either public or private)
 - childcare workers (more than 95% women) must be qualified and have diploma
 - Individual services
 - Childminders at (their) home (“assistantes maternelles”, 99% women) have an obligation to get the approbation of the local authorities and to take courses (60 hours training)
 - Family employees take care of children at parent’s home, no diploma or training are required
- Various responses to parent’s demand for flexibility
 - Collective services are opened at “normal” hours of work (7 a.m to 18.30 pm) and may offer flexibility within this time schedule
 - Childminders at home and nannies more often work at atypical hours, but sometimes refuse such working hours

The organization of childcare services

- The French organization of services combines
 - State regulation, decentralization and segmentation between
 - public services
 - market services (childminders and nannies)
 - private non-profit services (collective or individual) depending on non-profit organizations
- As opposed to
 - The universal welfare State model (Northern countries)
 - extended public childcare service provided only by the State
 - civil society mainly do lobbying
 - The dual model (Southern countries)
 - limited public services and limited services in the non-profit sector
 - childcare relies essentially on family solidarities

Family policy and the flexibilization of child care

- Family policy supports innovation in childcare services to respond to parents' demand for flexibility
 - by encouraging individualised forms of childcare
 - lowering the costs of childminders for low and medium income families
 - by extending family policy financial contributions to innovative childcare services
 - by encouraging collective services to offer more flexible services (part time, *etc.*)
 - by inciting companies to invest in childcare
 - through tax credits

A qualitative research on atypical childcare services

- A research conducted by the CEE (Center for employment studies) for the CNAF (National Family Fund)
- In various innovative care services and organizations with extended or atypical time schedule
 - Collective childcare services opened 24 hours a day
 - Emergency services at parent's home
 - Childminder caring for children at atypical hours, *etc.*
- Innovative services are the result of new partnerships
 - between family policy institutions, local authorities and firms or civil society
- Childcare workers were interviewed about
 - their experience in the workplace, the organization of work
 - work and family balance, *etc.*

Innovating in flexible childcare services

- Innovative childcare services aims at responding to parent's demand for flexibility
 - Professional needs : parents working at atypical hours
 - Social needs : parents knowing specific difficulties (separation or divorce, illness, *etc.*)
- Responding to professional needs
 - collective services (« crèches »), financial participation of local firms
 - time schedule corresponding to those of the firms
- Responding to social needs
 - various services (collective, individual)
 - extended time schedule (night and day, week-end, *etc.*)
- However, these innovative services respond to parents' needs by demanding care workers to adapt their working time...

Care workers : a work-family balance dilemma

- Several reasons lead care workers to accept atypical hours
 - responding to parents' and children's needs
 - choosing atypical time schedule
 - esp. in collective structures where time schedule may be negotiated
 - the need to work
 - childminders who do not find childcare work at standard hours
- Schedule constraints are however problematic
 - care workers receive very few compensation for atypical hours
 - they often face a work-family balance dilemma themselves
 - leaving their own children while they care for other children

Conclusion : towards a 24 hours economy ?

- Developing flexible childcare services tends to extend atypical hours to
 - an increasing numbers of workers (care workers)
 - and to children (including sometimes care worker's children)
- It raises some crucial questions as to
 - What society do we want (esp. for our children) ?
 - a 24 hour economy ?
 - The necessity to adjust childcare services to work flexibility imposed on parents by companies ?
 - Is the response to parent's needs the primary aim of family policy
 - Is it possible to question parent's needs and companies schedules ?