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## **Title: Preference or Constraint? Part-time Workers' Transitions in Denmark, France and the United-Kingdom**

### ***Abstract***

This article 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 article tracks part-time workers' transitions to both full-time employment and to labour market drop-out. The article 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/ preference/ part-time work**

### **Preference or Constraint?**

There are two competing accounts concerning women's disproportionate involvement in part-time work. One account assumes women's preference for part-time employment with women working part-time *less committed* to paid employment than their 'high-work-oriented' colleagues in full-time posts (i.e Fortin 2005, Hakim 2002). Here advocates claim that outcome is chosen with different outcomes reflecting different working preferences. Others underline the difficulties women with family responsibilities face in their negotiation of paid employment (i.e. McRae 2003, 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 being less committed to paid employment due to their weak work orientation.

This debate can only be resolved when there is an adequate understanding of how preferences and institutional structures, as well as their interaction, affect outcome. While there is a good grasp of the institutions and policies likely to structure female market

outcome (i.e. Plantega and Remery 2006; Jaumotte 2003; 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 and ‘accommodated’ preferences. That is between women who want to work part-time due to their preference for fewer working hours versus women who want to work part-time given the impossibility of balancing a full-time job with family care. It is also important to determine whether preferences are independent of institutional context or whether they reflect the institutionally-specific options available for preference attainment. Cross-national variation in policy support for maternal employment (i.e. Jaumotte 2003, Gornick, Meyers and Ross 1997), and in the availability and quality of part-time work (Fagan and Rubery 1996), lead us to expect strong institutional specificities by country. Therefore, this article claims that different countries provide different opportunities for preference attainment, with feasibility of attainment in turn influencing preference formation. It also argues that countries supportive of maternal employment will have greater proportions of chosen, as opposed to constrained, part-time workers. This article will assess the question through analyses of part-time workers’ transitions as well as the variables which support or impede such transitions. It looks at transitions to full-time employment and to labour market inactivity, allowing an engagement with the expected heterogeneity in the part-time workforce. Part-time workers who make transitions to full-time are expected to differ from those who leave 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), as well as its role in maintaining a foothold in the market over the life course (Drobnic, Blossfeld and Rohwer 1999). While both these articles sought to determine the impact of care responsibilities on part-time workers' transitions, none of the countries analysed (the United-States, Germany and the United-Kingdom) are particularly supportive of maternal employment. Whereas countries which do provide support, through investment in affordable and high quality childcare for instance, are more likely to allow worker-carers to choose between part-time and full-time jobs. Consequentially, this article draws on the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) to compare Denmark, France and the United Kingdom. Denmark and France provide unusually high levels of childcare and are frequently categorised as 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 preferences on labour market transitions with few panel datasets containing this information, but 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. The article accounts for the institutional features of the countries analysed and therefore limits itself to three countries.

### **Competing Explanations of Individual Outcome: Preferences or Structure?**

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 structures - if they are not, institutional structures become a competing explanatory mechanism of outcome. One means of asserting the dominance and independence of preferences over structures 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 children's working attitudes (Starrels 1992). Another means of asserting the dominance of preferences over structures is to claim that preferences are stable and unyielding to structural context. Gendered working preferences have been used to explain the persistence of the gender gap in pay and in forms of female participation (Fortin 2005), as well as of 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, women<sup>i</sup> 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 that 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 the absence of alternatives to paid work given family responsibilities (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 that are likely to influence both preference formation as well as attainment.

It is difficult to resolve the debate on working preferences without accurate measures of preferences both before outcome and *ex post*. Without both measures it is impossible to determine whether preferences determine outcome or whether preferences shift to reflect outcome. Previous research has found preferences and attitudes to change in response to changing social situations (Simon 1955, 1957; Simon, Krawczyk and Holyoak 2004).<sup>ii</sup> For instance, part-time workers are known to change their stated ‘reasons’ for working part-time to reflect their economic situation. Using panel data Galtier (1999) finds that workers with decreased probabilities of moving out of part-time employment are the most likely to change their reasons 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. Qualitative analyses also show how working preferences change to accommodate social constraints.

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 external constraints.

Even without the concerns of reverse causation in preference formation it is also important 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 than men. 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 worker's current post.<sup>iii</sup> This finding suggests that worker-carers are likely to encounter difficulties in their pursuit of preferred working time, given their competitive disadvantage in the labour market (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. Most research has found part-time work to be of poor quality. Moreover the lack of support for worker-carers is seen to push women into, and reinforce the existence of, a poorly remunerated and low quality part-time labour market (Jaumotte 2003). 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 translates into a wage penalty for working mothers (Harkness and Waldvogel 2003) and part-time workers (Bardasi and Gornick 2000), these penalties are found to be lower in countries supportive of maternal employment (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, this article argues 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 access to affordable and high quality childcare and working-hours culture. National variations in the quality of part-time employment also need to be considered.

### **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 only 21 percent of women in part-time jobs. 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 women who do work tend to work full-time. Only one in five French women work part-time (OECD 2001, 2004).

*Childcare Provision-* Access to 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). 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 Nursery schools in France) and 6 percent of UK children in publicly funded childcare (Rostgaard and Fridberg, *ibid*). In the absence of public provision, parents in the UK are most likely to use childcare facilities in the private sector. However, private childcare tends to be prohibitively expensive for low earners in the UK (Viitanen 2005).

*Working-hours Culture-* Worker-carers with a preference for full-time employment are unlikely to be able to work full-time and engage in childcare in a culture of long working hours. This is true of women working in a long working-hours culture as well as women whose partners do; with partners working very long hours less able to help with childcare.

For these reasons countries with a long working-hours culture are expected to have more 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 has more variation around the mean with high proportions of part-time employment among women and a long working-hours culture for both men and women. However, it is men in the UK who experience the brunt of the long working-hours culture with 40 percent of men working more than 45 hours per week. In Denmark and France this is true of a much smaller proportion of men: 18 percent and 12 percent respectively (OECD 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 job autonomy (Author A). This is reflected in the characteristics of our sample (table A1 in the appendix). UK part-timers are less educated, have less formal training and have lower occupational status than is true of part-time workers in 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 access to affordable childcare, above average quality part-time work and a working hours culture amenable to work-life balance. The UK provides little affordable childcare, poor quality part-time work and, in EU terms, has longer working hours, making work-life balance in full-time employment considerably

more difficult to obtain for maternal workers. Therefore greater evidence of constraint is expected among UK part-time workers relative to those in France and Denmark. This expectation is tested in the following manner: first, the article presents an analysis of variation in part-time workers' transition rates 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, a test of differences in labour market drop-out rates between part-time and full-time workers is provided. Again this allows us to gauge differences in the market behaviour of women in part-time and full-time jobs. Second, the variables which precipitate and impede part-time workers' transitions to full-time employment and to labour market drop-out are assessed. Here the article examines whether a variable measuring workers' reasons for engaging in part-time work offers convincing 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). The article also tests whether the presence of children in the household constrains part-time workers' future transitions, and if they do, whether there are differences between countries. Part-time workers with children are expected to be more constrained in countries unsupportive of maternal employment.

### *Hypotheses*

1. The UK is expected to have the greatest proportion of constrained part-time workers relative to Denmark and France. This is attributed 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 UK part-time workers are expected to have reduced transitions to full-time employment (being unable to work full-time) and increased transitions to labour market inactivity (as discouraged workers).

2. The reasons part-time workers give for working part-time are also expected to structure their future market transitions. In particular, chosen part-time workers (workers who claim to want to work part-time) are expected to be the least likely to make a transition to a full-time job. Similarly, chosen part-time workers are expected to be more likely to make a transition to inactivity (having 'weak work orientation'). Finally, preferences are expected to be the least predictive in the UK, with the UK offering the worst institutional structures for worker-carer preference attainment.

3. Given the absence of institutional support for maternal employment in the UK the number of children within the home is expected to decrease transitions to full-time employment and to increase transitions to inactivity in the UK only.

### **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  $t$ . The model applied is a ‘competing risk model’ which, other than the exit of interest, treats all exits as censored. The hazard function is piecewise constant exponential allowing the hazard to vary between specified segments of the time-axis<sup>iv</sup>. 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 allowing us to identify whether part-time work is chosen or not. First, it allows us to test whether there are differences in the job mobility of part-time and full-time workers and whether these differences reflect the institutional structuration expected. Second, it lets us

determine whether the variables which precipitate or impede transitions are associated with choice or constraint. 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 are defined as those working less than 30 hours a week in his or her main job and who also self-describe as part-time workers. Full-time workers are those who work more than 30 hours a week in his or her main job. Transitions to inactivity only include transitions to the status of housewife and other economically inactive. The variable does not include transitions to education or training, nor to retirement, as these categories tend to reflect different market strategies. Finally, while the ECHP does not reveal whether a respondent is on maternity or childcare leave, it does identify whether they are temporarily absent from their job. If a respondent is temporarily absent from their job they are classified as employed.

#### *Independent variables*

Respondents' main reason for working part-time is used as an indicator of worker preference, with respondents offered the following options: 'under going education or training, housework/looking after others, 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, it is still worth testing its predictive power for empirical research. If the variable appears to 'work' in the right direction, researchers will at least

have an idea of its relative use for future discussions. Those who want but cannot find a full-time job are placed 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.

Women's inability to access childcare is seen as a principal source of part-time worker constraint (i.e. Fagan 2001). While the dataset does not provide information on respondents' access to childcare it is possible to determine whether women with children appear to have different labour market transitions than women without them. For this reason constraint is operationalised as the number of children within the household. The variable is time-varying with the number of children grouped into three age bands: 0-3 years, 4-12 years and 13-18 years. The age categories were chosen to reflect different childcare needs by the child's age, the expectation is that very young children will have the strongest constraining effect in countries with little affordable childcare. Other household level variables were included in the analysis. Information on whether the woman is either cohabiting or married was included as was household income. Household income 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. The analysis is not restricted to women of childbearing age as the research questions are not solely about the constraining impact of childcare responsibilities.

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 provide a question on reasons for working part-time, the multivariate analysis only draws on the original UK ECHP data, which does 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.

## **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



part-time workers' transitions different from those of 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 part-time workers' competitive disadvantage relative to those without family responsibilities.

<FIGURE 1 HERE>

Part-time workers in both Denmark and France are found to have similar transition rates to full-time work relative to average job-to-job mobility. UK part-timers, however, are the clear outliers staying longer in their jobs than 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 with part-time workers thought to have 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 once again that part-time workers in the UK exhibit the largest difference in 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 work-oriented' 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 labour market that is not replicated in either Denmark or France. Danish and French part-time workers do not behave that differently from full-time workers. This suggests either that UK part-timers are considerably constrained, 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 article argues that it is more likely to be evidence of worker constraint.

Table 1 presents part-time workers' transitions to a full-time job and to labour market inactivity as well as the variables that increase or decrease these transitions. Here the aim is to reveal whether the variables used to operationalise preferences and constraint structure part-time worker outcome.

<TABLE 1 HERE>

Starting with the transitions to full-time employment, the reasons part-time workers give for working part-time are found to be predictive of the transitions they make. Nonetheless, the variable is less predictive than hoped. Chosen part-time workers were expected to have

the lowest transition rates to full-time employment, especially when compared with underemployed part-time workers (those who want but cannot find a full-time job). There was no evidence of this in either Denmark or France. In Denmark, rather, part-time workers engaged in childcare were the least likely to make a transition to full-time. In France, there was no statistically significant difference between women who gave different reasons for working part-time, suggesting either that preference are of little consequence in part-time workers' transitions to full-time, or that the variable used is a poor means of operationalising preferences. Finally, the United-Kingdom is the only country where our hypothesis of reduced transitions for chosen part-time workers is confirmed.

Turning our attention to the variable used to operationalise constraint, there is no negative effect of young children on women's transitions to full-time employment in Denmark or France. This is what had been hypothesised for countries with reasonably good childcare provision. In the United-Kingdom, however, the presence of children within the home has a strong negative effect on part-time workers' transitions to full-time employment. Moreover, younger children are found to have the strongest constraining effect. Therefore, the one country in the analysis with little institutional support for maternal employment is found to be the one country where children are an impediment to full-time employment.

Nested log-likelihood tests were used to determine the relative explanatory power of the variables measuring worker constraint as opposed to worker preference. The variable measuring the number of children in the household was found 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 hypothesis that the UK market would be the least likely to offer the opportunity structures for worker-carer preference attainment.<sup>v</sup>

While the variables 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.

Turning our attention to the variables which are predictive of part-time workers' transitions to labour market inactivity, the following was established. First, part-time workers' reasons for working part-time are 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. 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. Second, the impact of children within the home on workers' transitions to inactivity was also only predictive in France. Here 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 nursery 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 older women, those with lower levels of education as well as manual workers were found to be 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 the analysis was re-estimated using the BHPS sub-sample within the ECHP (results available from the author on request). As explained above this sample is not used here 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.

## **Discussion**

This article 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 underline the constraints women face in their negotiation of paid employment with family responsibilities. One of the contributions of this article was the suggestion that the opportunity structures for both preference formation and attainment vary by nation state, with women with family responsibilities particularly influenced by national policies and practices which support maternal employment.

Using comparative panel data the article examined differences in the market transitions of part-time workers and full-time workers and tried to determine whether the difference established 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 to those of Denmark and France, two countries considered to be supportive of maternal employment.

The UK exhibited the greatest part-time/full-time difference with UK part-timers the least likely to leave part-time jobs for full-time employment. Meanwhile, part-timers in Denmark and France behaved relatively similarly to full-time workers. Given the institutional barriers many UK worker-carers face relative to French and Danish workers, this article argued that UK part-time workers appear constrained in part-time employment. 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 article contributes to the mounting evidence which argues that inadequate childcare limits worker-carers labour force participation (i.e. Jaumotte 2003). It should come as no surprise that countries that provide no/little public childcare and where private childcare is only financially feasible for high earners (Viitanen 2005) appear to constrain maternal workers in 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 article 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

article did try to assess whether workers' reasons, a frequently used indicator of preferences, offered sensible predictions of worker outcome. It found preferences to offer weak predictions of worker outcome with other labour market and household level variables providing stronger 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 worker-carer preference attainment.

Future research on this topic would benefit from 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 structures on preference stability overtime.

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<sup>i</sup> 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).

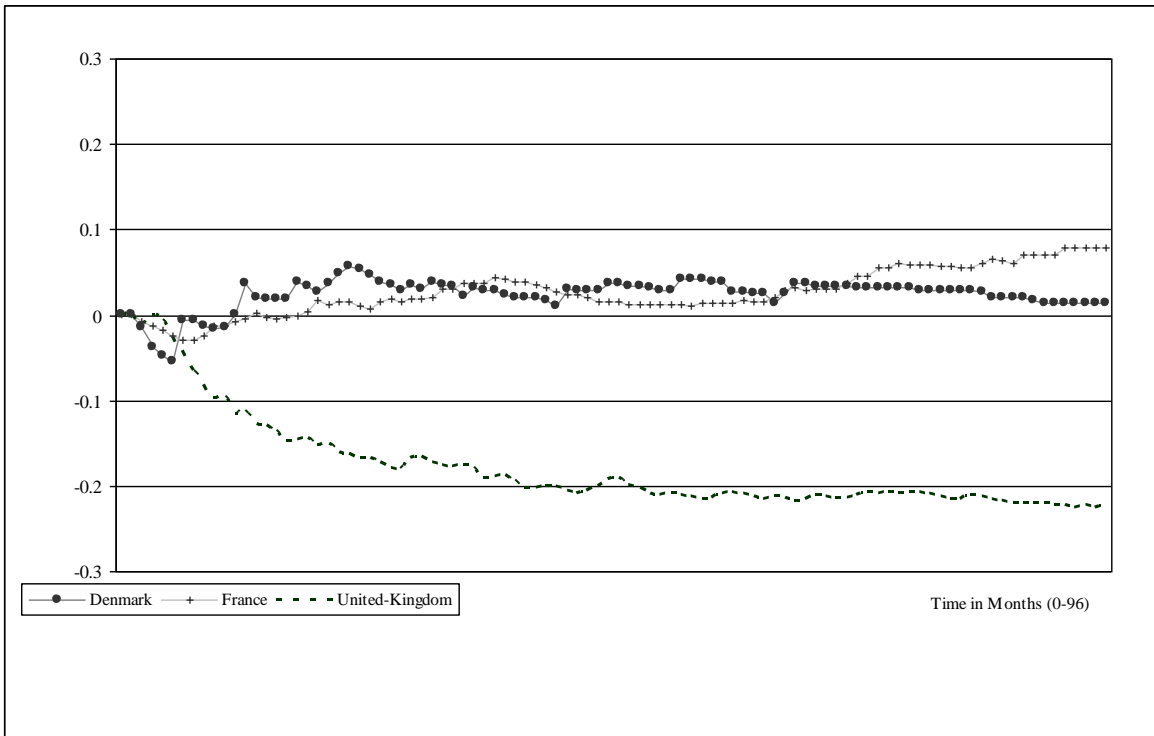
<sup>ii</sup> In the psychology literature it is standard practice to collect data at two points in time to determine the impact of a controlled experiment or test on a group of respondents. In their measurement of job related preference formation, Simon, Krawczyk and Holyoak (2004) established that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

<sup>iii</sup> 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.

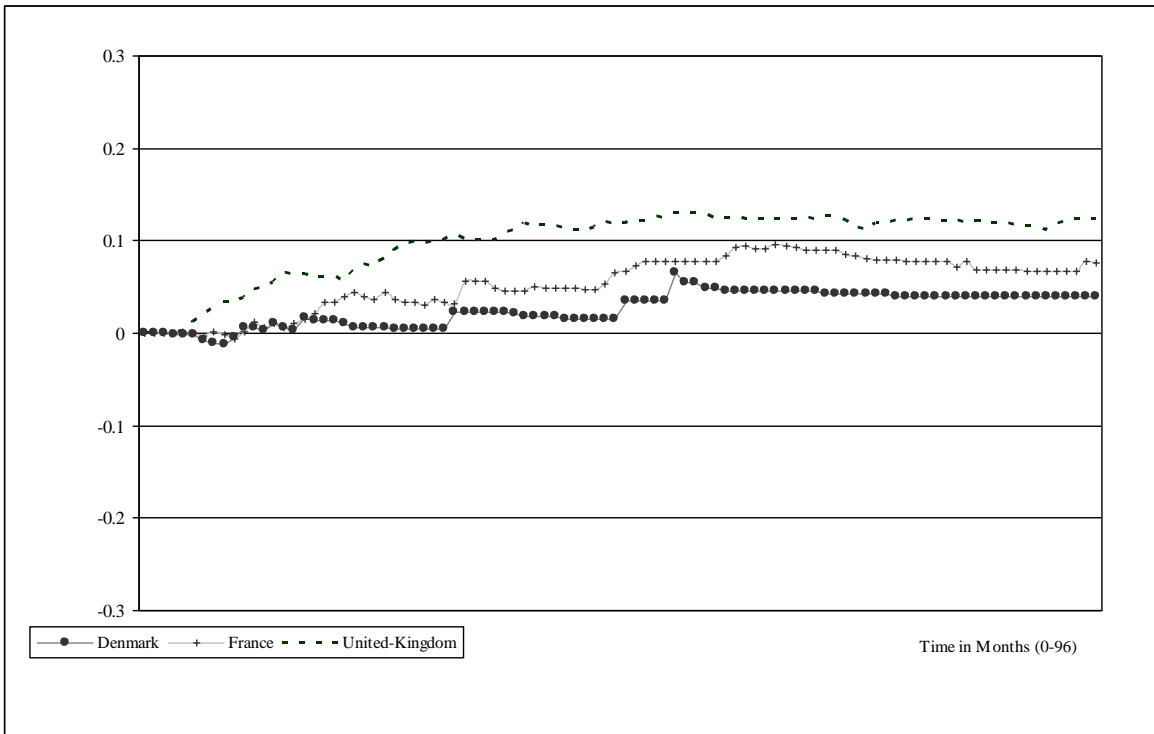
<sup>iv</sup> The complete model showing the baseline hazards is available from the author on request.

<sup>v</sup> Results available from the author on request.

**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 Work and Inactivity**

	Transition to FULL-TIME			Transition to INACTIVITY		
	DENMARK	FRANCE	UK	DENMARK	FRANCE	UK
<i>Reason for Part-time Work</i>						
Housework/Childcare	-1.88 (0.62)***	-0.51 (0.34)	-0.30 (0.50)	0.36 (1.19)	0.66 (0.41)	-0.13 (0.73)
Chosen	-0.78 (0.66)	-0.88 (0.56)	-1.26 (0.60)*	1.18 (0.74)~	1.24 (0.45)**	0.37 (0.69)
Other (ref. underemployed)	-1.55 (0.62)*	-0.41 (0.39)	-0.62 (0.50)	0.93 (1.31)	1.46 (0.46)**	0.26 (0.74)
<i>Number of Children in Household</i>						
N. of Children (0 -3 years)	0.90 (0.47)*	-0.50 (0.39)	-1.15 (0.59)*	0.59 (2.09)	1.22 (0.30)***	0.48 (0.38)
N. of Children (4 - 12 years)	-0.22 (0.42)	-0.09 (0.19)	-0.56 (0.31)*	-0.84 (0.79)	0.31 (0.22)	-0.01 (0.24)
N. of Children (13 -18 years)	0.55 (0.28)*	0.01 (0.15)	0.03 (0.15)	0.58 (0.56)	-0.49 (0.26) ~	-0.05 (0.20)
<i>Cohabiting</i>						
Aged less than 25 years old	0.77 (0.70)	0.13 (0.31)	-0.54 (0.32) ~	0.15 (0.74)	1.19 (0.58)*	0.09 (0.47)
25 to 29 years	0.64 (0.80)	1.38 (0.47)**	1.03 (0.43)*	2.18 (1.11)*	0.67 (0.54)	0.46 (0.71)
30-39 years	0.63 (0.69)	0.93 (0.37)*	0.91 (0.47)*	1.24 (2.13)	-0.27 (0.44)	0.87 (0.50) ~
55 years and older	0.98 (0.61)	0.91 (0.35)*	-0.31 (0.45)	-0.94 (1.63)	-0.17 (0.39)	0.32 (0.44)
	-0.66 (1.11)	-0.32 (1.01)	-0.91 (1.06)	2.38 (0.77)**	-	0.30 (0.52)
<i>University Education (ref)</i>						
Upper Secondary Education	0.37 (0.59)	-0.36 (0.35)	-0.79 (0.34)*	-1.73 (0.87)*	0.53 (0.57)	0.69 (0.65)
Lower Secondary Education	-0.32 (0.82)	-0.24 (0.40)	-1.34 (0.44)*	-1.23 (0.68) ~	0.63 (0.67)	0.71 (0.60)
Formal Training	0.65 (1.09)	1.84 (0.50)***	0.69 (1.07)	-2.89 (1.31) ~	-0.78 (0.33)*	-0.04 (0.37)
<i>Higher Professional occupations (ref)</i>						
Lower professional	-0.79 (0.68)	-1.21(0.45)**	-0.41 (0.63)	-0.57 (1.69)	-0.36 (0.78)	-1.90 (1.13) ~
Clerical	-1.15 (0.55)*	-0.34 (0.53)	-0.29 (0.46)	0.06 (1.18)	0.13 (0.75)	-0.41 (0.62)
Skilled	-	-0.09 (0.96)	-0.63 (0.80)	-	0.18 (0.41)	-0.76 (1.03)
Manual	-1.09 (0.87)	-0.51 (0.60)	-0.58 (0.67)	-0.40 (0.92)	-0.06 (1.00)	-0.17 (0.67)
<i>Workplace Size 1-19 (ref.)</i>						
Workplace Size 20-99	-1.64 (0.69)*	-0.47 (0.40)	0.42 (0.43)	-0.54 (0.79)	0.97 (0.91)	0.81 (0.42) *
Workplace Size 100-499	-1.98 (0.72)**	-0.32 (0.44)	0.06 (0.50)	-	0.18 (0.97)	0.27 (0.49)
Workplace Size 500+	-0.45 (0.92)	-1.53 (0.87) ~	-0.63 (0.59)	-0.35 (1.55)	0.74 (1.10)	0.10 (0.69)
Private Sector	-0.54 (0.52)	0.09 (0.29)	-0.09 (0.37)	-0.71 (1.16)	0.49 (0.37)	0.00 (0.38)
Previously Unemployed	-0.60 (0.54)	-0.37 (0.27)	-0.01 (0.38)	-0.53 (1.36)	0.47 (0.31)	-0.27 (0.42)
Constant	-2.61 (1.73)	-7.68 (1.13)***	-3.88 (1.37)**	-7.03 (1.77)***	-9.15 (1.18)***	-5.83 (1.09)***
Wald	196.27***	88.77***	102.23***	270.42***	246.51***	37.13*

Notes: \*\*\*p<=0.001, \*\*p<=0.010, \*p<=0.050, ~p<=0.10. Robust standard errors in brackets.

**APPENDIX-Table A1. Key Descriptive Statistics of Covariates of Female Part-Time Worker Samples by Country**

	DENMARK %	FRANCE %	UNITED-KINGDOM %
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
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
Formal Training	54.09	47.59	39.95
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 Occupations	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
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.