

**Combining Work and Family Life:  
Removing the Barriers to Women's  
Progression.  
Experiences from the UK and the  
Netherlands.**

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## **Executive Summary**

The balancing of work-life responsibilities has been a key objective of Government policy since 1997, with a raft of measures introduced from April 2003, aiming to enhance choice and support for parents, including the reform of the tax and benefit system, the National Childcare Strategy, Surestart, Parental Leave and a review of flexible working practices.

Whilst work-life balance is an issue for both women and men, women's position as primary carers mean that they are most likely to be affected by work-life balance initiatives. Women constitute 44 per cent of the UK labour market, yet despite Government recognition that flexible working arrangements, combined with quality childcare, are key factors in improving women's employment status, traditional patterns of women's relative disadvantage in the labour market remain. Women are concentrated in just three occupational groups and in low-paid, part-time work. Women form 83 per cent of part-time workers (Labour Force Survey, 2003) and whilst this may appear as a way of managing the work-life balance, it disadvantages women in terms of pay, training and progression.

Policy has responded to the needs of working parents in the past decade; however, the lack of any real legislative power, the prevalence of long hours cultures and the embedded nature of gendered assumptions relating to caring and domestic responsibilities mean its effectiveness is questionable.

### **The Project**

This report presents findings from an ESF Objective 3 Project 'Combining Work and Family Life: Removing the Barriers to Women's Progression'. The project is based at the School of Social Science, Liverpool John Moores University. The findings are based on 67 in-depth interviews and three focus groups with working mothers across a range of sectors and occupations in the UK, 16 in-depth interviews with policy-makers, academics and trade unionists and four focus groups with working mothers in the Netherlands.

## Summary of Findings

- There was evidence of progress in regard to work-life balance policy. However, there needs to be a more sophisticated appreciation of the differing needs of working parents and more commitment to tangible measures, rather than supportive rhetoric. The Life Cycle Policy in the Netherlands offers possibilities of flexible working across the life course.
- Women experience work-life balance as an ongoing process as they continually negotiate the boundaries of work and family.
- Policy initiatives addressing work-life balance can be effective in helping women to reconcile dual roles; however, many women in both the UK and the Netherlands still resolve these issues at the individual/personal level and feel that policy has not impacted on their lives in any tangible way.
- Evidence highlights how flexibility can help women manage full-time hours, spend more time with children and, in some instances, maintain career progression to management level.
- Access to flexibility is more likely to be negotiated at organisational level, formally and informally, rather than via legislative measures.
- Informal workplace cultures and the attitudes of peers and managers can militate against women's take-up of flexible working practices. These were viewed as more important than policy initiatives in enabling, or preventing, women's progression in the workplace.
- The long hours culture in the UK is a major barrier to promoting work-life balance, flexible working and women's progression.
- Definitions of progression and of care roles are complex and need a more sophisticated analysis.

## UK Policy

- Findings highlight low levels of awareness and take-up of both Parental Leave and the Flexible Working Request in the UK.
- Flexible working is more likely to be employer-led rather than via legislation.
- Informal workplace cultures influence the take-up of flexible working and can be a disincentive to making formal requests for flexibility.
- Contradictory accounts of the usefulness of Parental Leave emerged from the data. Some women had found it useful, whilst others felt it was unnecessary or ineffective as it is unpaid.
- The Flexible Working Request was felt to be a move in the right direction, but it lacks any real power to help working parents due to its voluntaristic nature. It was viewed as a fallback mechanism for employees who felt their employers were treating them unfairly.
- Data reveal dissatisfaction with childcare provision in terms of cost and flexibility, highlighting the inadequacies of much market-driven, private childcare with many women ‘working for nothing’ to pay for childcare. State nursery provision was criticised being inflexible and for failing to provide long enough hours.
- Evidence highlights the potential of tax credits as an incentive for women’s labour market participation and progression. However, it also emphasises the variable needs of ‘middle-income’ families that the system at present fails to recognise and accommodate adequately.

To be honest I get a little bit fed up with this, all you hear is we are helping working families with childcare . . . . They make out they are giving you all this money towards childcare but they are not . . . . I don’t think there is enough. (Paula, 40, IT Technician)

When I became pregnant with my second child I decided I couldn’t carry on. I couldn’t afford to have two children in nursery and commute to London . . . . It was a wrench to give up because I feared I would never get another professional job again. (Jane, 47, Human Resources Manager)

## Workplace Experience

It's all about the culture that you're in and the 'presence' culture . . . . In 32 hours you do just as much as you do in 36 hours. People who work from home do much more than people who work at the office. (Loes, 40, Project Manager)

- The data highlight a large degree of flexibility in working practices; however, this is determined by occupation, occupational level, sector and the nature of job roles.
- Women working within lower-level part-time work, such as care and retail occupations, are less likely to access flexible working arrangements and are more likely to work fixed hours.
- Flexibility represents an effective means of working and combining work with family commitments; however, it may also be combined with a long hours culture and extensive travel requirements placed on employees.
- Flexibility may have positive effects on women's work-life balance. However, this may not be available at certain sectors and levels, limiting women's opportunities for career progression.
- Often employers' formal family-friendly policies are cosmetic and offer no real help with dual roles.
- Informal negotiation between colleagues and managers appears to be more significant than policy in shaping experiences of a family-friendly workplace.
- The data reveal a lack of understanding and negative attitudes from colleagues regarding caring responsibilities. The significance of care and the caring role requires recognition within the workplace, practically and culturally, in terms of attitudinal change.

I think if you were routinely seen as putting in requests for unpaid leave to cope with children you'd be seen as not being able to cope. (Aileen, 41, Senior Legal Partner)

## Part-Time Working

It suits me quite happily to work my part-time hours, I like the job I am doing, it fits in well with my home life, and I think that I have a good work life balance to be honest. I like the job I am doing . . . . It could be a lot harder and I am very aware that we have a good balance. (Lily, 34, IT Programmer)

- Data highlight the existence of well-paid, meaningful, part-time work in both the UK and the Netherlands, with evidence of progression. However, part-time working is ‘normalised’ in the Netherlands, with more employment rights and possibilities for progression.
- Data demonstrate the use of part-time work can be an effective and practical means of combining paid work with care in both countries. However, for women working in low-level service occupations, part-time work raises issues about economic independence, progression and quality of life.
- Whilst part-time work options within organisations may have worked to increase women’s work-life balance in the Netherlands, negative attitudes from employers still occur. It remains a gendered option, normalised for women, rather than men.
- Workplace cultures can negate any positive effects of part-time working. Reduced hours may not correspond with workloads and employees often end up working more than their contracted hours. Colleagues and managers may fail to accept reduced hours as viable.

There isn’t, I don’t think, an acceptance of part-time working being as credible in a professional setting . . . it is a male environment. (Alisa, 32, Associate Solicitor)

## **Work/Care Negotiation**

I think you need a huge amount of strength to carve out the boundaries between work and home and to get both things working quite well. I feel guilty about the kids when I am at work and I feel guilty about my work when I am at home. (Genevieve, 47, Managing Editor/Producer)

- In both the Netherlands and the UK, women continue to take the majority of responsibility for the domestic sphere whilst working. Thus, work-life balance represents a gendered experience.
- The involvement of partners in care and domestic work is central to managing work-life balance and maintaining progression.
- Findings suggest an inherent conflict between combining work and care – given the lack of support and recognition given to care by employers and government.
- Work-life balance is not merely a matter of resolving practical issues but also of emotional reconciliation. UK policy emphasises the value of paid work over care within citizenship discourses.

I want to become a manager but I can only do part-time because I'm trapped at the moment . . . . I've got to think of the children. But I also want to have a career myself because when they grow up. (Eve, 37, Supermarket Warehouse Worker)

## **Barriers and Progression**

When I came back from maternity leave, I actually said to them, 'Look for the first few months just keep my workload reasonable' . . . . But then they never really got back into giving me any more responsibility. I had to go back to them and say, 'Do you know, you're kind of passing me over for jobs here that I'm well capable of doing'. (Naomi, 35, Electrical Engineer)

- The barriers to progression faced by women are complex and interrelated, partly due to the failure of employment structures to recognise caring responsibilities.
- Progression was hindered by employers' lack of accommodation of women's dual roles.
- Employment progression is hindered by 'time conflicts' – long hours culture and a lack of family-friendly working arrangements at higher organisational levels.
- Findings support arguments that women's 'choices' between career and family are made within the practical and ideological constraints generated by the caring role.
- Findings highlight the importance of support outside the workplace for career progression (in particular partners, informal support and childcare).

### **Good Practices from the Netherlands?**

- The Life Cycle Policy 2006 offers parents the possibility of financing parental leave: however, there are criticisms of its individualistic nature.
- The Working Hours Adjustment Act guarantees the right to request a decrease, or an increase, in hours. Nevertheless the ability to adjust working hours is employer-led. A reduction of working hours is quite normal for many working mothers, and can help to facilitate a better work-life balance. However, the data reveal that adjusting one's working hours can be more difficult in private sector occupations.
- Despite the problems in childcare provision, such as a lack of wrap-around care, childcare costs in the Netherlands are distinctly lower than in the UK.
- In contrast to the UK, no long hours culture is present. Instead, the 'reduced hours' culture of the Netherlands can have a positive influence on women's work-life balance.
- Despite the normalisation of part-time work in the Netherlands, more progress is required within organisations to increase the feasibility of progressing to management positions with a part-time contract. Efforts made by employers' organisations and trade unions within the Netherlands are positive developments in this respect.

## Policy Implications

- The lack of awareness of Parental Leave in the UK indicates a lack of commitment by government in promoting this policy. Awareness needs to be raised, as does employees' sense of entitlement.
- The fact that Parental Leave is unpaid in both the UK and Netherlands needs to be addressed. The differing financial circumstances of parents need to be acknowledged and fully paid short-term leave needs to be provided across the life course.
- Policy is ineffective in isolation and thus requires support and monitoring by government in order to ensure that employees can access work-life balance policy. This suggests a more 'joined-up' approach is necessary.
- In order for policy to be more effective, the interconnections between paid work and care require cultural and practical acceptance within the workplace. Policy needs to acknowledge the value of care.
- Positive accounts of good private nursery provision could be developed as models of best practice for all childcare providers.
- There is a need to increase the promotion of work-life balance policies within organisations, highlighting positive benefits to both employers and employees (for example, retention and progression). Employers' concerns need to be acknowledged but there is a need to promote dialogue to address how work-life balance issues can be resolved in the workplace.
- Work-life balance policies need to be extended to other caring responsibilities, for example, the care of older children and elder care.
- There needs to be an end to long hours culture in the UK to aid women's progression in the labour market.
- Employers need to offer more tangible forms of flexibility at higher organisational levels, for example, part-time working, job share, flexible working.
- There needs to be a rethinking of gendered caring roles, including the promotion of men's active involvement in care.
- A redefinition of work-life balance outside of the work-care nexus is required in both the UK and the Netherlands. Personal time and quality of life need to be acknowledged as central to work-life balance.

The policy doesn't do enough to encourage. Should the policy be backed up with the help of employers to make it work and other resources? (Denise, 30, Outreach Worker)



## Introduction

This report presents findings from the ESF Objective 3 Project Combining Work and Family Life: Removing the Barriers to Women's Progression.

### Objectives of the project:

- To evaluate family legislation and policy and explore its effectiveness as a means of addressing work-life balance and progression.
- To examine the extent of the take-up of work-life balance initiatives by women.
- To explore work-life balance in terms of lived experience.
- To identify the barriers to women's progression in the UK labour market.
- To identify examples of good practice from the Netherlands.
- To provide recommendations for initiatives which support women's progression in the labour market in the UK.

The balancing of work-life responsibilities has been a key objective of Government policy since 1997, with a raft of measures introduced from April 2003 (DTI 2003a) aiming to enhance choice and support for parents, including a comprehensive review of both the tax and benefit system and of flexible working practices.

Whilst the work-life balance is an issue for both women and men, women's position as primary carers mean that they are most likely to be affected by work-life balance initiatives (Women's Equality Unit, 2004). Women constitute 44 per cent of the UK labour market (Labour Force Survey, 2001), yet, despite Government recognition that flexible working arrangements, combined with quality childcare, are key factors in improving women's employment status, traditional patterns of women's relative disadvantage in the labour market remain.

Horizontal and vertical segregation mean that women are concentrated in just 3 occupational groups, clerical, personal services and retail, and in low paid, part-time work. Only 10 per cent of women are in professional occupations and 11.5 per cent in managerial positions (Labour Force Survey, 2003).

Despite gains made by women, the gender pay gap remains, with full-time women workers average pay being only 80.9 per cent of men's (ASHE, 2005). Part-time women workers earn on average 22 per cent less than women who work full time (Manning and Pertongolo, 2005) and the part-time pay penalty has increased over the past decade.

Part-time work is the most common alternative working arrangement, used by 42 per cent of women employees and 9 per cent of men employees (Labour Force Survey, 2005). Women from 83 per cent of part-time employees and, whilst this appears as a way of managing the work-life balance, it disadvantages women in terms of pay, training and progression. Women are increasingly returning to work after childbirth. Research indicates that 67 per cent of women return to work within a year of childbirth. However, two-thirds of those who do return part-time, with one third changing from full- to part-time. (Callender *et al.*, 1997). There remains a marked difference between the working hours of women and men: 93 per cent of men in employment work full-time whilst only 57 per cent of women do. The overall employment rate for women with dependent children is 72.2 per cent, with 40 per cent of women with a child under 11 working part-time. The status of jobs for women working part-time is more likely to be of a lower level with 25 per cent of part time women workers in occupations indicating a lower level of educational achievement (Manning and Pertongolo, 2005). Walby and Olsen (2002) conclude that many women suffer downward mobility on return to part-time work after having children, including an average drop in earnings of 16.1 per cent. Lone parents and low-income families also face more barriers to balancing home and work responsibilities (DTI, 2003a).

Research by Hogarth *et al.* (2001) has suggested that there is a disjuncture between the flexible working patterns offered by employers (variation in the number of hours) and the needs of employees (for flexibility in hours). Women are most likely to demand flexible working patterns, with 55 per cent of women stating flexible working hours are the most helpful form of support (Brooker, 2002). However, research suggests three-quarters of women do not work any of the listed flexible working patterns (Labour Force Survey, 2000).

In 1998, 25 per cent of women and 16 per cent of men were employed on some form of flexible working arrangement, the commonest being flexitime and two shift systems (EOC, 2000). In 2005, overall, 57 per cent of women and 23 per cent of men used one or more flexible working patterns: part-time, flexi-time, annualised hours, term-time working, job share and home working (Labour Force Survey, 2005). In reality the use of flexible working patterns is implemented on an organisational level and it is difficult to generalise across varied occupational sectors. Research found that organisations have both formal and informal flexible working policies and practice, leading to confusion amongst employees, poor knowledge of entitlements and a clear gender division in the take-up of flexible working patterns with men seeing it as having a negative impact on their career progression (CIPD, 2005).

This report highlights that workplace flexibility is actually relatively widespread, although this varies at different levels and between sectors. There are examples from the data which show how flexible working arrangements can contribute to managing work and family effectively and also to facilitating employment progression. However, the data also highlight the conflicts between work and care; although women appeared to access fairly widespread flexibility, the extent to which this addressed work-life balance in any tangible way was highly variable. The data demonstrate evidence of such conflicts at all levels and modes of working and highlight how a variety of factors both inside and outside the workplace can affect work-life balance. Furthermore, even where practical measures such as flexibility and support networks were in place, reconciliation was not necessarily achieved in emotional terms. Much of the data show how UK policy appears to play a minimal role, highlighting that although government has adopted a more supportive discourse, individuals continue to negotiate work-life balance at the personal/individual level.

Whilst policy has responded to the needs of working parents in the past decade, the lack of any effective law, the prevalence of long hours cultures and the embedded nature of gendered assumptions relating to caring and domestic responsibilities, mean its effectiveness is questionable.

## **The Netherlands**

The situation in the Netherlands is unique across the European Union. Average working hours are 31, slightly below the EU average of 36.5, and significantly lower than the UK, which at 37.3 remain the highest in Europe (Eurostat, 2000). In the Netherlands, the ability to reduce and increase one's working hours, various leave arrangements and subsidised childcare help individuals to find a balance between paid employment and the care of children. The Dutch model, in which the move towards a pattern of part-time, flexible work as standard working practice, has been successful in supporting women's long term employment and progression. In this it can be seen as a potential model of successful work-life balance policy and practice. However, not all policies have led to real solutions for Dutch women. It has been argued that gender equality is not central to the Dutch model and, whilst it has led to a destandardisation and individualisation of women's working hours, it has not removed women's socio-economic disadvantage (Plantenga 1997: 2002). Nevertheless, the report argues that the Netherlands experience may present some examples of good practice for work-life balance policy and practice in the UK.

## **Methodology**

The report is made up from data from 67 in-depth interviews and three focus groups (lone parents, public sector workers, private sector workers) in the UK. The sample includes women working in a variety of occupations, in the private (49 per cent), public (37 per cent) and voluntary (14 per cent) sectors, working full-time (62 per cent) and part-time 38 per cent (30 hours or less). Nineteen women were working in managerial positions. The women had children of varying ages spanning from 10 months to 20 years old. Of the research participants 75 per cent were married or living with partners, with 25 per cent of the women divorced or separated from partners or identifying themselves as being lone mothers (see figure 1).

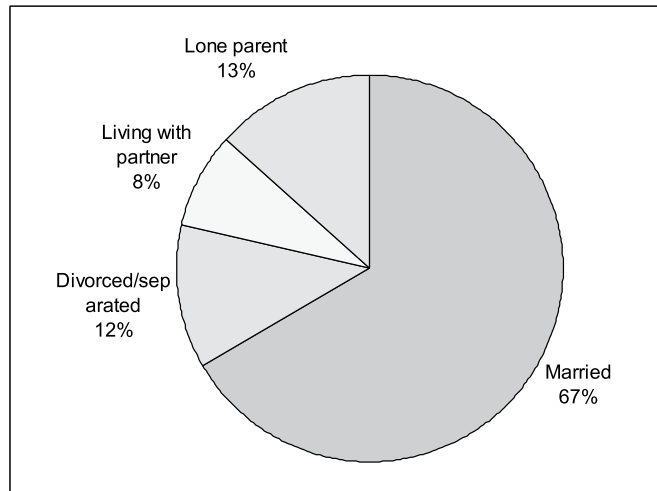


Figure 1. Marital status

The majority of the women (82 per cent) identified as White British. Other ethnic groups included White Irish, Turkish Cypriot, Black African, Black Caribbean, White Finnish, Indian, Black British and White South African (see figure 2).

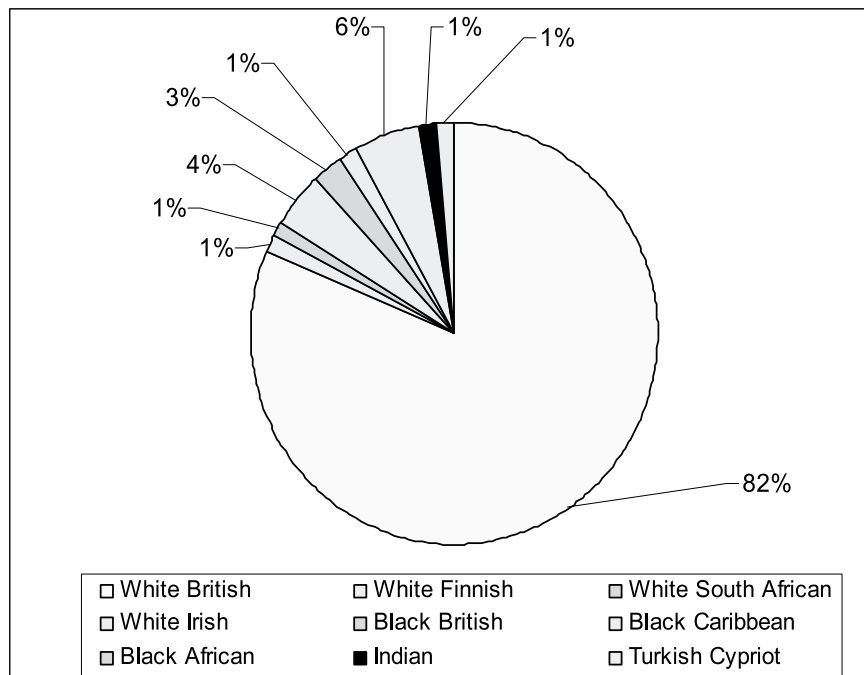


Figure 2. Ethnic group of participants

In the Netherlands four focus groups were conducted with 14 working mothers and 16 in-depth interviews were undertaken with policy-makers, academics and trade unionists.

There is an existing body of statistical research into work-life balance issues (DTI, 2003a; EOC, 2004; Eurostat, 2005) but little qualitative discussion of women's understandings of negotiating work and family life. The findings discussed in this report therefore represent in-depth explorations of women's experiences rather than a statistically representative extrapolation from the wider population.

## **Chapter One**

### **Engagement with Government Policy**

#### **Introduction**

Evidence from the data suggests that, for the most part in the UK, women's access to work-place practices that might influence the reconciliation of work and family life are more likely to be determined at an organisational level rather than through engagement with legislation. This is highlighted in the negotiation of working arrangements, formally and informally, between employers and employees, rather than via the government's Flexible Working Request.

Government policy in the UK includes:

- Flexible Working Request
- Parental Leave
- Child Tax Credit
- Free nursery places for three and four year olds
- Childcare Vouchers

Evidence from the Netherlands demonstrates that formal policies attempting to improve work-life balance are more far-reaching, particularly the right to adjust individual working hours.

In the Netherlands, government policy includes:

- The Working Hours Adjustment Act
- Parental leave
- Life course arrangement
- Government-subsidized childcare

Data for the Netherlands show that in terms of working hours, family-friendly policy is more advanced than in the UK. Dutch legislation offers all employees the legal right to an adjustment of their working hours, either a reduction or an increase. Employers' awareness of

their employees' right to adjust working hours varies, however. Employers in the public sector are most aware of employees' right to adjust their working hours, whereas employers within small companies are less likely to be aware of this right (MuConsultancy, 2003). Among employees, many individuals are aware of their right to reduce working hours, yet far fewer employees know they have a right to increase working hours (MuConsultancy, 2003). At the same time, despite extensive flexible working policies, leave arrangements and childcare policies are not necessarily more family-friendly than in the UK and experts are critical of these policies and the way in which they can help women balance work and family life.

Research in the UK indicates that levels of awareness about the Flexible Working Request were vague and limited just prior to its implementation (EOC, 2003). Holt and Grainger (2005) highlighted how research has found that female employees were more aware of their right to request to work flexibly than men (71 per cent compared with 60 per cent). Furthermore, a focus on the impact of the request (Camp, 2004) highlights that, although parents have benefited from flexible working, many employers do not fully acknowledge legislation and do not adhere to its stipulations. In sum, research findings reflect the inadequacy of UK legislation relating to awareness, take-up and sense of entitlement to family-friendly policy. They also emphasise the difficulties which women face in accessing affordable and flexible childcare. At the same time, however, these same findings suggest that policy in this area has improved and that family-friendly measures do have some positive impact.

Wider research evidence indicates that employees' take-up of government policy in the UK is low. A Department of Trade and Industry survey of working parents indicates that 3% of parents have used parental leave (DTI, 2000). Other studies demonstrate equally low rates of take-up (Bond *et al.*, 2002; Lewis, 2004; DTI, 2000). At the same time, there has also been considerable criticism of the fact that parental leave is unpaid. Some commentators have highlighted that until leave is paid, take-up will remain low and women will be more likely to take it as they generally earn less, which serves to reinforce women's role as principal carers and perpetuate their unequal labour market position (Toynbee, 1999; Lister, 2001). In addition, an unpaid right to parental leave also discriminates against lower income parents who would not be able to afford to take it (Ward, 1999).

## 1. 1. Parental Leave: Awareness, Take-up and Limitations

### Parental Leave in the UK

In the UK, the right to parental leave was introduced in 1999 as part of the Maternity and Parental Leave Regulations. Parental leave grants parents with children under the age of 6 and disabled children under 18 the right to up to 13 weeks unpaid leave for each child. Both fathers and mothers are entitled to take parental leave, as well as a legal guardian or those in the process of adopting a child. Leave can be anything up to 13 weeks unpaid leave per year (18 weeks for parents with disabled children) and must be for the purpose of looking after or ensuring the welfare of a child or dependant. According to the DTI (2000:30), parental leave 'enables parents to spend more time with their children or to help children settle into new childcare arrangements or a new school'. The government does not provide payment for periods of leave and this issue is left to the discretion of the employer.

Employers have the right to postpone leave for up to six months after the leave request has been made if they feel that an employee taking leave may disrupt the business. For example, 'at a seasonal peak; where a significant proportion of the workforce applies for parental leave at the same time; or when the employee's role is such that his or her absence at a particular time would unduly the harm the business' (DTI, 2000:24). However, when an employee requests leave immediately after childbirth or adoption, employers cannot reschedule leave.

Just a wider research indicates, the data reveal low levels of awareness and take-up of parental leave in the UK which suggests that this piece of legislation is failing to reach those who are or were entitled to it. Furthermore, even when women were aware of parental leave, some expressed the view that they were unlikely to use it and that it would not be acceptable in their workplace. However, many women who were eligible or had been eligible when their children were younger were not aware of the right.

### **Parental Leave in the Netherlands**

In the Netherlands, unpaid parental leave legislation was introduced in 1991 and only some collective labour agreements offered paid parental leave, mostly in the public sector. In 1997, parental leave was extended to include children up to eight years of age and employees with a job of less than 20 hours a week (SCP, 2004). In 2001, the Netherlands passed the Work and Care Act (*Wet Arbeid en Zorg*), implemented to ease the combination of work and family responsibilities. The new law continues with the parental leave legislation of the 1990s and now includes provisions for two days paid paternity leave, two days annual emergency leave, ten days paid annual leave for care of sick parents, children or partners, four weeks leave for parents adopting a child and six weeks leave to care for a partner, parent or child with a life-threatening illness. Following implementation of the Work and Care Act, parents now have the right to take up to three months of unpaid parental leave.

In terms of statutory arrangements, the terms of leave arrangements are the same across sectors. However, the availability of paid leave, not required by statutory leave regulations, is not uniform across sectors. Most parental leave remains unpaid. While some public sector employers offer paid parental leave in collective labour agreements, private sector occupations, on average, do not. New to the Netherlands in 2001 was the availability of modest short-term care leave for dependents, of ten days paid at 70 per cent of an employees' wage. In 2006, long-term care for dependents was introduced, allowing employees a maximum of six weeks leave. Dutch paternity leave, or *kraamverlof*, is paid, but of very short duration. Employees making use of adoption leave do not receive wages from their employer but have the right to a cash benefit, equalling 100 per cent of their wages, from the government. Finally, new legislation in the form of a Life Course arrangement was introduced in 2006.

## **Awareness of Parental Leave**

Levels of awareness of Parental Leave in the UK were limited and partial. This was amongst both the women who were eligible to take leave now and those with older children who would previously have been eligible. The right to leave was introduced in 1999, which means that many women could have used it when their children were younger. Some women who had been unaware of Parental Leave in the past were disappointed that their lack of awareness in the past had prevented them from using the leave. Some were also surprised by their own lack of knowledge given their education and professional status:

Isn't that interesting cos if I've never heard of it working in a local authority, you know, reading newspapers and things like that, that I haven't picked it up? . . . Ellen would have been five in 1999 and that would have, yes, that would have really helped. (Laura, 50, Senior Social Worker)

In contrast, in the Netherlands, most of the women interviewed were aware of their right to parental leave. In discussing the shift in working hours after the birth of a child, one woman explains that this time around, not only will she reduce her working hours as she did with the first child, but she will also make use of parental leave: 'Later with the second [child] I'm going to take parental leave.' (Corine, 31, Notary Employee)

## **Take-up of Parental Leave**

Over half of the women interviewed in the UK had children under six and were, therefore, eligible for leave and flexible working entitlements. However, given that the legislation was five years old, this meant that a further 34 had been entitled. Some women felt the right did have potential and said they would feel comfortable requesting it within their workplace for at least a short period rather than the full 13 weeks. Other women saw no need to use parental leave as they could use other entitlements such as carers leave or could access unpaid leave through their employers rather than via legislation. For some this appeared a more effective means of gaining additional leave as women could 'buy' leave – the cost of which was deducted from wages throughout the year which meant the loss of pay was not missed:

At [company] we have four weeks and then you can buy two . . . . You still get paid, it's paid leave because you're paying towards it all the time you get paid when you're off. I think it's good. Especially for those people with kids in the summer holidays and what have you. (Samantha, 39, Mail Sorter)

Many women were informed of the right during the interview and as a result said they would (or would, had they known about it) consider requesting parental leave. Despite high levels of eligibility, only three women had used parental leave and two were planning to. Examples of take-up draw attention to its usefulness in providing parents with the means to sort out childcare related issues, spend time with children and have some respite from the practical and emotional stress of juggling care and paid work.

[It's]Brilliant, absolutely brilliant. Because they can't refuse it. They can refuse the first time but for six months later they cannot refuse it. I have used it twice in those circumstances . . . . It's hard to make a decision on a childminder cos I didn't know anybody that could do it so I had to look up the council register and phone people up and go round and see people. So that's when I took my parental leave. (Aileen, 41, IT/ Business Outsourcing Consultant)

I'm going to request the parental leave for her recuperation . . . it just makes me feel more happy about things because I'd be here with her . . . she can't go back to the nursery so otherwise I'm relying on grandparents and it will just be too stressful. (Karen, 34, Advertising Accounts Manager)

Given the slightly longer history of parental leave arrangements in the Netherlands, almost all of the mothers interviewed had children born after 1991 and were therefore eligible for parental leave. Some of the women interviewed did not feel it was necessary to use parental leave but chose instead to reduce their working hours for a longer period of time. In a small number of cases, women's partners were more likely to use parental leave to temporarily shift from working five days a week to working four days a week, although some women interviewed chose to do this themselves:

It wasn't going real well [working 32 hours a week over 5 days] and then I said I wanted to work less. So, no problem. I said 30 hours, so [my employer said] take those other two hours as parental leave. Now I have a note where it says that I can work 30 hours a week for the next four years until my parental leave is used up. (Hella, 39, Accountant)

The results from the focus group discussions confirm general take-up rates of parental leave in the Netherlands. According to the Social and Cultural Planning Office, 27 per cent of employees aged 20 - 61 had a right to parental leave in 2001/2002. However, only two per cent made use of parental leave arrangements. In general, five per cent of employees stated a need for parental leave (SCP, 2004a).

### **Factors Contributing to Take-Up**

From the small number of women who had taken parental leave in the UK, three main factors appear influential to take-up:

- a. Employees earn enough to take unpaid leave:

I wouldn't expect it to be paid. I think it's fine that it's unpaid and I think we earn enough money to be able to cope with taking time off at some point. (Caitlin, 37, Engineer)

- b. The structure/culture of organisations accommodates and accepts employees' leave:

Got signed off without a murmur – two weeks literally, my boss signed it. I went to the head of department and said, 'Oh can you sign a parental leave form?' He was like 'yeah'. (Alisa, 32, Lawyer)

- c. Employees possess sufficient confidence and 'bargaining' power in terms of professional/occupational status to make requests:

I went to my manager saying, ‘You can’t refuse this, we need to agree a time when I need to take it and I’m going to take it’. (Aileen, 41, IT/Business Outsourcing Consultant)

### **Limitations of Parental Leave**

Several limitations in regard to the usefulness of Parental Leave emerged from the data.

a. Lack of knowledge/sense of entitlement:

Discussions of parental leave highlight that employees in the UK are not being adequately informed about this right, and that when they are aware of it they often do not feel entitled to use it. ‘Parental leave - it’s something that I can’t quite believe I’m entitled to’. (Alice, 37, Engineer). Some women working part-time or flexibly felt additional leave was unnecessary and simply did not see it as a right which applied to them: ‘I kind of file it under miscellaneous if it’s not applicable’. (Catrina, 38, Credit Policy Manager).

b. Structure/culture of organisations

Just as amenable workplace cultures may facilitate take-up, informal workplace cultures may hinder access to policy and women may feel unable to request leave:

You feel very uncomfortable in our office because there are so many people on sick leave at any one time. And because we are so short-staffed, you know that anything you ask for that involves being off work, it’s going to go down like a lead balloon. So it makes you feel very uncomfortable before you even start. (Emily, 35, Civil Servant)

Some women felt that using this right would reflect badly on them at work:

I think if you were routinely seen as putting in requests for unpaid leave to cope with children you’d be seen as not being able to cope correctly with putting in place like arrangements to care for your children. (Deborah, 39, Senior Legal Partner)

Tensions between policy aims, general attitudes towards work and organisational cultures can render policy ineffective because of a lack of recognition within the workplace. Consequently, although this right is available to working parents, it appears ‘too good to be true’:

I wish it could just be taken, ‘Oh, yes, you’ve got kids, you are allowed that, don’t worry, you can have time off’. I feel it’s not going to be that easy. (Isobel, 36, Senior Administrator [Focus Group])

c. Age of Children

A further criticism of parental leave related to the fact that leave was only available to parents with children under six. Some women made the point that childcare actually became more problematic when children reach school age and that children still required care and more specifically time whilst at secondary school. Such opinions reflect similar criticisms of age limits evident within DTI consultations (DTI, 2000).

d. Lack of paid leave

Some women in the UK said that they would be deterred from taking parental leave because it was unpaid, as they simply could not afford to do so. Women on higher incomes were less likely to object to this and the point was made that payment for additional time off was unfeasible and may also provoke hostility from employees without children. Other women viewed the lack of pay negatively, which was raised as a particular issue for mothers who were separated or divorced from partners and were relying on one household income. This reflects the government’s failure to consider the needs and circumstances of single women with children, which has been identified as a common thread running through New Labour family and welfare policy (Lewis, 2001; Rake, 2001).

That’s fine if you can afford it, if you’ve got a husband or a partner on a good wage and you’re only working for yourself, for your pocket money. That

would be fine, but for someone who needed the money there's no chance you could do it. (Eve, 37, Supermarket Warehouse Worker)

In this way, the policy demonstrates no tangible commitment to addressing work-life balance:

It seems like a gift to begin with but it doesn't seem like a gift because it is unpaid, it seems like, well I don't know, it seems like a nothing thing really.

(Julia, 39, Social Worker)

### **The Pay Issue in the Netherlands**

Dutch parental leave limitations seem limited to the fact that much parental leave was unpaid, although more general conclusions provided by the SCP show that Dutch parents who do not take up parental leave did not do so because they feel that good childcare is available, that one of the parents can stop working or that the woman chooses instead to reduce her working hours (SCP, 2004a). Parental leave is most often paid in the public sector, where women are more likely to make use of it than men. Even within the public sector, however, leave arrangements are not equally covered, depending upon which arrangements employers choose to provide.

I read in our CLA [collective labour agreement] that there would be a leave arrangement, parental leave, well, I'm going to take that. Turns out it's unpaid, I think that's unacceptable. The [company] made a choice to reserve a budget for older employees and not for younger parents. (Sofie, 40, Teacher)

Academics in the Netherlands are quick to point out the necessity of having a paid parental leave option.

[Parental leave] is very important because Dutch women have to decide after only 10 weeks of maternity leave whether to return to the labour market or not. So if you have to decide after 10 weeks what you're going to do, most people decide to exit the labour market. If paid parental leave is available, you can stay home with your child for 9 months or something

like that, and therefore a decision to exit the labour market might be very different. (Dr. T. Knijn, Professor of Economics, University of Utrecht)

Simultaneously, academics argue that Dutch paternal leave arrangements are deplorable. While policy-makers recognise that parental and paternal leave schemes are not uniform across sectors, they expect the new Life Course arrangement (discussed later) to address some of the inadequacies. However, experts are also critical of maternity leave, particularly the transition from maternity leave into parental leave, arguing that ten weeks of leave for women following delivery is too short, particularly given Dutch women's viewpoint on the care of young babies.

Policy-makers evaluate Dutch maternity leave in the light of its effect on hours worked following women's return to work after childbirth:

In comparison to other European countries, 10 weeks is not a lot of time before women are expected to go back to work full-time . . . . That is really very short. This could help to explain the fact that Dutch women work relatively short hours when returning to their jobs following a period of maternity leave . . . . There is some kind of optimum. As much time as women have in Sweden or Germany is too long, then you see that women become estranged from the labour market making it more difficult to return, which leads to more segregation. But here it's just too short. We need to find some kind of balance between 'too short' and 'too long'.

(Policy-makers at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment [A])

Taking opposing views on the subject are the social partners in the Netherlands. Trade unions are critical of both childcare and leave arrangements in the Netherlands, although they agree that maternity leave is generally well organised.

In regard to maternity leave, I think that it's OK, but that an extension of leave would be better. It's fine that it [maternity leave] is 100 per cent paid. It's arranged legally in such a manner that it's difficult to get around it. But it no longer covers self-employed [women]. (Dutch Trade Union Representative)

Employers, on the other hand, seem rather content with the conditions of Dutch maternity leave. They feel that while maternity leave is adequate, various other forms of leave, such as short-term care leave, are not necessary, given the already numerous possibilities for vacation days or leave days.

Aside from maternity leave, I don't really think that anyone [employees] is much happier with all the various forms of statutory leave. When care leave is (Dutch Employers' Organisation Representative)

As noted above, academics argue that without financial remuneration, parents are not encouraged to make use of parental leave policies. Our data do not always confirm this argument, however. In the Netherlands, the fact that parental leave remains unpaid, particularly in the private sector, means that most women will continue to choose to reduce their working hours rather than take-up parental leave. Therefore, it seems that the culture of reducing working hours after having children is stronger than a need for parental leave, paid or unpaid. Of the fourteen women interviewed, ten reduced their hours after having children, whereas only two women have made use of parental leave thus far. However, in the Netherlands there is now a new possibility of financing parental leave on an individual basis through the use of the Life Course arrangement.

## 1.2 Good Leave Practices from the Netherlands?

### **Life Course arrangement in the Netherlands**

The new Life Course arrangement allows individuals to put aside extra money in their current job to save for leave at a later date. Participation in the Life Course arrangement is voluntary and individuals can choose whether they use money saved to take a sabbatical, extra parental leave or early retirement, for example. Employees are allowed to save a maximum of 12 per cent of their gross annual salary. In total, employees may save a maximum of 210 per cent of their gross annual salary (SZW, 2006). However, take-up of life-cycle leave is dependent upon employers, with the exception of statutory parental leave and long-term care leave.

Policy-makers are aware that it is too soon to know whether or not the new Life Course arrangement may be a policy of best practice, something that other countries may learn from. However, the idea behind the life-cycle legislation is one to be followed, according to governmental policy-makers.

If you're talking about the idea of saving for leave, for school, retirement, or whichever form of leave you prefer, which leads to a more integral savings account for diverse goals, then yes, I think that's a good philosophy. And if you would like to, you can always add a number of other possibilities. But the idea of saving up for leave, thereby placing the financial responsibility for that leave on the employee, that's a good idea.

(Policy-makers from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment [B])

In terms of concrete possibilities with the new policy, the new life-cycle legislation is a means of financing extra leave, which can help to bridge the gap between actual and preferred working hours during certain periods across the life course, according to policy-makers. And while *ex ante* research done prior to the introduction of the legislation suggests that some difficulties may arise (SCP, 2004b), policy makers emphasize that this need not be a negative development.

You could say that the change in thinking assumed by the new policy will help women to think more about their pre-pension leave [early retirement] in the future. Secondly a life course arrangement available to both men and women gives women the opportunity to say to their husbands: now it's your turn. I know you have money saved. I financed a few months of leave for the first child, now it's your turn. (Policy-makers from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment [B])

Academics are critical of a completely individualised system of leave. Plantenga argues that a new system of social security should be based on three pillars: one which offers a basic social right for coverage of risks such as disability and unemployment, a second pillar with Life Course options, and a third pillar of individual savings. Within a system like this, women can be convinced to make more use of Life Course arrangements:

You could give bonuses for example – if you use your individual savings for certain purposes, you get a 25 per cent bonus. You can make it more attractive. But my main argument against this type of individual savings account is that it still is an individual savings account. It should be backed up with a first pillar arrangement. If it's not backed up with a first pillar arrangement, it will only lead to a larger difference between men and women. Men will use it for schooling or early retirement whereas women will use it for care. That means that small differences, for example educational differences between men and women, will increase because of these differing incentives for taking up individual savings for different purposes. From my point of view it will only work – it will work anyhow – but it will only work for the benefit of women if it's backed up with a first pillar arrangement. (Dr. J. Plantenga, Professor of Economics, Utrecht School of Economics)

Furthermore, academics are critical of this latest policy plan in the Netherlands because the individual focus of these policies ignores structures of household decision-making and will not address problems currently visible in parental and paternal leave schemes. Employers' organisations join academics in the critique of the new life course arrangement, albeit for different reasons. The new Life Course arrangement can cause a great bureaucratic burden for employers, says a representative of a Dutch employers' organisation. Employers bear the greatest responsibility in keeping track of money saved, knowing whether or not employees have saved enough to take the time off they want and scheduling replacements for absent employees.

In essence we're happy that it's an individual agreement and not a required, collective one. Although it's a bit disappointing that it can only be used for leave – as if we don't have enough free time as it is. Because we also see, but maybe that's the future, a bit of a mixed reaction, that you can also use it as an addition to your income. (Dutch Employers' Organisation Representative)

Trade unions, while positive about some aspects of the new law, such as the possibility for longer leave, even for low-income groups, point out a number of problems:

The point is, who can save up? People in the ‘rush hour’ of life are precisely the people who cannot save - neither time nor money. And for people with low incomes it will always be difficult. We say, if you’re going to do it [a Life Course arrangement] do it with a good investment from employers. (Dutch Trade Union Representative)

### **1.3. The Flexible Working Request: Awareness, Take-Up and Limitations**

#### **The Flexible Working Request (UK)**

The right to request a change in working hours to work more flexibly in the UK came into effect in April 2003 as part of the 2002 Employment Act . Following consultation and legislative processes, the bill was implemented in April 2003 and parents, legal guardians and adoptive parents employed for six months or more were given the right to request to work flexibly on a permanent yearly basis under the same conditions as those set out for parental leave. Employers are legally obliged to give requests appropriate consideration. Employees can work flexibly in a number of ways: through annualised working hours, compressed hours, flexi-time home working; job sharing; shift working; staggered hours, time working, etc. (DTI, 2003b).

Although not mandatory, the DTI advises that the most effective way to request to work flexibly is in writing ahead of the time when employees want their application to take effect. It also advises that employees think about the ways in which their altered working hours would affect and possibly benefit their employer. Such consideration should be present within written applications as ‘evidence shows that applications for flexible working patterns succeed where they are soundly based on the business needs of the employer’ (DTI, 2003b:13). In fact, ‘an application can only be refused where the employer has a clear business reason for doing so’ (DTI, 2003b:22). The grounds for refusal are as follows: burden of additional costs, detrimental effect on ability to meet customer demand, inability to organise work among existing staff, inability to recruit additional staff, detrimental impact on

performance, insufficiency of work during the periods the employee proposes to work and planned structural changes.

Use of the formal Flexible Working Request in the UK was low. Again data show that employees were more likely to negotiate flexible working arrangements at the employer level. Some women said they would consider using it if flexibility was not available through employers and felt that recognition of the work-care issue within policy was a move in the right direction. Others had investigated the details of the legislation in some depth, with a view to using it because they were having problems with working times and managers and wanted to know their rights. Two women had used the legislation to request a change in their hours. One woman had researched the formal procedure but was encouraged to pursue a change of hours more informally, although she did feel that the legislation would have given her the opportunity to dispute a refusal. In this way, the request may provide some sense of support and may represent a 'fall-back' mechanism for employees:

I found on the DTI website the request for flexible working forms and I filled them in and I think it startled them because they were like 'where did you get these from?' I said, 'Well, I just looked on the website because I thought this is what you'd want me to do'. And they said, 'Oh God no, no, we're so laid back here, you could have just emailed us or sent us a handwritten note, we don't use formal documentation'. I said, 'Oh well, I just preferred doing it that way because if you were going to reject my request for flexible working then I was going to challenge it.' (Karen, 34, Advertising Account Manager)

The fact that take-up of the Flexible Working Request is low in the UK should not necessarily be viewed pessimistically. A large number of women interviewed had accessed flexible working, which indicates that the role of the employer may be more significant than that of the government. However, the arbitrary nature of access based on employers' discretionary practices and informal workplace cultures is evident - many women commented that they would not feel comfortable applying for flexible working.

Awareness of the Flexible Working Request was limited, with few women demonstrating any comprehensive knowledge of the right. Women were more likely to refer to employers' policies. As with Parental Leave, many women disagreed with the idea that parents with children over five could not use the right. Many women felt the right was inadequate given that employers merely have the right to consider requests and employers can refuse.

The data reflect criticisms that the legislation in the UK is a 'soft law' which may prove ineffective in light of other factors: 'It's not tough enough. It's certainly not tough on managers' (Anna, 29 year-old tourist information assistant). In order for both government and formal organisational policy to be effective, initiatives cannot be implemented in isolation and require monitoring and adequate support:

The policy doesn't do enough to encourage. Should the policy be backed up with the help of employers to make it work and other resources?  
(Elizabeth, 34, Outreach Worker)

#### **1.4. Working Hours Adjustment Act (Netherlands). Awareness, Take-up, and Limitations**

##### **The Working Hours Adjustment Act (Netherlands)**

The Netherlands is a forerunner in legislation allowing employees to adjust their working hours. In 2000, the Netherlands introduced flexible working legislation in the Working Hours Adjustment Act (*Wet Aanpassing Arbeidsduur, WAA*), which gives all workers the right to reduce or increase their working hours after one year of employment with the same employer (WAA, *Artikel 2*; see Visser et al., 2004). This legislation differs from the UK in that it is a right to adjust working hours rather than a right to request an adjustment in working hours. The WAA is often considered the most interesting piece of Dutch working time legislation because it allows individuals not only the right to decrease their working hours, but to increase them as well and this change to working hours is reversible. Furthermore, part-time workers cannot be discriminated against for working fewer hours. The Equal Treatment Full-time and Part-time Workers Act (*Wet Verbod op Onderscheid naar Arbeidsduur, WOA*), introduced in 1996, removed any final discrimination between part-time and full-time

work. In this manner, Dutch legislation goes beyond European anti-discrimination legislation, which does not guarantee against discrimination based on working hours or contract type (EU Directive 76/207/EEC; amended with EU Directive 2002/73/EEC).

Despite the strides made in introducing family-friendly working hours legislation in the Netherlands, the organization of these working hours can still be problematic. When it comes to organizing one's working hours, employees often have little say when it comes to what days and times they will work.

In a situation where an individual decides to work fewer hours because they want to combine caring for their children with a paid job, it will do nothing to help the situation if their employer says they can have Mondays off even though they need Tuesdays off because the crèche is closed. This is an area of the law that remains vague. (Dr. C. Baaijens, Researcher on Working Time, Dehora Consultancy Group)

Tijdens would also argue that in the Netherlands:

Women prefer planned working hours knowing well in advance when they work. And they prefer part-time hours. (Dr. K. Tijdens, Professor of Women and Employment, Erasmus University, Rotterdam)

Yet employers can experience planning difficulties when implementing an employee's adjustment to their working hours. Although part-time work provides companies with a certain amount of flexibility, the organization of work can be problematic when it comes to shift work. It can also create problems in companies who have contacts abroad where it can be important that clients have contact with the same person, something that is not always possible when many employees are not available five days a week.

You have a bit more influence on that [organisation of working hours] as an employer, but even that is limited. For example, on Fridays many

organisations are running on limited manpower. (Dutch Employers' Organisation Representative)

Problems with the application of the Working Hours Adjustment Act within companies vary by company size. For medium and small enterprises it can be more difficult to organize shift work when many employees reduce their working hours. However,

It can be easier to negotiate in medium and small businesses because the culture there is oftentimes more informal and as an employer you know why someone wants to adjust their hours. This makes it easier to find solutions that one might not think of in larger companies with all kinds of arrangements. (Employers' Organisation Representative)

That said, employers feel that in terms of working hours, it is relatively easy for Dutch women to combine work and family life. This perspective possibly misses the fact that many working mothers in the Netherlands feel that one of the obstacles to achieving a better balance between work and outside activities and responsibilities is the inability to organise and plan these activities, including their working hours, in advance.

However, employers do add that a number of other factors hinder the increase of women's labour market participation, including the Dutch childcare culture and school hours. Problems in organizing the working week are mostly short-term problems but flexible working hours and the dominance of part-time work among women in the Netherlands has other consequences as well.

One of the main benefits of the Dutch system is that part-time work has been normalised, something that is quite different from part-time work in the UK (Visser, 2002). If part-time work is to be a successful strategy for helping women to achieve work-life balance in the UK, steps must be taken to ensure that part-time workers maintain the same rights, pay and benefits as their full-time counterparts.

In the UK, it's much more detrimental to work part-time. It's much more atypical, whereas in the Netherlands 60 or 70 per cent of the women work part-time, so it is no longer atypical. There are whole sectors of the

economy that are organised on a part-time basis. The schooling system and the healthcare system are all organized on a part-time basis. We have become used to it and we see the benefits of it. It's not atypical, it's not marginalized. (Dr. J. Plantenga, Professor of Economics, University of Utrecht)

Tijdens agrees that the part-time situation in the Netherlands has its advantages, particularly in the area of the equal treatment of full-time and part-time employees.

In comparison to the UK, the Netherlands is in a good position with part-time work. First of all, many collective agreements have clauses about the equal treatment of part-timers and full-timers. Second of all, there is now legislation, anti-discrimination legislation, which protects part-timers from being discriminated against. So these two factors, in combination with the right to adjust working hours in the same job – that is very important – that people can stay in their job and adjust their hours to part-time hours and then continue their employment conditions as they have always been. Together, these three things make part-time conditions similar to full-time, probably with the exception of those working less than 12 hours a week. But particularly for people working 12 to 32 hours, conditions are good, certainly in comparison to other countries. (Dr. K. Tijdens, Professor of Women and Employment, Erasmus University, Rotterdam)

Some experts remain sceptical of part-time work, as they fear it hinders better female labour market participation in general. As one employers' organisation puts it,

With respect to leave arrangements and part-time legislation, we are still of the opinion that it may be a backwards development. In other words that those types of things could also have a stigmatising effect on women. It doesn't boost women's careers. (Dutch Employers' Organisation Representative)

## **1.5 Childcare Provision**

### **UK Childcare Provision**

#### **Tax Credits**

Child Tax Credit (CTC) is a means-tested allowance for a person responsible for at least one child or qualifying young person in full-time non-advanced (secondary, comprehensive or grammar) education. Child Tax Credit helps to support families with children and some 16 to 18 year olds. All families with children, with income of up to £58,000 a year (or up to £66,000 a year if there is a child under one year old), can claim the credit in the same way.

#### **Childcare vouchers**

Childcare Vouchers are a form of childcare assistance offered by UK employers. They have become one of the most effective components that any progressive family-friendly organisation can offer as part of a benefits package. Childcare vouchers can help with the problem of recruiting and retaining key employees as these vouchers can help to relieve the added stress of arranging and paying for childcare, which may discourage employees from returning to work at all. Childcare Vouchers can only be offered by the employer, as part of a remuneration or benefits package, but individuals are unable to purchase these vouchers ([www.childcarevouchers.com](http://www.childcarevouchers.com), 2006).

#### **Free nursery places for 4 years**

From 1 April 2006 a free nursery education place consisting of a minimum of 12.5 hours per week for 38 weeks of the year will be available for every child aged between 3-4 years old. This Bill has enshrined in law parents' legitimate expectation of accessible high quality childcare and services for children under five years and their families. It puts the needs of children and their parents at the heart of the legislation, and ensures that whatever their background, high quality local services will be provided to support them and their children in ways that suit their needs (Childcare Bill, 2006).

State provision for childcare is patchy in the UK (Moss, 2001; Hantrais, 2004). There is no state early years provision, nursery hours are not compatible with working hours and services are inconsistent across the country because of delivery at local level (Rake, 2001). Childcare in the UK is generally expensive and, since 2003, childcare costs have increased three and a quarter times above the rate of inflation, with costs significantly higher in London and the Southeast (Daycare Trust, 2005).

#### **Dutch Childcare Provision**

The most recent changes in Dutch childcare legislation were introduced in 2005, in the Childcare Act (*Wet kinderopvang*). The new law condenses the previously three-tiered childcare system into one scheme. Prior to the new law, three possibilities were available to parents: private, state-subsidized or employer-subsidized day-care (business places purchased by companies). Under the new law, parents pay childcare costs upfront, receiving income-dependent compensation from the government and a contribution from employers on a voluntary basis. Employers are not required by law to subsidize childcare. However a recent bill has been introduced by the Minister of Social Affairs to make all employers responsible for one-sixth of childcare costs, assuming that the partner's employer will cover one-sixth. The change in childcare legislation happened at the same time that wage costs in the childcare sector were on the rise due to the abolition of state subsidized employment within many sectors, including childcare.

Traditionally the Netherlands has had inadequate childcare coverage, due to a conscious effort to provide proper leave arrangements, allowing for care of children to take place within the home. This policy is slowly changing, particularly in light of pressures for certain groups to remain active in the labour market, such as single mothers. The current cabinet is determined to continue the expansion of childcare availability in a demand-driven fashion, which led to the change in childcare legislation in 2005.

## Paying for Childcare

Table 1: The cost of childcare in the UK and the Netherlands

	Full-time nursery place in England	Full-time nursery place in London and the Southeast	Childminder in England	Full-time nursery place in the Netherlands	Childminder in the Netherlands
Weekly	£141	£197	£127	£88	(€126) £60 (€87)
Annually	£7300	Over 10,000	£6600	£4563	(€6573) £3134 (€4514)

Source: SCP, 2006.

For women in the UK working full-time, childcare is provided informally or by the private sector (Pfau-Effinger, 1998, 1999). The data highlight that often, finding and paying for childcare in order to go out to work is expensive and problematic with definite implications for women's labour market participation (Daycare Trust, 2005). The cost of childcare in the UK is amongst the highest in Europe and the growth in working women with young children means demand is outstripping supply and pushing up prices (BBC News, 2003).

Within the UK sample, professional women living in London and the Southeast were more likely to have relocated from elsewhere in the country and were therefore less likely to have access to informal support from relatives such as grandparents. Consequently, 'geographically mobile' families rely on 'market care' (see also Yeandle *et al.*, 2002; Reynolds *et al.*, 2003) in the parts of the country where it is most expensive. Women working in lower income occupations were less likely to engage with private childcare provision and often worked part-time and 'shift parented' with partners in order to manage childcare responsibilities. As a result, they did not engage to the same extent in debates over childcare provision.

Most women working full-time with pre-school children used a nursery or a childminder. Many thought that the government should intervene to improve childcare provision and complaints about the expense and availability of private childcare were frequent. Many women in the UK were essentially 'working for nothing' once they had paid nursery fees, highlighting the childcare issue as a significant disincentive to participation within paid work:

Although my childcare is excellent and I love my childminder dearly, £310 a week is more than I earn so it just got to the point where I just said to my husband, ‘this is ridiculous’, so I just held on until we got the mortgage.

(Caroline, 36, Publisher)

Women in the UK also talked about the inflexibility of nursery hours and the difficulties of co-ordinating between home, work, school and childcare, with some UK nurseries charging if women were late picking up children. Because nurseries are privately run, they prioritise business needs over those of parents and children: ‘It’s money first and it’s a business, and then care comes after’ (Karen, 34, Advertising Accounts Manager).

Women in the Netherlands echoed similar sentiments about the cost of childcare. With the new law in place, childcare has become more expensive for certain households, particularly when previously subsidized childcare disappeared for some women. ‘For us it was a shock that we had to pay everything at once on our own.’ (Corine, 31, Notary Employee).

Most experts would agree with these individual experiences:

I think childcare, in most cases, is too expensive. Moreover, childcare could be better in the Netherlands if an informal market existed. Official places offer fully qualified childcare but there is hardly any room for informally organised childcare such as children going to a care minder at someone’s home. (Dr. K. Tijdens, Professor of Women and Employment, Erasmus University, Rotterdam)

However, a recent in-depth study of childcare in the Netherlands shows that parents’ perception of childcare costs seems to be more strongly related to the use of childcare than the actual cost. In fact, a comparison of sample households from 2004 to 2005 showed a slight decrease in childcare costs (SCP, 2006). At the same time, the strong focus on good quality childcare seems to have hampered the growth of organised informal care.

In the Netherlands, some people focus on pedagogically structured childcare, requiring highly qualified childcare with excellent standards. All

childminders have to be hired with good certificates, making childcare expensive, leaving no room for informally organised childcare to emerge. (Dr. K. Tijdens, Professor of Women and Employment, Erasmus University, Rotterdam)

Despite the focus on good quality childcare, there seems to be an assumption that parents often distrust the quality of Dutch childcare. In fact, many Dutch parents feel that the best care for a child comes from the child's parents or close relatives (SCP, 2006). Roughly one-third of Dutch mothers agree that formal childcare is an option (SCP, 2006). Of all the mothers in our Dutch sample, no mothers relied on formal childcare for more than three days a week.

No, I wouldn't have them [at childcare] for more than three days, but that's strictly personal. Yeah, it's personal and very much a cultural thing I think. (Hester, 41, Teacher)

Evaluating the Dutch system of childcare in comparison to the UK, policy-makers explain that Dutch childcare is characterised by a strong preference for caring for children within the home or by friends or relatives.

What you see is a lack of trust in the childcare system. It is often still seen as outsourcing your own child because you so desperately need to work. Research shows that parents who do not make use of formal childcare also have relatively little trust in formal care (Policy-makers Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment [A])

The professionalisation and affordability of childcare centres are current issues on the Dutch political agenda, and according to Knijn, are crucial elements of satisfying women's demands nowadays:

What women want are part-time jobs in combination with pedagogical childcare. If women have the perception that it [childcare] is beneficial to their children, it might be a tool for emancipation as women would be inclined to think childcare is educational for their children and

would therefore feel better about working outside the home. (Dr. T. Knijn Professor of Economics, University of Utrecht)

### **Informal Support**

Some women in the UK and the Netherlands had informal support from grandparents and other family members. However, the point was made that informal support such as this should not be taken-for-granted and should not be viewed by government as a solution to this problem:

You know I do appreciate that I am lucky in that respect. But you know I know too many people who don't have any support and have to pay for childcare and therefore are either working part-time in jobs they are not enjoying or are not working at all. (Janet, 33, Area Manager)

Dutch women mirror UK women in this sense. Relatives, particularly grandparents, as well as friends and neighbours, play an integral role in creating wrap-around care.

As long as everything is going smoothly, it's fine - until one of them gets sick. Luckily then we have the grandparents. (Hella, 39, Internal Bank Accountant)

However, the informal support provided by relatives and neighbours often leads to a precarious balance, and policy measures could be taken to provide more wrap-around care.

### **State Childcare Provision**

In terms of the use of state childcare provision in the UK, some women used nursery places and had received nursery vouchers. Some felt the nursery vouchers were a definite policy improvement that eased the cost of childcare and demonstrated a positive change in policy:

I think it's wonderful families now have this opportunity to have some of the childcare paid for to get people back. Because I was literally working full-time with young children . . . . All I knew was that I was paying the mortgage, my

pension and the childcare. There was no benefit for me in the short term for actually going to work. (Carol, 46, Teaching Assistant)

Others felt they were less useful as nursery places were scarce:

We had nursery vouchers. They made a big thing about free nursery places for four year-olds, but you try and find them and they are not there'. (Paula, 40, IT Technician)

Women with older children were positive about breakfast and after school clubs that alleviated the tensions between reconciling work with school times. However, others made the point that such provision was inconsistent and not available in all schools. Further, evidence highlights that nursery places for three and four year olds may compound the difficulties of juggling care and work because the sessions are too short. Consequently, this does little to encourage parents and primarily women to participate in work:

if you go to a state nursery, they are only there half 9 till half 11. Who can work that?' (Paula, 40 IT Technician).

The hours provided by nurseries and out of hours school provision was an issue for women using both state and private childcare providers:

If it closes at six and you're still in a meeting somewhere . . . you're in a meeting at the other end of the borough - in rush hour even if you finish at five, you might not get there for six and that's when the nursery closes. And it is really stressful and you're like nearly crashing trying to get from one end of the borough to the other. And it's just hard. (Stella, 42, Community Programme Manager)

Positive accounts highlight how nurseries could adopt more 'parent-friendly' policies that offer more flexibility and accommodate working parents more effectively. The quality and nature of early years provision as important for the welfare of children and critical for both their short and long-term development and learning. The private provision of childcare may have implications for quality of care. However the provision of wrap-around care in schools

also raises issues of quality: ‘Do children really want to hang around at school so many hours a day?’ (Genevieve, 47, Television Editor/Producer).

In the Netherlands, where opening times of schools, childcare centres and nurseries are also often problematic, women were concerned about the difficulty of co-ordinating between home, work, school and childcare. A major concern with state subsidized childcare seems to be the availability of wrap-around care. Given the fact that elementary schools are closed on Wednesday afternoons and, dependent upon the region, other afternoons as well, mothers wished that the state would take more initiative in providing better before and after school care. As in the UK, opening and closing times of both state and private childcare centres can hinder women’s work-life balance:

We now have a combination of after school care and private care and I’ve always had a good experience with that, trusted [them], and agreements about what time to pick them up but not a race against the clock that I have to be there absolutely no later than a quarter to six at the childcare centre.

(Nynke, 43, Teacher)

The lack of wrap-around care has not gone unnoticed by the Dutch government. Recently, the Dutch parliament accepted a motion by politicians Jozias van Aartsen and Wouter Bos, which proposes better wrap-around care in the form of before and after school care. This motion asks the government to require schools to provide care between 7.30 in the morning and 6.30 in the evening. Should this proposal be successful, the availability of wrap-around care in the Netherlands could be greatly improved.

## **Tax Credits**

The research highlights that for those on lower incomes and especially lone parents, the tax credits system provides incentives for women to remain economically active:

I’m satisfied because if it wasn’t for the fact that child tax credit and working tax credit were paid to me, I certainly couldn’t work, I would be stuck on income support’.

(Emily, 35, Civil Servant)

The childcare element was also viewed positively - in some cases it was the main reason women had carried on working:

That really helped and that urged me to stay in work because I was ready to give up work . . . . When I had the twins . . . that was the reason why I stayed on’.

(Rose, 34, Personal Assistant)

However, the experiences of other women highlight problems relating to complicated application forms and problems with overpayment. This reflected in the well-documented administrative problems affecting the system, including numerous overpayments, computer problems and unqualified staff (MacErlean, 2004).

The data also draw attention to the fact that tax credits may fail to accommodate the differing circumstances of women. For example, a significant number of women interviewed were ineligible because their salaries or combined salaries with partners meant that they earned too much to qualify. Others who did qualify, received only minimum entitlements, as payments do not vary for those earning between £20,000 and £55,000 (Inland Revenue, 2004). Some women living in London and the Southeast were dissatisfied with their lack of entitlements, as they felt that, although they earned reasonable salaries, their mortgages and childcare costs were high and the needs of ‘middle income’ families were not considered:

To be honest I get a little bit fed up with this, all you hear is we are helping working families with childcare. I mean I have just finished nursery fees - £350 a month. And I got £36 a month on that working tax credit. They make out they are giving you all this money towards childcare but they are not. And I know OK perhaps it does help with people on a lower income, but we are not on a massive amount. And when you don’t claim anything else, you can afford to pay your mortgage all the rest of it. I don’t think there is enough. (Paula, 40, IT Technician)

### **Childcare Practices in the Netherlands**

While many experts are critical about the new law, some policy-makers believe the Childcare Act has the potential to improve the current Dutch system of childcare. A representative from

a Dutch employers' organisation notes the increased investment of employers in childcare during the last 15 years:

At the end of the 1980s, companies started buying up childcare places. They started doing it themselves - the government didn't really play a role yet . . . . Slowly but surely more companies started to do this, and parties involved in collective labour agreements started creating funding during the beginning of the 1990s. And then the government started investing in childcare. Money through municipalities in subsidized centres to create extra [childcare] places. But we still see an increase in the number of companies that contributed to their employees' childcare costs during the last fifteen years. (Dutch Employers' Organisation Representative)

Moreover, employers are positive about the new childcare law, allowing childcare to be more market-driven and giving parents a more central role in the organisation of childcare. Despite criticism from Trade Unions that employers need to do more in terms of childcare, Dutch employers remain positive:

We have done a number of different things and brought them [issues of childcare, paying for childcare] to our members' attention. Together with the trade union movement we made a number of recommendations to companies about a contribution, we made our own brochure, we had meetings throughout the whole country, we have a sort of weekly bulletin where we put a message in each week. We're not there to point a finger at our members. But in this way, we do it [stimulate childcare contributions]. (Dutch Employers' Organisation Representative)

In turn, the Dutch government is happy to see the tripartite approach to childcare continue. Policy-makers point out that a tripartite system, where childcare costs are covered by the government, employers and parents, works well in the Dutch labour market:

It is very important to us that parents are responsible for the choice of childcare. And that means contributing to the cost as well. In that manner you make the most balanced decision . . . . But of course you can discuss

the issue of how much the government should subsidize. And that's why historically we've chosen for a tripartite model, a model which we've related to the labour market, where employers also have an interest in childcare. (Policy-makers Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment [B])

At the same time, the Dutch government is hopeful that the increased marketization of childcare will lead to a more diverse supply of childcare options.

*Interviewer: Is that a particular goal of the Ministry at the moment, creating a broader supply of care maybe by lessening the restrictions on childcare?*

The purpose of course is that we see more supply. But the fact that the supply is smaller in the Netherlands does not mean that it is too small. To see that, you have to look at the waiting lists and at the moment they are not really long. And you need to look at what the demand is, and the demand is also less. (Policy-makers Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment [B])

In general, it can be said that the demand for flexible childcare is a response to the difficulties of organizing this care in the light of changing legislation, problems with school hours and staffing and other difficulties.

The demand for flexibility is coming from the organization of the care for children. If women want to work substantial hours, they can make use of childcare. But the childcare sector is in tumult at the moment because of the changing legislation and what the possible effects of this legislation will be. Yet once a child has reached school age things become even more tumultuous because they [children] have very limited school times, there are a lot of holidays, a lot of days off, and that part demands a great deal of flexibility. (Dr. T. Knijn, Professor of Economics, University of Utrecht)

However, care organisation problems due to school hours and a lack of infrastructure for after-school care are becoming increasingly apparent. Primary schools are closed on Wednesday afternoons and many primary schools are closed on other days of the week in the first few years of a child's education. Next to this, the assumed low quality of market-driven childcare, the lack of professional staff and pedagogical methods and the perceived high costs involved reinforces the perception that formal childcare in the Netherlands is not 'child-friendly' and that mothers should be the ones actively involved. Therefore, even though the policies about flexible working hours seem to fit women's needs to fulfil their labour participation and their care wishes, the marketization and individualization of childcare does not facilitate women's full (re)integration in the labour market:

I think if childcare in the Netherlands would have been cheap and well organized, we would have had higher participation rates, definitely. If women decide to take a career break following childbirth, those decisions are more likely to fall into the category of 'no labour force participation' . . . and once someone is out of the labour market, it takes a huge effort to re-enter. (Dr. K. Tijdens, Professor of Women and Employment, Erasmus University, Rotterdam, 2005)

## 1.6 UK Summary

- Findings highlight low levels of awareness and take-up of both Parental Leave and the Flexible Working Request. Flexible working is employer-led rather than via policy. Both Parental Leave and flexible working are likely to be influenced by informal workplace cultures.
- Many women felt that Parental Leave was too generous and would be unnecessary if reduced and flexible working hours were available.
- The fact that Parental Leave is unpaid needs to be addressed. The differing financial circumstances of parents needs to be acknowledged with the introduction of payment for those on lower incomes and lone parents.
- However, women's use of Parental Leave highlights its potential for addressing work-care conflicts.

- The lack of awareness of Parental Leave in the UK indicates a lack of commitment by government in promoting this policy. Awareness needs to be raised, as does employees' sense of entitlement to additional leave as working parents.
- Although it was felt that the Flexible Working Request was a move in the right direction, many felt it lacked any real power to help working parents due to its voluntary nature.
- Data highlight that the Flexible Working Request may be of some value as formal back - up and as a fallback mechanism for employees who feel employers are treating them unfairly.
- The role of informal cultures emerged as a disincentive to making formal requests for flexibility.
- Policy may be ineffective in isolation and thus requires support and monitoring by government in order to ensure that employees can access family-friendly policy – this suggests a more 'joined-up' approach.
- In order for policy to be more effective, the interconnections between paid work and care require cultural and practical acceptance within the workplace.
- Data reveal dissatisfaction with childcare provision in terms of cost and lack of flexibility, highlighting the inadequacies of much market-driven, private childcare with many women 'working for nothing' to pay for childcare. State nursery provision was criticised due to the length and timing of sessions, which meant it was of no real use in terms of managing working and care.
- Evidence highlights the potential of tax credits as an incentive for labour market participation; however, it also emphasises the variable needs of 'middle-income' families, which the system at present fails to recognise and accommodate adequately.
- The childcare element of tax credits emerged positively in terms of making it worthwhile for women to stay in the labour market.
- Generally, policy in this area indicates progress; however, it requires a more sophisticated appreciation of the differing needs of working parents and more commitment to tangible measures rather than supportive rhetoric.

## 1.7 Netherlands Summary

- While parental leave awareness is better in the Netherlands, take-up rates are also very low. Many women choose to reduce working hours or use saved holiday time rather than take parental leave, particularly because it is unpaid.
- The new Life Course arrangement in the Netherlands, introduced in 2006, offers parents the possibility of financing parental leave by contributing a percentage of their gross salary to a Life Course savings account over a number of years to finance leave at a later date.
- The Working Hours Adjustment Act appears to be the most well received piece of Dutch legislation, guaranteeing not only the right to decrease working hours, but the right to increase working hours as well, which is reversible.
- Nevertheless, employees often retain little say in the organisation of their working week, which can hamper work-life balance.
- The ability to adjust working hours and organise these hours in a manner conducive to work-life balance depends on the employer. Prior to the introduction of working hours legislation, employees often adjusted their working hours via consultation with their employer.
- However, while an adjustment of working hours (most often a reduction) can help women achieve work-life balance, the long-term effects of working fewer hours must also be considered.
- Following the introduction of new childcare legislation in 2005, parents now perceive childcare to be more expensive. However, research shows that parents often perceive childcare costs to have increased while this is not always the case (SCP, 2006). Research over the next several years will be needed to determine the average differences in childcare costs before and after the legislation introduced in 2005.
- Despite the problems in childcare provision (such as a lack of wrap-around care) childcare costs in the Netherlands are distinctly lower than in the UK. However more research would be needed to determine the reasons for such a great difference in childcare costs.
- Recent efforts to increase wrap-around care in the Netherlands, as evidenced by the Van Aartsen/Bos proposal, could serve to improve the Dutch childcare situation.

## Chapter Two

### Workplace Experiences: Access to Family Friendly Policy and Flexible Working Practices

#### Introduction

Although formal childcare and employees' rights in the UK are criticised for not providing any real support for working parents (Moss, 2001; Brannen, 2001), organisations appear to have recognised the need to provide more flexible working arrangements other than the standardised full-time 9 to 5. Initiatives such as the Work-Life Balance Campaign (DfEE, 2000) may have encouraged employers to introduce working arrangements that are more flexible and employers themselves may have been prompted to respond to the changing needs of employees. It is clear that new forms of working have emerged (Dex, 2003). However, it is women, rather than men, who are using flexible and part-time working arrangements (Table 2).

Table 2: Part-Time and Flexible Working, UK employees aged 16-64

	<b>Women</b> (Thousands)	<b>%</b>	<b>Men</b> (Thousands)	<b>%</b>
<b>Part-Time</b>	4,845	42	1,093	9
<b>Flexi-time</b>	1,387	12	1,055	9
<b>Annualised Hours</b>	514	4	524	4
<b>Term-Time Working</b>	888	8	162	1
<b>Job Share</b>	150	1	16	*
<b>Home working</b>	195	2	124	1
<b>Any Flexible Arrangement</b>	6,538	57	2,766	23

Source: Labour Force Survey (2005)

However, it is important not to overplay the availability of flexible working; findings from large-scale surveys exploring flexibility highlight that, other than part-time hours, very few employees work flexibly and often demand outweighs availability (Hogarth *et al.*, 2000; DTI, 2004). The 2003 Labour Force Survey shows rates of 11.6 per cent across all flexible working categories (LFS, 2003).

In the Netherlands, organisations often provided employees with options for flexible working prior to the introduction of legislation in 2000. At that time, bargaining for reduced working hours took place on an industry level. Throughout the 1990s, more than a third of Dutch employees were covered by collective labour agreements that allowed a reduction in working hours. Women taking part in the focus groups did not discuss flexibility *per se*. rather, individuals focused on their ability to work part-time within organisations. The Dutch labour market is known for its high rates of part-time work among women and (younger) men. Female part-time work as a percentage of total employment is currently 60 per cent (OECD, 2005). The legislative changes to working arrangements introduced in 2000 largely complemented this part-time trend. While some may assume such high levels of part-time work as they are present in the Netherlands must be negative, others see part-time work as a possible means of combining paid work and domestic life (Plantenga, 1997; Visser, 2002). The use of part-time work as a means of facilitating work-family balance must be considered with caution, however (O'Reilly and Fagan, 1998). In the Netherlands, the number of women working part-time continues to increase (OECD, 2005), while the number of female employees with a flexible contract (either a temporary contract or employees without a fixed number of working hours) decreased over the last several years from 14 per cent in 1996 to 8 per cent in 2004 (CBS Statline, 2006).

## 2.1 Working Arrangements

The data evidenced flexibility in working arrangements and hours. Table 3 shows how UK women in the research were working in terms of flexibility.

Table 3: Working Arrangements in UK sample

Fixed Hours	20
Occasional Flexibility	12
Designated Flexibility	24
Extensive Flexibility	11

## **Fixed Hours**

Those women working fixed hours had very limited access to flexibility – starting and finishing work at precise times. Fifteen of the women working fixed hours were working part-time, highlighting that reduced hours may help with work-life balance but they are not necessarily flexible. Unsurprisingly, many of those on fixed hours were women working within retail, care and service occupations where the nature of jobs meant that they worked shifts and had to perform particular tasks at allocated times or were dealing with people face-to-face. This means that employees have less control over when and where they work. Often, part-time hours may be set at the same time every week and this can be problematic if women's circumstances change and they need to alter their working patterns. This is reflected in the following comment:

I have asked for different hours but they can't accommodate me, so they're just trying to work around me at the moment . . . . I'd prefer to have different hours to be honest because every week I don't know what I'm doing. (Lisa, 27, Supermarket Bakery Assistant)

Medical and teaching professionals also worked set hours. As a trainee primary schoolteacher commented: 'You don't realise how inflexible teaching is'. (Kim, 41, Trainee Teacher).

## **Designated Working Arrangements**

Many of the women in the UK had access to designated flexible working arrangements. Often this was via 'flexi-time', which meant that women had core hours in which they had to be at work but they had some flexibility around starting and finishing work. Flexi-time was available for some women working for a local authority and for large organisations in both private and public sectors. For some this was as a result of the autonomy of their managerial status. For instance two women managers in the voluntary sector had some flexibility over start and finishing times although their staff worked shifts as care and project workers. The following quote illustrates the autonomy and flexibility granted to a mid-management private sector employee:

The hours are pretty set as in the core is 9 - 5 Mon - Fri, and that's the hours I need to be there. However, if I need to come in later or leave earlier because it's not a strict 9-5 they are pretty flexible and it's up to me to manage my own time, I have objectives I need to meet, myself and team. If they're met, that's fine, you can be as flexible as you need it to be but then you pull out all the stops if you need to. (Catrina, 38, Credit Policy Manager)

This type of flexibility was the most prevalent within the sample and possibly reflects how the public sector and female dominated occupations have responded to the need to accommodate female employees. It may also be a consequence of private sector organisations wanting to retain highly trained and experienced staff by offering them flexibility.

### **Occasional Flexibility**

Occasional flexibility is evident when women work fairly fixed hours but could negotiate slight alterations to set working hours such as starting an hour later or where being half an hour late due to childcare commitments was not viewed negatively. There was variability within this group with some women having slightly more scope to be flexible than others in terms of working times but this was expressed as a perk, rather than an entitlement:

Well, I'm lucky, aren't I? I've got employers that are, this is where I'll be positive about them, they are flexible enough to allow me to arrive 40 minutes late some mornings when I have had a problem and they do allow me to leave early to attend you know a doctor's appointment but that's about it. (Karen, 34, Advertising Accounts Manager)

This group of women varied in terms of occupation and sector and differences in access to flexibility were at times relatively subtle. Several women were managers in the voluntary sector who did have more control over working times. However, they imposed set hours on themselves due to the demands of their job. Other women's hours were dictated by their organisations. For these women, access to flexibility reflects a general trend within organisations to accommodate employees but this was not official and did not permit substantial variability in working hours. As one manager in the voluntary sector commented:

‘You have flexi-time, but you do the hours necessary to get the job done’ (Janet, 33, Area Manager).

### **Extensive Flexibility**

Some of the women within the UK sample had access to extensive temporal and spatial flexibility, working from home and working evenings. In general, women within this group worked in similar occupations and several worked for the same organisation as analysts, consultants and project managers in business outsourcing. This may be characteristic of this sector and of one organisation in particular, which had a history of employing women with children and offering part-time and flexible hours within the sector. The fact that some of the women worked from different sites and were not based at a main office may also explain why they could control their own working hours and task completion:

My 26 hours are set within the week so it’s very flexible in that sense. I can come in when I like and go home when I like and take as much lunch as I like. But like today I will stay late because I have got some work to do.  
(Elsbeth, 47, IT/Business Outsourcing Project Leader)

However, for some women, this type of extensive flexibility was offset by heavy workloads and employer and client-led flexibility which led to long hours working. Thus, for some, flexibility may become a means of managing long hours:

On average I work 45, 50 hours. Sometimes more depending on a deadline and usually over the whole month you try and pan it out so you don’t do more than 50 hours in a week . . . . I work from home. . . . I’ve got meetings scheduled, but if I couldn’t make the meetings I can dial in on teleconference. I plan my own week. (Aileen, 41, IT/Business Outsourcing Consultant)

## Hours, Flexibility and Occupation

Most women within the UK sample were working standard full-time hours, although a substantial number (24) were working reduced part-time hours (Figure 3) and 18 women worked over 40 hours per week.

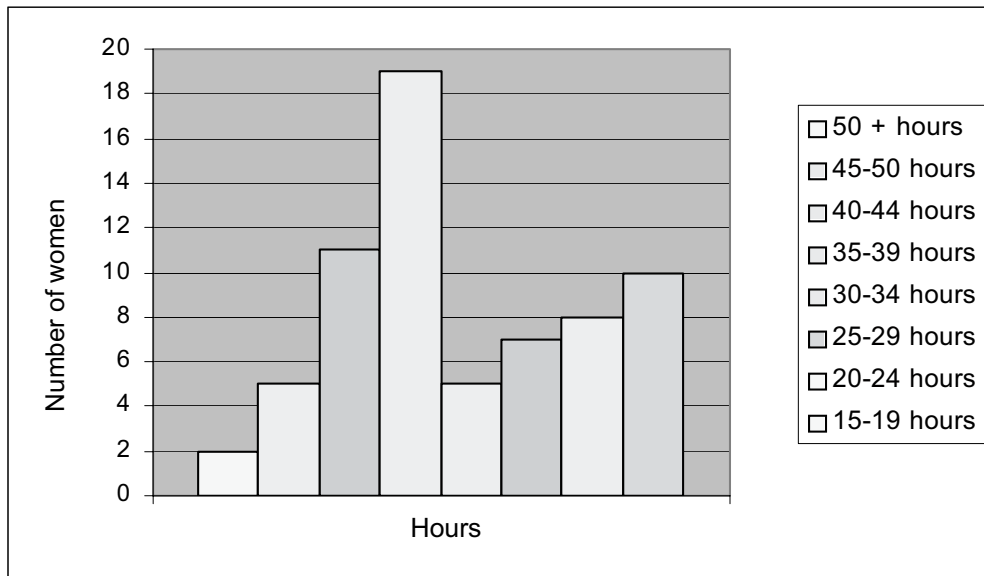


Figure 3. UK Sample Working Hours

Part-time work is the principal means by which many women manage the dual responsibilities of paid work and caring for children (EOC, 2003; Purcell *et al.* 1999; Perrons, 1999; Branine, 1999; Walsh, 1999; Sheridan, 2004), although its status as a flexible working option is debatable. For instance, part-time hours for women working in retail, service and routine occupations are generally fixed. Working part-time in occupations such as these offers little opportunity for training and career progression (Jenkins, 2004; Warren, 2000; Rubery *et al.*, 1998; Rubery and Fagan, 1995). Nevertheless, part-time working is highly variable in terms of hours worked and occupation and should not merely be viewed as low paid and marginal.

As well as fixed part-time hours in retail and routine occupations, women were also working part-time as healthcare professionals in the NHS, in administrative roles in the public sector and in IT programming and technical roles in the private sector. The following quote highlights access to mid-level flexible part-time work in the public sector for a local authority:

Yeah, you build up two days a month. But then on the school holidays instead of doing five short days I do three long days. So I do three days of

seven and a half hours. That is quite good because I couldn't do it any other way. (Sophie, 43, Environmental Health Officer)

Evidence from this sample shows that meaningful and fairly high-status part-time employment is available and can be an effective means of managing work and care. This still raises issues about progression, as some professional women may maintain occupational status on reduced hours in order to take primary responsibility for childcare; however, they may cease to progress to higher occupational levels, in what has been referred to as the 'mommy-track' (Lewis and Lewis, 1996).

In the Netherlands, part-time work, including high-quality part-time work, is widely available. Furthermore, moving from full-time work to part-time work to increase flexibility and balance paid work and family life is normal; part-time work has been normalised (Visser, 2002). In fact data in this study indicate that many Dutch women assume they can easily make a move from full-time to part-time work after having children, given current Dutch legislation and a growing tradition of mothers working part-time after having children. However, the flexibility in working arrangements does vary by sector. As one woman in the banking sector explains, her attempt to reduce her working hours was not well received:

So I made my wishes known and bank management was not very enthusiastic about it and implied that you could just forget about that at the bank. We'll find another place for you where you can work part-time. (Loes, 40, Bank Project Manager)

Even if the request is made in terms of parental leave, which is legally available to all employees, employers can be difficult:

Two years ago, when I wanted to take parental leave to work 32 hours instead of 36; well . . . I was so unique and indispensable. It simply could not be a half day less, was absolutely impossible. It was one of the reasons to leave my previous job. (Hella, 39, Bank Internal Accountant)

## 2.2 Engagement with Formal Policy

Data highlight recognition amongst employers of the need to provide policies, which address work-life balance and caring responsibilities. It is clear that flexible working policies have now been acknowledged and implemented within organisations:

They've got a pamphlet that HR will give you that lists about 20 different ways in which you can apply to work flexibly . . . . I think they've been priding themselves on being at the forefront of the interpretation of employment law and they were also trying to, I don't know if you ever see, every year The Times have the best 100 firms to work for . . . . They're first to see it when it comes out and they're very much trying to get themselves up in the ranking. And all that is, is employee feedback on a firm so I think they're very much trying to be seen as being flexible and family friendly. (Ailsa, 32, Lawyer)

This recognition of the need to accommodate working parents was also evident for non-professional women working in retail and process occupations with visible 'family-friendly' policies such as term-time working, enhanced leave schemes and 'special' childcare related leave:

I know it's a silly one but I know you can have a day off without pay for the first day your child goes to school to be there to take them. (Lisa, 27, Supermarket Bakery Assistant)

However, this may simply be a reflection of gendered employment experiences. Such policies are more likely to be evident within large public and private sector organisations with a high proportion of female employees. In this way, such policies may help women with work-life balance but their absence across sectors and at certain occupational levels means they do little to address career progression.

One of the women in the Dutch focus groups did make use of the availability of paid short-term leave but as she explains, she was also responsible for the promotion of this type of leave within the company.

I did use it [short-term leave]. Of course, for me it's a bit more up close and personal. I have all these arrangements. I promote them myself and tell employees, you know, you can take up short-term care leave. I've done it twice myself, short-term care leave, once when he had an ear infection in the middle of the night and the next day I just took a day of care leave. No problem. (Esther, 40, Senior Rewards Bank Manager)

### **Effectiveness of Formal Policy**

The data from the UK highlights positive examples of engagement with formal policy and illustrate the now widespread implementation of family-friendly policies, albeit to varying levels of commitment. However, the extent to which this results in addressing work-family negotiation in any tangible way is debatable and may merely be lip service:

That's been quite promoted within [place of work] for working mothers - term time working. But a friend of mine put in for it and was told that within the customer service side, working in the call centre, it wasn't viable within that working environment. . . . If you work in a call centre with 250 people and somebody covers you for school holidays [and it's not viable] then when is it? And we never really got a proper answer to that. (Helen, 41, Clerical Officer)

Companies may demonstrate positive family-friendly measures but other features of policy may run counter to such policies. For instance, the same supermarket that offered a day off for children's first day of school (unpaid) was not so amenable if women needed to change fixed hours. The organisation also required employees to undergo a return-to-work interview if they were off ill or they were off work due to child's illness:

It's usually OK but you've got to have a return-to-work interview.

*Interviewer: So how does that work then?*

They turn round and say, 'Will you be off again in the next six months?' And I always say, 'Well, I don't know. I can't answer that.' (Teresa, 36, Supermarket Bakery Assistant)

In the Netherlands, despite the existence of formal policy measures women are not always inclined to make use of these measures:

You often hear in our [work] environment that people know there is care leave, but when push comes to shove and the child is sick, they often just call up and say that they [themselves] are sick. (Nynke, 43, Teacher)

For some Dutch women, formal policy is less effective when other alternatives seem more attractive. For example, short-term care leave can be negated by the availability of extra vacation days that are fully paid.

Yeah, we have the right to short-term care leave; it's covered in our CLA [collective labour agreement]. But you get paid 70 per cent of your salary, and in the catering we have so many vacation days and ADV days. With a full-time job about 40 days a year. That's just a lot. So I just take a vacation day or an ADV day; I have more than enough. And then I get 100 per cent of my salary. (Annemarie, 30, HRM Catering Manager)

### **2.3 The Significance of Informal Working Relationships**

Formal policy may affect employees' workplace experiences, but it is the way that these issues are negotiated on a daily basis between colleagues and line managers that mainly determines workplace experiences (Kodz, 2003; Yeandle *et al.*, 2003; DTI, 2004; Perrons, 1999; Stevens *et al.*, 2004). For instance, research data highlight how flexible working may be arranged on an informal and temporary basis between teams and line managers and may be dependent upon relationships with peer groups and clients rather than via formal policy. Given that the demands and circumstances of caring often change, informal and fluid arrangements may be more effective for those with childcare responsibilities. This highlights how both positive and negative workplace experiences are often dependent upon individual relationships rather than government policies and formal workplace procedures:

There's a formal process to go through about filling in this form and putting down your justifications and I think it goes to personnel and ticked off or whatever. But the main reason why it would or would not get ticked

off is whether you've got the support of the team to stand behind you to say 'Yes, we can make this work'. (Deborah, 39, Legal Partner)

Interviews with Dutch policy-makers confirm the importance of the organisational environment in creating possibilities for combining paid work and family care. The flexibility of many Dutch working arrangements is not only dependent upon the requests of employees but on the willingness and ability of employers to meet these requests. As a representative of a Dutch employers' organisation explains:

Part-time [work] has its advantages and disadvantages. One advantage is the flexibility it provides a company. It becomes easier to spread workers out during a day or during a week. Instead of one person for one function, you have two or three people, so as an employer you're less vulnerable to staffing problems. It also helps to retain employees who otherwise might have left the organisation . . . . The drawback is that it can create planning problems. (Dutch Employers' Organisation Representative)

Data from the focus groups about employers' attitude towards flexible working varied. One woman was very positive about her employers' influence on her work-life balance.

I have a great employer. My boss has children as well. I think that makes a big difference. It's a she and she has children and she's a lone mother. I think that that makes a big difference. (Annemarie, 30, HRM Catering Manager)

Yet this flexibility and positive attitude from the employer could partially be attributable to the size of the company.

It's a small company. It's easier for us to help each other out . . . but I think an employer has a lot of influence [on work-life balance], they're part of the whole. [Formal] care, the employee and the employer and the government, they all have to work well together and if you have an employer who isn't that interested in all those part-time working mothers, then your situation is very different. (Annemarie, 30, HRM Catering Manager)

Due to staffing problems, it can be more difficult to organize shift work within small and medium enterprises when many employees reduce their working hours. Yet as a representative of a Dutch employers' organisation explains, the more informal culture present in small and medium enterprises can allow for negotiation between the employer and employee.

It can be easier to negotiate in medium and small businesses because the culture there is oftentimes more informal and as an employer you know why someone is making a request to adjust their hours. This makes it easier to find solutions that one might not think of in larger companies where more formal arrangements are present. (Dutch Employers' Organisation Representative)

### **The Negative Impact of Formal and Informal Practices**

Informal dynamics between colleagues and managers can have particularly negative effects on workplace experiences.

Examples from the UK data include:

- Negative attitudes towards working mothers and a lack of consideration of family responsibilities.
- The inability of colleagues to accept the credibility of part-time hours.
- Absence as a result of child-related illness was looked upon negatively and was a source of stress and guilt.
- Some women felt uncomfortable discussing children and childcare problems at work.

In some workplaces hostility towards issues of childcare may not be intentional but may originate from an inability to consider the needs of carers in the workplace (Williams, 2000):

For example you could be there at say 9 at night and I would like, 'I have to go home now, I'm pregnant and I need to go to bed' . . . but they just didn't understand as they hadn't experienced it. (Lucy, 33, Advertising Copywriter)

Others felt that entrenched, negative assumptions about working mothers resulted in implicit and indirect discriminatory practices such as missing out on promotion and being overlooked for particular roles and tasks:

When I first came back you know rather than giving me a high-pressure job [I said] 'I don't want that at the moment, just give me all the finishing off jobs, that I can sort out quite comfortably'. Not taking work home with me all that sort of stuff. But then they never really got back into giving me any more responsibility, I had to go back to them and say 'do you know, you're kind of passing me over for jobs here that I'm well capable of doing.'  
(Naomi, 35, Electrical Engineer )

As with other studies, line managers at all occupational levels emerge as central in determining the extent to which the workplace is experienced as 'family-friendly'. Their discretionary actions and attitudes can be especially problematic if they are inflexible and make life difficult for employees:

My manager makes it quite easy but other people in other shops that I've spoken to, it's not easy, they want you to work awkward hours . . . you get a part-time contract but they always want you to work extra and you just can't you know, you've got to pick your child up from school. You can't always do it. (Grace, 32, Shop Assistant)

The positive aspects of formal workplace policy such as access to part-time and flexible hours may be negated by the informal workplace culture. Colleagues working full-time may fail to accept part-time working arrangements or reduced hours as sufficient for specified roles. There were significant examples from the UK data of 'part-time problematics' where the strategy of working reduced hours became a source of stress and conflict for women and failed to address the work-life balance. This is reflected in a failure to accept part-time hours and to accommodate them:

I still think there's this thing where [colleagues think] you are being paid full time and that you have just got a day off . . . . I have no argument with

the hours, I have got no arguments, I have not had any battles with them sorting my hours out. It's just the attitude. (Paula, 40, IT Technician )

Lack of acceptance of part-time working at higher levels in the UK derives from cultural norms which view full-time working as standard and the demands of the presenteeism culture.

It was round about 1990 . . . there were a lot more men coming into what was [employer] then, and up till then we had all been women and had all been part-time and we got on with it. We handed over and it worked a dream, absolutely perfectly. And then all of a sudden there were these full-time men around and they didn't understand the need for the same level of communication because you were all going to be there every day. So if they didn't tell you something today and then you weren't going to be in tomorrow then that didn't matter normally. But it did, because you weren't there you know . . . . I just remember getting frustrated that the communication that was necessary wasn't happening with the full-time men. (Elspeth, 47, IT/Business Outsourcing Project Manager)

Even in the Netherlands, where part-time work is common and generally well accepted, some employers still respond negatively to part-time working requests and the attitudes of employers towards part-time workers vary:

We're in an office with about 25 people and there are quite a few women who work part-time and one of the bosses never has a problem with that but the other. . . . If something isn't going right, 'Something's missing, I need a file that can't be found', then it's always the part-timers. . . . It's so hypocritical to always blame the part-timers when it could just as easily have been a full-timer who had a day off. (Corine, 31, Notary Worker)

In some cases, the organisational culture leads to negative views of part-time workers or workers who arrange their working hours flexibly:

It's all about the culture that you're in and the 'presence' culture [actual physical presence of employees at work] . . . and that's true, of course. In 32

hours you do just as much as you do in 36 hours. People who work from home do much more than people who work at the office. (Loes, 40, Project Manager)

The implications for progression of opting to work part-time are well documented. Organisational cultures in the UK expect full-time and long hours at management levels and often do not associate shorter hours with higher-level positions and commitment. As one lawyer commented about her organisation: ‘There isn’t, I don’t think, an acceptance of part-time working being as credible in a professional setting . . . . It is a male environment’ (Alisa, 32, Lawyer).

In terms of wider cultural factors, several professional women in the UK talked about the availability of reduced hours within organisations but were aware that take-up of flexibility would be detrimental to careers because informal organisational and sectoral cultures expected long hours and equated reduced hours with a lack of commitment:

I think in practice there is a stigma to that. So I think in practice if you go in and say, ‘Right, I want to work more flexible hours officially, formally, I want to engage in a formal discussion about that’. That then provides a stigma for, ‘OK, so how committed are you?’ (Aileen, 41, IT/Business Outsourcing Consultant)

#### **2.4 Reduced Hours as Good Practice from the Netherlands**

Flexible working hours and the dominance of part-time work among women in the Netherlands has long-term consequences. Whilst the Netherlands has a relatively high female labour market participation in comparison to other European countries, the calculation in full-time equivalents is much lower. The gender gap in working hours and pay can be a hindrance to women’s progression in the labour market. Whilst part-time employees could realistically fulfil some management positions, evidence from the data suggests that a gender gap is evident in upper level management positions:

[Women] are not allowed in. There is an ‘old boy’s network’ alongside mechanisms to tackle women once they have achieved higher [management]

positions. Furthermore, managers are of the opinion that their job cannot be done part-time, although of course it can be done part-time. (Dr. K. Tijdens, Professor of Women and Employment, Erasmus University, Rotterdam)

Others would argue that Dutch women are not as eager to work in the higher echelons of management:

My impression is that more women are choosing, are not – that’s a huge issue in big companies – don’t make it, and don’t want to make it, to top management level. I’ve met a few CEOs and they say, ‘When I tell my middle manager that he can become a board member, he’s very excited. And when you tell it to a woman she says, “Well, that’s good news, I’ll have to talk it over and let you know tomorrow.”’ (H. Hanssen, HRM consultant on father-friendly policy)

At the same time, Hanssen suggests that employers should create an atmosphere in the workplace that stimulates women’s upward career progression. Yet as the data from this research project show, women are capable of fulfilling a management position within the confines of part-time and flexible working arrangements in the Netherlands. Furthermore, many employers actively work to increase the number of women in higher positions in the company. For example, a Dutch employers’ organisation has an annual diversity award, rewarding companies for innovative policies to help women reach the top. In order to achieve this,

First and foremost, the leaders of a company must support the goal of needing more women in the company and be willing to hold everyone accountable for this. That is the most important aspect. And then you need to think of how to achieve that as a company. It’s not easy, it definitely requires a cultural shift. (Dutch Employers’ Organisation Representative)

The availability of flexible working practices highlights how employers have responded to the changing needs of employees. However, flexibility is variable and may be concentrated within female dominated sectors and unavailable within higher-level management occupations

(Crompton *et al.*, 2003; CIPD, 2003; European Foundation, 2003). The implications of this are that, although flexibility is evident and can help manage the work-life balance, it is often not available alongside employment progression and higher-level jobs. Further, it is evident that women within certain sectors and occupations continue to work fairly fixed hours, albeit part-time, with little or no flexibility.

## 2.5 Summary

- The data highlights a large degree of flexibility, which may reflect organisational responses to the changing needs and circumstances of employees.
- Access to flexibility is more likely to be negotiated at organisational level – formally and informally – rather than via legislative measures.
- Data reveal different forms of flexibility, which appear to be determined by occupation, occupational level, sector and the nature of job roles.
- Women working within lower level, part-time work such as care and retail occupations are less likely to access flexible working arrangements and are more likely to work fixed hours.
- Flexibility represents an effective means of working and combining work with family commitments; however, it may also be combined with excessive spatial and temporal demands upon employees.
- Flexibility and its positive effects on the work-life balance may represent feminised experiences which are not available at certain sectors and levels or if women want to progress in careers.
- Research evidence highlights the existence of well-paid, meaningful, part-time work.
- Often employers' formal family-friendly policies are cosmetic and offer no real help with dual roles.
- Informal negotiation between colleagues, managers and at the sectoral level appears to be more significant in shaping experiences of a family-friendly workplace.
- The data reveal lack of understanding and negative attitudes from colleagues regarding caring responsibilities. The significance of care and the caring role requires recognition within the workplace – practically and culturally – in terms of attitudinal change.

- The Dutch data shows that many women consider flexibility in terms of the ability to adjust their working hours.
- While the ability to adjust one's working hours is now covered by legislation, many organisations provided employees with the possibility to adjust working hours prior to its introduction as formal policy.
- A reduction of working hours is quite normal for many working mothers, and can help facilitate a better work-life balance. However, the data reveals that adjusting one's working hours can be more difficult in private sector occupations.
- The 'reduced hours' culture of the Netherlands can have a positive influence on an individual's work-life balance.
- While formal Dutch policy seeks to increase individuals' flexibility within organisations, such as (partially) paid short-term care leave, formal and informal workplace experiences still hinder Dutch women from making use of these policies.
- Furthermore, while part-time work options within organisations may have worked to increase women's work-life balance in the Netherlands, negative attitudes from employers still occur. The promotion of reduced hours work or part-time work should include an active campaign among employers to increase the acceptance of part-time work.
- More progress is required within organisations to increase the feasibility of progressing to management positions with a part-time contract. Efforts made by employers' organisations and trade unions within the Netherlands are positive developments in this respect.

## Chapter Three

### Exploring the Negotiation of Dual Roles

#### Introduction

Work-life balance has emerged as a general problem for workers in contemporary labour markets (Taylor, n.d.). However, it is especially problematic for parents and carers given the pressures of managing dual obligations. Furthermore, although women have now entered the labour market in significant numbers, the persistence of traditional gender roles means they are still primarily defined as principal carers (Lewis, 2001; Crompton, 2001; Duncan, 2002; McKie *et al.*, 2002). Thus, women may now work, but they often do so in a way that enables them to combine this with care and domestic work (McKie *et al.*, 2001; Lewis, 2001). Although there has been some indication that men now do more in terms of childcare and domestic tasks, women still carry out the bulk of this work (Gershuny *et al.*, 1994). Hence, negotiating work-life balance or more accurately paid work, care and domestic and childcare work, is a highly gendered experience.

Women juggling childcare and employment face a range of practical and emotional difficulties. Research findings examine the effectiveness of organisational working practices and policy measures in helping women to juggle, as well as highlighting the relationship between work and factors outside of the workplace in shaping work-life balance, both in the UK and the Netherlands.

#### 3.1 Work-Life Balance as Process

Women's accounts in the UK and the Netherlands reveal the difficulties involved in negotiating the dual responsibilities of work and care, but reveal how some women discuss experiences of both conflict and balance. This variability of experience relates to the differing situations, contexts and relationships, which are involved in the everyday negotiation of work and care. It also highlights subjective differences in women's responses to the balancing of work and family life, and the coping strategies they employ.

McKie *et al.* (2002: 912) criticise UK family-friendly policy because it frames the issue of work-life balance too narrowly and does little to address the wide range of issues faced by

those attempting to manage lives across two spheres. They argue that ‘the different temporalities of care are ignored in much policy concerning care in general and childcare in particular’ (p.912). This highlights how carers’ circumstances can change in the long and short term. Working parents negotiate and renegotiate the boundaries between work and family as children grow older and support networks and employment change: ‘I also worry about how we’re going to manage when they get a bit older and get real homework’. (Deborah, 39, Legal Partner)

Work-life balance is an ongoing process shaped by women’s changing circumstances:

So it’s a very, it’s always very sort of perilous. I don’t know if your other respondents have been in this position but we do always feel we are sort of juggling the next 6 months . . . . So it is constantly changing and evolving. (Christine, 50, Business Analyst)

Women continually evolve in their roles as employees and caregivers but as this quote from a Dutch mother shows, the evolution of this process is not always easy:

I’ve made all kinds of career moves in my ‘previous life’ and now I’m making some as well, and I’m doing it easily. Very relaxed. That chasing that I always did is gone now that I have kids, and it’s going well. But what’s hard is going through certain phases. (Hester, 41, Teacher)

### **3.2 Work and Care – An Inherent Conflict?**

Findings highlight that in the current context work and care may represent an inherent conflict with implications for familial relationships. This has consequences for work-life balance and findings from the UK highlight that for many employees in predominantly two-earner professional households, combining work and care may represent an essentially conflictual relationship that may be impossible to resolve in any straightforward way:

I wish we could both work fewer hours. It’s very tiring. Sometimes you just feel like it’s one lifelong struggle and you only sit down to say hello to each other on a Saturday night, because we’re alternating. In the week you

don't get that much time. (Aileen, 41, IT/Business Outsourcing Consultant)

The prioritisation of paid work and work pressures obfuscates the importance of care and the welfare of children:

My son would be sick and rather than us worrying about him being sick, we would be arguing about whose meeting was more important. (Elaine, 38, Senior Partner/Business Consultant)

For many women in the Netherlands focus groups, working part-time provides a means of improving the co-ordination between home, work, school and childcare. However, some women were left with the feeling that work and care remain inherently in conflict with each other.

If you want to be a full-time mom, maybe, OK. But if you want to *work* full-time, what you won't hear then. It's never good. So in that regard you just keep fighting, you just keep explaining and defending your choice. (Marijke, 35, Risk Intermediary)

The issues of 'choice' are not clear cut and are shaped by the absence or presence of policies that facilitate a balance of work and care, as well as factors outside the workplace:

The possibility to choose, to choose to stay at home or to choose to work. Only you see that the choice to work has problems because of a lack of care possibilities and such things. (Loes, 40, Bank Project Manager)

### **3.3 Long Hours Culture**

Evidence from the data highlights that often full-time hours are not problematic and can be effectively managed if they are flexible and women have adequate support from partners and other family members. It is working hours that exceed standard full-time which create problems with work-life balance. The UK has the longest working hours in Europe (Eurostat, 2002), with the long hours culture a significant workplace feature in certain sectors and

occupations (Kodz, 2003). Several extreme examples from the data illustrate this problem and highlight that if women deviate from feminised career patterns and occupations, they may face excessive demands on time and space that render work-family negotiation problematic. Some women talked about how they had resigned from jobs and relinquished careers because of the long hours culture. Several women were working at senior management level but this clearly has ramifications for their family and home life:

Yeah and I do remember coming home where I'd had a particularly bad spate of having to work late, and I arrived home one night at about seven o'clock. And then Richard, at about five coming up to six, and he walked down the stairs and said, 'Mummy what are you doing here?' (Deborah, 39, Legal Partner)

Yeah I mean a normal day would sort of start a conference call any time after 8 really. I mean my phone is switched on from 8 o'clock and I have got to be, you are sort of expected to be able to take calls from 8 o'clock onwards . . . . Normal routine thing up to 7 o'clock in the evening and I would expect . . . . And I would probably expect people who were working for me to pick up their phone up until 7 o'clock. (Elaine, 38, Senior Manager in Business Outsourcing)

Long hours culture draws attention to the intersection between formal and informal organisational practices and also wider sectoral and occupational cultures that call into question the efficacy of formal policy. For instance, both of these women articulated explicit awareness and understanding of family-friendly policy within their organisations. One of the women was working a four-day week that she had negotiated via the firm's formal procedures; however, for the remainder of the week she worked long hours and was often required to work five days to meet client demands. Such experiences highlight the multi-faceted nature of workplace experiences and also how employment progression demands long working hours that are not conducive to work-life balance:

I worked there every night until about eleven, twelve, and sometimes two, three o'clock in the morning. If I got home at nine pm I would have

considered it early . . . . There is no way I could do it. There is no way I could do it with [daughter]. (Megan, 35, Events Organiser)

A general lack of recognition, amongst colleagues and managers and at the organisational and sectoral level, of the need to accommodate care in the workplace is significant to the negotiation of the spheres of family and paid work. As well as long hours and informal cultures, employees may be expected to travel extensively, which creates additional difficulties for those with caring responsibilities:

I have the added, the added sort of pressure that I am supposed to travel with my job . . . . And so, well I have agreed with my company, which is actually quite nice of them, is I have to drive my son all the way up to Liverpool, drop him off at my parents and drive to Manchester. If I am going somewhere where there isn't a direct flight from Manchester, I fly to London, pick up the connection, fly where I am going, fly back to London, fly back up to Manchester, pick my son up, get a hire car, drive home, and go to work the next day. (Michelle, 33, Product Design Engineer [Focus Group])

The concern to ensure profits and the running of organisations means that recognising and accommodating care is not prioritised and is frequently a competing interest within private sector organisations (Crompton and Birkelund, 2000; Crompton, 2002). This is highlighted in the following comment:

The family does not have equal importance to your work . . . . The bottom line is the service to the client and meeting your targets and making the, however many million pounds, they make in a year. (Alisa, 32, Lawyer)

In contrast, the Netherlands does not have a long hours culture. Rather, the Netherlands has a 'reduced hours' culture, for individuals with and without children. The data in the Dutch study demonstrate that the majority of women interviewed worked full-time prior to having children, yet only a third continued to work full-time after having children. Most women either reduced their working hours to a four-day working week (30-32 hours a week) or a

three-day work week (anywhere from 24-28 hours), oftentimes in combination with one day of working at home. As one mother explains,

Before the birth of my son, I worked 40 hours a week. But afterwards, I went from five days in the week to three. And my partner went from five to four. That means that there are two days in the week that nobody is home for him and that he goes to the crèche, to formal childcare. (Annemarie, 30, HRM Catering Manager)

### **3.4 Reconciling Work and Care: Work Based Strategies**

Flexible working arrangements can be an effective means of reconciling work and care. Women used flexi-time in order to fit work round school and nursery hours, share care between themselves and their partners and generally ease the temporal and spatial conflicts created by dual responsibilities. Women at management level also used flexibility to manage full-time hours and childcare – highlighting its potential for enabling career progression.

Several women in the UK were working a four-day week. This could be problematic if workloads did not correspond to reduced hours but it enabled women to spend more time with children. The following comment comes from a full-time employee and highlights that flexibility can render full-time working hours manageable:

Yeah. I could say for instance I don't work Fridays as a rule. But I could say look I need to take this afternoon off, I will do a half day Friday or something like that, and nobody would mind as long as you do your work. It's fantastic it really is. It makes you happier. You feel that you really want to do something for the company. (Megan, 35, Marketing Consultant)

Women in the Netherlands rely not only on the ability to work reduced hours; they also rely on a certain amount of flexibility in their working arrangements.

On days that the neighbour brings the kids to school, then I start a meeting at eight thirty in the morning, for example. And on the days that my

husband or I have to drive [the children to school], yeah, then the meeting is for nine or nine thirty. So basically I can plan it on my own. (Loes, 40, Project Manager)

### **The Part-Time Strategy**

The principal means by which many women manage dual roles is to work part-time (Lewis, 2001; Bang *et al.*, 2000; Fagan *et al.*, 1999). More than two-fifths of women (42%) and over two-thirds (69%) of women with children under five work part-time in the UK (WEU, 2004). In dual-earner families, women's part-time employment will generally supplement a man's full-time salary (Smith *et al.*, 1998). Generally, women will work in marginal jobs with fewer hours and no career prospects or more qualified women will opt for lower level professional positions which offer reduced hours (Marshall, 1991; Lewis and Lewis, 1996).

For many women in both the UK and the Netherlands, working part-time was an effective work-care strategy and was evident at a variety of occupational levels: 'If you're talking about the work/life balance, that's how I feel I've achieved it.' (Jane, 47, Human Resource Manager). Three of the women worked a job share, which appeared particularly effective as it meant that a full-time role was covered. Some women worked evenings and weekends and 'shift parented' with partners to manage childcare: 'If I'm not here, my husband's always here and if he's not here I'm here and that's just how it is' (Samantha, 39, Mail Sorter). Whilst this may be a means of reconciling work and childcare, it has implications for familial relationships and quality of life:

It's far from ideal really because we never see each other you know. I mean he comes into work sometimes to pick the key up for the car because I take the car to work he'll come and pick it up to go home and that's the only time I see him. He gets up at six o'clock in the morning and I come home at night at nine o'clock at night and we see each other between nine and eleven at night. (May, 44, Mail Sorter)

For some women, working shorter hours had clear implications for work-life balance and quality of life:

Because I have done the right thing by my children. And working the hours I do, I pick them up after school – they don't know what I do during the day so that's fine . . . . I did a four-day week and that gave me the opportunity to spend a bit more time with her and also able to cope with the domestics. So you know there's such a shift in how you manage your time between working full-time and less than full-time. (Jane, 47, Manager)

As discussed in chapter two, informal cultures are highly significant in the negotiation of work and family and can often be problematic, creating more conflict than balance. This is illustrated in the way that the benefits of working less hours is negated by cultural factors which fail to accept reduced hours as viable. Women in occupations with less responsibility were under less pressure in terms of workloads and informal cultures 'The thing I like about [organisation] is that you go, you do it and you come home' (Samantha, 39, Mail Sorter). The experiences of women in marginal employment raise issues about quality of life outside of the work-care nexus, economic independence and employment progression, but they do demonstrate a less pressured reconciliation between work and care.

Although many women benefited in work-life balance terms from working reduced hours, the data from the UK also show how part-time working can be a source of stress and conflict. Working reduced hours often means that women work more hours when childcare and domestic work are accounted for (see also Hochschild, 1989; Sullivan, 1997, 2000):

[My husband] thinks, oh well I work part time but you know he doesn't realise that from the minute I get up it's you know, packed lunch, off to school, I go to work, I work straight through, I come back, I pick them up and then you know I take them to whatever or it might be their friend's house or whatever activity and then I pick them up, I squeeze the shopping in, I come back and I come home, start the dinner. (Sophie, 43, Environmental Officer)

### **3.5 Support Outside of the Workplace**

Work-life balance is more straightforward for women who have access to flexible care such as good informal support from relatives, most frequently grandparents, and those who can afford private wrap-around care such as au pairs and nannies. However, this is dependent on financial circumstances and arbitrary availability and, therefore, should not be treated as a general solution.

Where women lack such support, partners and working hours become central to work-life balance. For instance, equal division of childcare between partners and good informal support may alleviate negative workplace pressures with some women working full-time achieving a better balance than women employing the 'part-time strategy'. If support is absent, coping with care and work can be problematic, even if employers are flexible and accommodating. Levels of support are also likely to influence women's decisions on working hours and consequently career progression. Findings from the UK emphasise the significance of the division of care and domestic labour between partners.

As in the UK, many Dutch mothers rely on informal support from relatives and neighbours. Few of the women interviewed had access to wrap-around care through the use of au pairs and babysitters. Rather, many women combine the use of formal and informal care to combine paid work with the care of children. At the same time, the support of partners is oftentimes a significant factor in women's work-life balance.

#### **Role of Partner**

The role of an actively involved partner is central to women's work-life balance:

There is no way I could've done it without [husband]. Because he, I mean I take [daughter] even now to the childminders in the morning and [husband] picks her up in the evening. So if I need to stay later I can do and that works really well. It means we have breakfast together in the morning... And then in the evenings she comes home and [husband] and her have dinner together and I come in and she's going to bed so we spend some

time together and I see a bit of her in the morning. So it's not perfect but it works for us. (Catrina, 38, Credit Policy Manager)

It is often taken as given that women will integrate care with work (McKie *et al.*, 2001) and that their work is more open to disruption than men's. Consequently, men have a more straightforward relationship with paid work than women:

Mostly, I think I sometimes feel a bit resentful that he has the flexibility to stay late when he needs to and I don't, you know I think of days where it gets to five to three and I think I wish I could just finish this report or get this piece of work done and I can't so I occasionally might take things home or you know, more likely I'll take it home and then not get round to doing it and bring it back again the next morning so I feel slightly resentful. (Laura, 50, Senior Social Worker)

Even where two parents are both working full-time in one household, there may often be no reformulation of traditional gender roles and the division of labour and childcare. Some women may accept this:

I'm going home immediately to full-on two children . . . you've got to focus on and get your own tea and put the washing on and do all the rest of it so you can't, you just can't focus on your career . . . . I've been off sick the week before and I was out Thursday and Friday . . . so I had to take work home . . . . I had the children till eight o'clock when I put them to bed and then I got my laptop out and worked till half past ten for three nights and I just, my brain was just completely . . . . Most people have got a bit of flexibility, even if they do take work home, they go home and you know their wife's cooked tea for them or they sit. Alice, 37, Engineer)

For others it is an irresolvable source of conflict:

That was one of the reasons why we split up. The responsibility was with me whether I liked it or not. (Megan, 35, Events Organiser)

In the Netherlands, the average number of hours women spend on household work per week decreased three hours from the 1970s through the 1990s, attributable to less time spent on cleaning and washing. Yet the average hours spent per week on childcare increased in this same time period (Pott-Buter and Tjzens, 1998). Women who are in paid employment generally see a decrease in the total hours spent on unpaid work. However, this does not reflect a more equal distribution of unpaid work within the home. Rather, women taking part in paid employment simply spend less time on unpaid work in the home, most often due to outsourcing of various tasks, including childcare and cleaning. Currently, significant differences in the division of paid work in households with young children in comparison to households without children remain and the incidence of true dual-earner households is predictably low among couples with young children in the Netherlands. The slight increase in half-half earner couples among this group can be attributed to the reduction in working hours trend among men. While this development suggests a closing of the gap in the division of paid work in some households, a similar closing of the gap in the division of unpaid work within households does not parallel it.

Nevertheless, most of the women in the Dutch focus groups were enthusiastic about the support they receive from their partner in helping to take care of the children. As one woman explains, her husband is quite important in the sharing of household tasks.

In general, my husband cooks at least twice a week. I'm pretty much the one who needs direction within the household, my husband knows precisely what has to be done and when. . . . So it was the world turned on its head a bit.  
(Fransia, 40, Senior Rewards Bank Manager)

However, within the division of household tasks, women are often still the main carers. Data from the Dutch focus groups reveal that on the days that women are not working in their paid jobs, they are at home with the children performing a number of household duties. In contrast, the at-home days for fathers seem to be spent doing other activities:

I think that I'm the one doing the caring tasks in the house, so to speak. So I'm the one that gives him a bath most of the time. The real caring tasks, and if he's sick and stuff, I think that a lot of that is my part. But there's a balance

because [my partner] does totally different things with [our son] and in that way, things just work. . . . So as a mother, then I guess you see it's a little traditional [gender roles] I guess. [My partner] is doing this, doing that, doing more tough guy stuff with him. (Annemarie, 30, HRM Catering Manager )

## **Lone Parents**

The stresses and conflicts of working and childcare are more extreme if women are divorced or separated from partners. For instance, whereas two parents can divide pick-ups and drop-offs and take advantage of flexible working, lone parents have to work within standard hours more rigidly in order to be compatible with nursery or school hours. However, UK findings show that if women had access to good informal support, they could cope more effectively than some partnered women. Support from former partners varied, but many women talked about a lack of practical and financial support:

He sees her twice a week, which is quite good. He wouldn't come and do her washing and ironing for example. (Kelly, 38, Sheltered Housing Manager)

When he wasn't working I'd still be paying the nursery, instead of him saying, 'No, well I'll have him, we'll pocket that money.' No he wasn't very helpful and he's still not financially. (Claire, 36, Local Authority Administrator [Focus Group])

Most women felt that childcare was primarily their responsibility and that they could not rely on former partners for any tangible help. When partners were separated, gendered care responsibilities appeared to be reinforced more acutely:

I think this is the problem. You shouldn't just be dividing costs, you should be dividing responsibility. There are five working days in a week. [Mother] is responsible for five of those. And he is not responsible for any of those. I have that problem when my mum is sick. I phone him up and say, 'Can you take a day off?' "No". 'All right then.' I have to then, it always comes down to you, the mother. (Louise, 39, Marketing Assistant [Focus Group])

### 3.6 Gender Roles and Emotional Reconciliation

Even when work-life balance is achieved in practical terms, this may not necessarily lead to emotional reconciliation. The prevailing assumption of the role of carer as feminine means that women often have difficulty combining dual roles as they feel they should be the main carer and therefore often feel guilty about working:

I will go through periods where I beat myself up big time where I think I'm the most horrendous parent and get really down. Generally though, I have a balance but I can lose the plot at home every now and then. . . . It can make me feel inadequate, but I think a lot of working mums go through that.  
(Denise, 39, Outreach Worker)

Women in the UK who were the main breadwinners and whose partners had taken on the caring and domestic role experienced problems because traditional gender roles remain intact and are therefore not easily transferable:

I am thinking about my sister who does 100 per cent of the housework and childcare and doesn't even mind, whereas I would mind. Whereas [husband] does what he does but is very conscious of it and he will remind me. He doesn't begrudge it, but he will make sure I do my bit as well. (Marianne, 38, Lawyer)

Furthermore, although women are expected to care, they are also expected to work (McKie *et al.*, 2001) with New Labour policy discourses emphasising the value of paid work in the UK. Consequently, no consideration is made for women who may want to care for their children rather than work (Duncan *et al.*, 2003):

I enjoy the job I am doing in the sense you've got to be doing something you like to do. Because I would much rather be at home looking after my little girl than sending her off for someone else to look after. And I think there is a lot of guilt around it as well – you do feel guilty going to work. I leave late in the morning, my partner takes my daughter to my sister-in-law's, and some mornings she has little tears in her eyes as I'm waving her

off and I think ‘Oh God, I have to go to work and leave you’. And I know she’s alright when she gets there, but it’s just that you do feel guilty. Have I had a child to give her away to somebody else and get them to look after them? (Wendy, 38, Project Co-ordinator )

As is the case in the UK, Dutch mothers do not always achieve emotional reconciliation in their dual roles as mothers and employees.

I like my work but I always have the feeling that if I’m here than I want to be home. And I’m at home and I think, I should go to work, I have to do this, I have to do that. . . . So it means that every night, Monday through Thursday in any case, I’m still loyally doing my work and once again in the weekend to compensate. (Mies, 36, Teacher)

Some women, however, do manage to reconcile their dual roles:

I like the job I am doing, it fits in well with my home life, and I think that I have a good work life-balance to be honest. I like the job I am doing . . . . It could be a lot harder and I am very aware that we have a good balance. (Lily, 34, IT Programmer)

So I really don’t have the feeling when I’m at work, oh, how are the kids doing. Maybe that sounds a bit bad, but I really only have that feeling when one of them is sick or something special, otherwise I just don’t. (Isabella, 52, Teacher)

### **3.7 Work, Care and Leisure**

Williams (2000) argues work-life balance represents reconciliation of three spheres - ‘personal time and space, care time and work time and space’ - rather than just work and family. However, findings show that personal time and leisure time away from both work and family were marginal concerns that most women did not even consider. Some women viewed leisure as time they spent with the children: ‘My me time is when I’m with the baby’ (Alisa, 32, Lawyer).

Often women appeared satisfied that they were achieving work-life balance if they were coping with two spheres. Accounts show that anything additional to this is less straightforward. Some women were attempting to create some time for themselves and 'work' on their work-life balance.

Until recently I worked 30 hours in five days and that was too much. Five mornings going to work and that was too much. Then you miss time for yourself. (Hella, 39, Accountant)

However, at times this placed additional pressure on individuals and became another demand to be met rather than a means of relaxation and personal fulfilment, as one woman commented: 'I have to work hard at the leisure thing, to achieve some' (Jane, 47, Human Resource Manager). The following woman talks about how her partner was keen for her to take up activities outside of work and family and the difficulties this involved:

And it's things like 'you don't do anything in the evenings'. Well it's pretty difficult because she's not in bed till about seven... I've now called his bluff and signed up for yoga . . . but if he's not home or if he's not having her I'm now in the realms of 'can I get grandma to come around and baby sit for me?' The extra pressure you put on yourself to make yourself a more rounded person can ultimately end in tears . . . . Is it all going to be worth it? (Karen, 34, Advertising Accounts Manager)

Often the pursuit of leisure activities remains curtailed by feelings of guilt and an inability to achieve some type of emotional reconciliation.

There's room for sports, birthday parties, everything passes nicely and neatly in the schedule. But still, he [son] complains. It's really hard - I'm ambitious, I'd like to get my Masters and I'd like to do something for when I 'grow up' and then my little boy looks at me in the morning and says, 'Mama, you need to stay with me. (Hella, 39, Accountant )

Often, like yesterday, I'm dreading the rest of the week because I'm away from home with different things each night. And then [husband] said, 'Well, we really don't miss you, just go.' Meant in a very positive way [laughter]. I'm just stuck with that feeling, yeah, I should be at home, you know. (Esther, 40, Senior Rewards Bank Officer)

### 3.8 Summary

- Findings reveal the changing nature of work-life balance for women in the UK and the Netherlands and the way that individuals experience both conflict and balance as they negotiate the boundaries of work and family. This raises issues for policy, which often misunderstands carers' changing circumstances.
- Policy initiatives addressing work-life balance can be effective in helping to reconcile dual roles; however, many women in both the UK and the Netherlands still resolve these issues at the individual/personal level and feel that policy has not impacted on their lives in any tangible way.
- Flexible working arrangements at the employer level can be an effective way of reconciling family and work. Evidence highlights how flexibility can help women manage full-time hours, spend more time with children and in some instances maintain career progression to management level.
- Findings demonstrate the use of part-time working as an effective means of combining paid work with care in both countries. Reduced hours are a measure that can reduce practical difficulties and impact positively on quality of life. However, for women working in routine occupations, part-time work raises issues about economic independence, marginal work and quality of life.
- The effectiveness of part-time hours on achieving work-life balance is questionable. Women working part-time often end up working more when domestic work is accounted for; reduced hours may also result in reaffirming gender roles and devaluing women's employment.
- Workplace cultures also negate the positive effects of part-time working. Reduced hours may not correspond with workloads and employees often end up working full-time in part-time hours. Colleagues and managers may fail to accept reduced hours as viable.

- Findings suggest an ‘inherent conflict’ between combining work and care – given the lack of support and recognition given to care by employers and government and the way in which family-friendly practices go against market interests. This is reflected in informal workplace cultures and excessive temporal and spatial demands in some sectors. This may render work-life balance problematic.
- The involvement of partners in care and domestic work is central to managing working hours, especially full-time hours, and care, and maintaining progression.
- Women continue to take the majority of responsibility for the domestic sphere whilst working. Thus, work-life balance represents a gendered experience. Even where women are working full-time, traditional gender roles remain intact. In the Netherlands this is true as well, with only minor exceptions.
- Work-life balance is not merely a matter of resolving practical issues. Findings highlight how women may experience emotional conflicts because of strong caring preferences and the prevailing assumption of care as a feminine role. This also draws attention to the way that care is overlooked in UK policy, which emphasises the value of paid work within citizenship discourses.
- Redefinition of work-life balance outside of the work-care nexus is required in both the UK and the Netherlands. Personal time and quality of life need to be acknowledged as central to work-life balance.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Conclusion: Implications for Women's Progression**

#### **Introduction**

Gendered labour market inequality occurs as a result of the type of jobs women do and their lack of occupational progression. Women are clustered in a more limited number of occupations than men, which are more likely to be lower paid and have a lower status (Walby and Olsen, 2002). Organisational cultures governed by masculine norms perpetuate inequality which means women are considered out of place and are subject to both explicit and implicit discrimination (Davidson and Cooper, 1992; EOC, 2001; Walby and Olsen, 2002). However, it has been argued that institutional discrimination, the failure of workplaces to accommodate the caring role, is now more significant than cultural discrimination, such as the glass ceiling (Crompton *et al.* 2002).

Ideological and material factors encourage women to take on the bulk of caring responsibilities and to integrate care and work at the expense of progression (Crompton and Harris, 1998). Work cultures based on masculine norms ignore the impact of caring responsibilities (Hogarth *et al.*, 2000; Rake, 2001; EOC, 1999) and assumptions relating to gender roles continue to define women as primary carers despite their labour market participation (Lewis, 2001; Crompton, 2001; Duncan, 2002; McKie *et al.* 2002). This situation is exacerbated by a lack of adequate formal childcare provision in the UK, which would enable women to combine work and care more effectively (Moss, 2001).

#### **4.1 Barriers to Progression**

Women's employment trajectories reflect the impact of wider factors such as recession, redundancy and organisational inadequacies upon employment. Further, the impact of class and ethnicity will also shape how care as a barrier is experienced (Bhopal, 1998; Warren, 2000). The way in which barriers are negotiated and experienced is complex and multi-layered; their interrelated nature means that individual factors cannot be used to fully explain experience (Green *et al.*, 2004). However, drawing on the research data, it is possible to identify how particular factors impact upon experience.

## Work Related Barriers

The failure of some employers to view carers as committed employees is a significant barrier to progression. This is evident in relation to the expectation to work long hours in the UK and the lack of availability of reduced and flexible hours in managerial and professional positions in both the UK and the Netherlands. (Kodz, 2003; Hogarth *et al.*, 2003; DTI, 2004). For instance, some UK women in the study felt they would not be considered for promotion because they could no longer work long hours and travel due to caring commitments and some felt they were overlooked for promotion and discriminated against because of their caring role. Others had given up higher-level positions because long hours and hostile workplace cultures conflicted with caring commitments.

Working part-time has been identified as central to gendered labour market inequality (Marshall, 1991; Lewis and Lewis, 1996). However, for some professional women in the UK sample, well-paid, meaningful employment was often available part-time; this is less likely to be the case for working-class women working in elementary and marginal occupations (Warren, 2000). For example some women talked about pursuing management careers but higher positions were not available part-time:

I want to become a manager but I can only do part-time because I'm trapped at the moment. . . . I've got to think of the children. But I also want to have a career myself. (Eve, 37, Supermarket Warehouse Worker)

Some women were deterred from pursuing careers further because they were aware of the additional hours and responsibilities required at higher levels:

I do think I'm capable of a promotion to, you know, like the next step up the ladder, which would be sort of quite a big step. That would involve quite a lot of committee work you know with councillors and extra hours and I don't think I'm, I'm not prepared to do that while Jack's so young because I don't want to compromise my family life. At the moment I'm quite happy with the position I've got and it fits in well with my family. (Margaret, 39, Benefits Team Leader)

The limitations placed upon mothers' employment by unaccommodating employers in the UK were often not questioned. Many women accepted their primary caring role, lesser working role and the implications of this for employment progression. However, for some this was interspersed with reflections on failed ambitions and regrets about halted careers. This illustrates how work and care 'choices' are often not clear-cut in terms of an 'either/or' commitment to careers and family (Hakim, 1998, 2000), but are the result of compromises made:

I have had to compromise in the last 14 years. Since I had kids, I haven't progressed at all in my career. And I take whatever cruddy jobs are going because you know I have to be grateful that I have part-time work. It drives me crazy but that is the compromise I've made and the value I have got is that I have two lovely kids. So you can't have everything. Whoever told you you could? (Christine, 50, Business Analyst)

I mean you start off life with all these ambitions and then it's as if everything goes on hold. Sometimes it's very frustrating to think 'where am I going?' And you think I've got to deal with this problem first - get them through college or school or it's like sitting and playing a waiting game. (Cathy, 45, Mail Sorter)

The choice to reduce working hours and thus forego progression is a complicated one, influenced by factors outside contractual working hours alone.

I was nearly 35 when our son was born. And I was so ambitious so I just kept working full-time, at that time I was in charge of 45 people, so adding one kid to that was no problem. . . . But then suddenly all this biological stuff was going on. Kind of like, you can't do this. There were a lot of evening commitments and a lot of other developments in the company where I was working that made me think, OK, I'm done. So I wanted to work 32 hours, but that wasn't possible in a management position. Rubbish, but, whatever. So then I chose for a different position, not a management one. (Hella, 39, Accountant)

Nevertheless, some of the women in the Netherlands and the UK expressed the feeling that even though their career ambitions or progression may be temporarily set aside, they could focus on their career at a later date:

I was pretty young, so I figured we'd do that [motherhood] for a few years. I have a while a yet, my time [for a career] will come. This is my time too [for motherhood], I like this a lot as well. (Yvonne, 32, Bank Adviser)

### **Barriers Outside of Work**

Access to informal support from partners, friends and relatives and satisfaction with formal childcare provision shapes decisions on remaining in the labour market, working arrangements and ambitions to pursue careers. In terms of childcare, Rake (2001:223) argues that the gaps in provision mean that the 'constraints of childcare will remain a strong influence on the labour market decisions, particularly mothers of young children.' Chapter Three identified the significance of support outside work for enabling women to achieve work-life balance. Findings from the UK also draw attention to how partners' working arrangements and involvement in the domestic sphere may impact upon women's career aspirations and employment decisions.

If women had support in the workplace it's up to them to make choices but those are often limited when you have kids depending on your husband's job, for example. When my husband was studying I couldn't have worked full time, as it would have been impossible to achieve the family at that level. Do you know what I mean? (Denise, 39, Outreach Worker)

Negative attitudes and a lack of support from partners may lead women to reconsider their working role:

Because he doesn't value my job as being anything that special . . . . I don't think they [partners] see the working as a team and working as a unit, a family unit and it's, you know when you're working against each other then all other factors come to destroy that, don't they? But I mean I didn't want to have to

take like five years out and then find myself starting again as well and be very unconfident thinking I can't do anything. (Karen, 34 , Advertising Accounts Manager)

It is evident that inadequate formal childcare arrangements in the UK may represent a significant disincentive to mothers' labour market participation and progression:

Yes, everyone else that I speak to about childcare and about going back to work it's always, always a stumbling block for everybody. There is such a lack of good quality and it is expensive, you are trying to find places for two children sometimes, a baby and a toddler and it's impossible. (Emily, 35, Civil Servant)

The expense and availability of childcare provision and the additional pressures of travelling between work, home and childcare providers may result in women withdrawing from the labour market or foregoing careers to try to achieve work-life balance:

When I became pregnant with my second child I decided I couldn't carry on. I couldn't afford to have two children in nursery and commute to London . . . . I would have had some money left after paying for my nursery fees and my train fare. But I would have been working for £50 a week. It wasn't worth it. It was a wrench to give up because I feared I would never get another professional job again. (Jane, 47, Human Resources Manager)

#### **4.2 Care Preferences and Progression**

Women's employment progression and labour market inequality is shaped by practical access to support, both inside and outside the workplace, but also their attitudes and preferences towards care and the mothering role.

The organisation of paid work and care/domestic work continues to be influenced by the male breadwinner model (Crompton and Harris, 1998; Crompton, 2002). McKie *et al.* (2001) argue that ideologies which frame women within the caring role and encourage the continuation of the 'conventional' gender 'template' are still central in shaping labour market experiences and employment trajectories. Although significant numbers of women now work, this is often

within a modified male breadwinner framework, rather than as fully integrated ‘adult workers’ (Lewis, 2001). This results in a situation where many women participate within the labour market, but within the confines of gendered expectations relating to care and motherhood (Guerrina, 2002; Duncan, 2002).

Research findings in both the UK and the Netherlands highlight how strong caring preferences affect women’s attitudes to work and career progression. Ball (2004: 19) notes that ‘how mothers feel about caring for children has been given insufficient attention in current childcare and gender equality policies.’ As one UK woman commented: ‘They’re mine and for all the sort of policies and that, they are mine and I like to be with them you know’ (Amanda, 40, Adult Education Teacher).

Many women in the UK and the Netherlands viewed their primary caring role as inevitable and prioritised it over paid work. As one woman in the UK put it, care is ‘non-negotiable’. The implications for work are either that women prefer not to work at all or choose reduced hours in order to spend more time at home with children:

I didn’t want to be separated from the children very much but I did still want to work, but I wouldn’t have wanted to work full time. (Hannah, 39, Midwife)

‘The ideology of care’ is evident across class, occupation and income groups (MacDowell *et al.*, 2005). Strong caring preferences contribute to labour market inequality because they frequently lead to a lesser working role or withdrawal from the labour market. Research findings demonstrate how this was often interspersed with opinions on appropriate methods of childcare and ‘moralities of care’ (Duncan *et al.*, 2003; Himmelweit and Sigala, 2003) regarding working mothers, formal childcare provision and the welfare of children:

Because I just think it’s so important for parents to be there for their kids. I do really, really strongly believe that you don’t bring kids into the world to be brought up by an au pair or a nanny . . . . (Diana, 30, Television Producer)

These caring preferences were generally the case when children were babies and younger than school age. Some women in the UK talked about not wanting to miss out on children’s early

years and development by working: ‘When [son] was very young I did work part-time, you know it was important to have those years at home with him.’ (Kelly, 33, Housing Project Area Manager). This can become less of a concern when children get older and some women resume career aspirations

These caring preferences are evident in the Dutch research findings as well. Dutch cultural ideals about caring and the role of mothers in childrearing continue to shape women’s preferences regarding the care of the children in combination with paid employment.

I didn’t have a child so that both of us can work full-time, I don’t think that’s a solution. Because then, is that child being raised by the crèche or grandmas and grandpas? (Annemarie, 30, HRM Catering Manager)

In fact, in terms of Dutch caring preferences, three days a week of formal or informal childcare seems to be the maximum for most women, ‘I wouldn’t want to have them in the crèche more than three days’ (Hester, 41, Teacher), results that correspond to recent research on the use of formal and informal childcare in the Netherlands (SCP, 2006).

Reflecting on work/care histories, many professional women talked about the transition to motherhood and how their attitudes towards work changed when they had children. Some professional women, who had clearly valued work and invested significantly in careers prior to motherhood, talked about losing interest in work and how their priorities had changed: ‘Your whole outlook on work changed’ (Alisa, 32, Associate Solicitor).

Beforehand, I thought I wanted a career, that it fit with having a university education. So I thought it was normal that even if there were kids I would keep working. I had invested in my future and I needed to make use of that. . . . Well, that was how I looked at it before I had the baby. It was just more practical that way. And afterwards, I really didn’t like it. Because I didn’t like going to work any more. (Mies, 36, Teacher)

Some women had progressed to management level, but some had chosen to work fewer hours, essentially opting for the ‘mommy-track’. Crompton and Harris (1998) define these as

'domestic life first', women who to some degree maintain careers but prioritise their caring responsibilities. Several women had given up private sector jobs to train as primary schoolteachers and many professional women expressed the view that they were satisfied with the level and status they had achieved but were reluctant to go further because of caring commitments:

I don't have any regrets. I was never like pushing for a promotion or anything because I guess the job level I was at, I had some responsibility but it wasn't high pressure so maybe that helped get more home life balance as well and I never had to take work home, you know, that sort of thing. (Caitlin, 37, Engineer)

Some women had stepped down from higher-level positions, even if practical support was in place:

It was funny because I had always loved work and I anticipated that when I had children I would go back to work full-time. And I had my first child, I had my son and realised I never wanted to work again, it was a complete revelation . . . . I was committed to go back to work full-time and my husband in the meantime had taken a part-time job so that he would work part-time. . . . I would work full-time, but I was completely miserable because I didn't want to work full-time. I wanted to be at home . . . . I knew I couldn't manage the job any longer which had the level of responsibility I'd had at that stage - the management responsibility. (Laura, 50, Senior Social Worker)

The same was true for one Dutch woman who switched from a full-time job in the private sector to teaching part-time at a college.

I don't feel I *have* to work, because I'm *thrilled* that I work. Because I couldn't imagine having to sit at home with the kids all day. I came from the private sector and started teaching two years ago. And I guess I made the switch, yeah, consciously subconscious because everything is less stressful and I think this is better in this phase [for the children]. (Sofie, 40, Teacher)

These quotes highlight how women rationalise decisions to halt careers in order to prioritise care. They also raise questions about progression. On the one hand, such experiences represent positive examples of work-life balance: effective negotiation of care and labour market participation. However, the prioritisation of family commitments could be viewed negatively by employers in terms of progression:

You are seen as not being ambitious because I have no career path, because I can't go for a higher grade, because I can't make the commitments they want. (Catrina, 38, Credit Policy Manager)

Strong caring preferences were evident across occupations in the UK. However, the implications of strong caring preferences and decisions to work part-time are experienced differently in relation to class because middle-class, educated women can still access professional, well-paid employment and access to childcare (Warren, 2000).

#### **4.3 Class, Jobs and Careers**

Westergaard (1984) argues that given labour market shifts, one can no longer speak in terms of non-manual and manual classes. Instead, he makes the distinction between the 'job class' and 'career class'. The job class are those employed in low-paid, routine jobs with little chance of progression or pay increases, and no 'autonomy nor authority on the job.' The career class by contrast, offers more secure employment, opportunities for progression and pay increases 'while allowing discretion and variety in the application of skills and experience.' The majority of women interviewed in the UK fall into the 'career class'; however, of the 67 women interviewed, twelve women are defined as the 'job class'. A further eight women were working in administrative roles which could be defined in 'job class' terms because of the type of work they did and the lack of opportunity for career advancement. However, this is not straightforward and often relates to 'choices' regarding childcare and working hours:

I want to obviously be a professional in a profession and hopefully end up being a manager one day. . . . I want to do this post-graduate diploma and I can't. It's dependent on who is going to look after my children and if that

person is willing to do that then I can do it but, if not, then I can't. (Rose, 34, Personnel Assistant)

Given the decline in status and prospects of much white collar employment, Westergaard's definition is useful because it defines employment in terms of economic value and potential for progression and is useful for highlighting the low standard of much white collar employment in contemporary labour markets. However, the marginal nature of 'jobs' is most apparent in service, retail and routine occupations. The experiences of this group of women are important as they highlight progression issues most significantly. Some women did not identify with notions of employment advancement and 'careers'.

No I don't think I've been held back. I think that if I'd have had a career then maybe but because I haven't had a career and I've been going from one job to another. (May, 44, Mail Sorter)

This often relates to class and educational position and the way in which working-class women are discouraged from considering employment in terms of careers and economic value:

I'm not qualified to do anything else really . . . . I have thought about training, yeah, but I'm too old now. (Katie, 43, Supermarket Checkout Operator)

#### **4.4 Achieving Progression?**

Much of the literature on women's career progression focuses on the standard patterns of advancement within organisations and the barriers women face in attempting to progress to management level (Davidson and Cooper, 1992; Flanders, 1994; Halford and Leonard, 2001; Crompton *et al.*, 2002; Broadbridge, 2004). Given individuals' commitments to care as well as paid work and women's increased labour market participation, a redefinition of progression that moves away from the standard masculine model may be required. Crompton *et al.* (2002) argue that, although somewhat overstated, significant organisational restructuring may benefit women who are less likely to pursue conventional progression patterns due to caring commitments.

However, the rejection of conventional notions of progression may not be feasible as it continues to be the way in which the majority of organisations operate. Further, given the increased economic and occupational polarisation of women throughout Europe and the UK (MacDowell *et al.*, 2005), debates around women's employment progression remain significant.

Examples from the UK data highlight more 'unconventional' and 'unintended' career advancement shaped by care and also by social class. Such experiences demonstrate how progression is possible, even when women have substantial care histories and also how career histories, across the life course, which factor in care, may be a more effective model of progression, given the circumstances in which parents now participate in paid work.

In the Netherlands, the possibility of overcoming barriers to career progression is also uniquely shaped by the role played by part-time work in the Dutch labour market. Given the likelihood of women working part-time, particularly mothers, Dutch women are less likely to be found in upper-level management positions. Most of the women interviewed who were in management positions switched jobs or downgraded their position to something outside management. Of the fourteen women interviewed, only three women were currently in a management position, one of them performing her duties in a part-time job, three days a week.

#### **4.5 Experiences of Progression**

The experiences of women who had progressed to higher management levels highlight how care as a barrier can be overcome. Although 'commitment' to careers as opposed to care and the family is not a straightforward dichotomy (Crompton and Birkelund, 2000), ambitions to progress, a greater value placed on work and a lesser attachment to the caring role are expressed by women who have maintained career trajectories and continue to do so. In practical terms, women in management positions were able to maintain progression mainly because of the childcare support they received from partners: 'I don't think you can do this job and have children unless you've got that sort of support in the background' (Deborah, 39, Law Partner), grandparents or private wrap-around childcare such as nannies and au pairs. Access to comprehensive childcare support outside of the workplace enabled women to work the long hours that are frequently required in higher-level management positions. Several had made

the most significant progress prior to having children and were aware of the difficulties of maintaining progression due to caring commitments:

I got to my position before I had the children . . . you probably put off having children in order to get to the position . . . . I think it's still quite difficult if you have children before reaching partner . . . . I think it's very difficult. The first twelve months after you have a child, however much you try, it does impact on how you are able to work when you come back. (Deborah, 39, Legal Partner)

Women in management positions in the UK talked about how flexible start and finishing times made work and caring commitments more manageable and it appeared that flexible working had been effective in helping some women to stay in full-time employment and to maintain ambitions and career progression:

Thinking about it in terms of the flexibility that I've got with work – just the fact that I can do the things that I want to do. I feel I've got the best of both worlds. If I didn't have that flexibility, then I would think about going part-time . . . . What I would really like to do is to actually be heading up policy across the whole of the UK consumer finance within the next 18 months. That's my sort of like 18 months to two-year goal, which I think will work. That's what I wanted and that's what looks like is gonna happen. (Catrina, 38, Credit Policy Manager)

Nineteen of the women interviewed in the UK were at management level. However, there was significant variation in status, level of responsibility and salary from the £20,000 to £25,000 income bracket to a partner in a law firm earning over £100,000. The women earning the lowest salaries (between £20,000 and £25,000) were working as a departmental manager in a supermarket and as the manager of a housing project; both were based in the North West. Levels of responsibility also varied, ranging from a part-time project leader in business outsourcing who had always worked part-time and had always prioritised her caring role, to a senior manager in the same sector who had indirect responsibility for 1000 employees and employed a nanny.

As well as 'conventional' progression, findings also demonstrate cyclical or 'feminised' employment trajectories which are influenced by care commitments and class positioning. Women's career patterns frequently deviate from the standard linear paths that characterise men's careers, illustrating the less strategic and more spontaneous nature of women's employment progression. This is highlighted in the experiences of women who had progressed from 'jobs' into meaningful well-paid 'careers' through education and training:

I applied for a project officer job because it was full-time but shifts, I thought that might fit OK and I got that and whilst I was doing my shifts there I did an OU diploma and from there I managed to get a manager's job but in the company I'm with now and then get promoted so it wasn't a career plan . . . . So, yeah, the last couple of years I've done OK, from getting that break and finding something that I enjoyed and wanted to do I've managed to kind of progress through that field. (Janet, 33, Area Manager)

Experiences also highlight the spontaneous and unplanned nature of progression for some:

When I eventually came back to the world of work, so I applied for the voluntary sector as the job was only 9 hours a week, which then escalated into more hours with [organisation], which is a housing association. I was there as a caseworker and that meant going out and meeting people - it was great . . . . Well, it's just a learning curve, isn't it? I do feel quite proud of myself though, as I saw opportunities and I just took them and worked really hard . . . ten years ago I would never have imagined what I'd be doing. (Denise, 39, Outreach Worker)

The UK data also show how often women's attitudes towards paid work and progression do not view paid work in economic terms where the aim is organisational mobility, increased occupational status and greater financial rewards. Rather, some women expressed views which frame work less in economic terms and focus more on personal fulfilment and the potential of work to enhance their lives and those of others.

Working with children with disabilities and special needs, and actually getting something good for them, is very rewarding. That is a personal reward, well hopefully making someone else's life a bit easier and a bit better. (Wendy, 38, Project Co-ordinator)

#### 4.6 Summary

The report draws attention to the relative nature of employment progression, as well as women's less linear career histories that are often shaped by class as well as care. Caring preferences might be a barrier to conventional progression, but not if a wider definition of progression is used and a more holistic sense of work-life balance – not just managing two spheres but including quality of life.

- The barriers women face in employment are multi-layered and do not merely relate to gender and care. However, data from both the UK and the Netherlands bear out the significance of childcare responsibilities on women's employment. The arrangement of employment structures and family provision results in the caring role generating a number of potential barriers to progression - albeit differentially negotiated.
- Employment progression is hindered by 'time conflicts' – long hours cultures in the UK and a lack of family-friendly working arrangements at higher organisational levels in the UK and the Netherlands
- Findings from both countries highlight how 'the ideology of care' continues to influence women's relationship to paid work and decisions to pursue careers
- The data refute the notion that 'choices' between career and family are straightforward and clear-cut in both the Netherlands and the UK.
- Women in the UK who were committed to careers and who demonstrated progression to management level achieved this via comprehensive childcare support outside of the workplace.
- However, the data from the UK also highlight that flexibility can help women to manage full-time employment at management level.
- Employers need to offer more tangible forms of flexibility at higher organisational levels.

- Progression is conceived in terms of a masculine model that defines it in economic and linear terms. The impact of parental care often means that women's progression does not reflect this model and is 'cyclical' and interrupted.
- The 'mommy-track' mode of working reduced hours in professional occupations may represent a more 'family-friendly' approach to working in contemporary labour markets given the demands of dual roles but data question the notion of the 'mommy-track' as a positive example of progression.
- The role of education in raising awareness, progression, training and economic independence is an area for future research.
- Findings also highlight alternative attitudes towards work and progression which view work in terms of personal fulfilment rather than linear progression and economic gain.
- Working in a management position part-time is the exception to the rule in the Netherlands. To overcome these barriers, Tijdens (2005) suggests Dutch government should subsidize efforts to increase the number of women in top level positions.
- Policy initiatives addressing work-life balance can be effective in helping women to progress in the workplace. However, many women in both the UK and the Netherlands still resolve these issues at the individual/personal level and feel that policy has not impacted on their lives in any tangible way.
- Findings highlight the need for a wider cultural and socio-economic shift in policy, practice and attitudes to work-life balance and women's progression. Current policy is largely driven by the business agenda and the report emphasises the need to frame work-life balance in wider terms than the implementation of flexi-time within workplaces. This relates both to embedded assumptions relating to gender, care and work and the absence of adequate practical support from the state and employers. More pro-active work needs to be done to promote awareness of policy and employees' sense of entitlement.

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## Appendix 1: UK Participants

Name	Age	Occupation	Sector	Salary (UK £)	Hours*	Age of Children
<i>Aileen</i>	41	Business/IT Consultant (senior management band).	Private	30,000-40,000	40-50	<b>2:</b> 5yrs, 3 yrs
<b>Ailsa</b>	32	Level between solicitor and partner, works within a team of 7 solicitors.	Private	50,000-60,000	32	<b>1:</b> 18 months old
<b>Alice</b>	37	Development engineer.	Private	Over 30,000	37	<b>2:</b> 8yrs, 5yrs
<b>Amanda</b>	40	Adult education teacher.	Public	25,000-30,000	37	<b>3:</b> 15yrs, 10yrs, 6yrs <b>2:</b> 11yrs, 3 yrs
<b>Anna</b>	29	Tourist information assistant.	Public	15,000-19,999	37	<b>2:</b> 11yrs, 3 yrs
<b>Bernadette (FG)</b>	37	Factory worker.	Private	Over 30,000	36	<b>1:</b> 14yrs
<b>Beth</b>	49	Business analyst/ consultant helping customers with their computer systems.	Private	20,000-24,999	25	<b>2:</b> 13yrs, 11yrs
<b>Caitlin</b>	37	Manages a small team who develop new types of paint.	Private	25,000-30,000	30	<b>2:</b> 6yrs, 4yrs
<b>Carol</b>	46	Teaching assistant	Public	15,000-19,999	-	<b>2:</b> 16yrs, 10yrs
<b>Caroline</b>	36	Multi roles at Publishers.	Private	20,000-24,999	40	<b>2:</b> 3yrs, 1.5yrs
<b>Carrie</b>	47	Oversees general running of sheltered accommodation.	Public	25,000-30,000	36	<b>2:</b> 14yrs, 6yrs

<b>Cathy</b>	45	Mail sorter.	Private	10,000-14,999	40	<b>3:</b> 17yrs, 16yrs, 9yrs <b>1:</b> 9yrs
<b>Catrina</b>	38	Manages a small team responsible for overseeing and formulating credit policy for a large credit company.	Private	50,000-60,000	45	<b>1:</b> 9yrs
<b>Christine</b>	50	Business analyst for large company.	Private	20,000-24,999	31	<b>2:</b> 13yrs, 11yrs
<b>Claire (FG)</b>	36	Local authority employee	Public	20,000-24,999	36	<b>1:</b> 3yrs
<b>Debbie</b>	37	Journalist.	Public	10,000-14,999	20	<b>1:</b> 21 months old
<b>Deborah</b>	39	Manages team of solicitors. Also responsible for aspects of marketing and organisational policy.	Voluntary	Over 100,000	36 (worked a four-day week)	<b>2:</b> 7yrs, 5yrs
<b>Denise</b>	39	Outreach support worker and facilitator.	Voluntary	20,000-24,999	35	<b>2:</b> 13yrs, 12yrs
<b>Diana</b>	30	TV series producer.	Public	25,000-30,000	21	<b>2:</b> 3yrs, 1yrs
<b>Elaine</b>	38	Indirectly responsible for 1000 employees outsourced by the company as IT/management consultants.	Private	70,000-80,000	50+	<b>2:</b> 7yrs, 3yrs
<b>Elizabeth</b>	34	Training and outreach worker, counselling co-ordinator.	Voluntary	15,000-19,999	30	<b>2:</b> 13yrs, 11yrs

<b>Elsbeth</b>	47	Project Leader: business outsourcing.	Private	25,000-30,000 (pro-rata)	26	<b>2:</b> 17yrs, 14yrs
<b>Emily</b>	35	Low level civil servant.	Public	15,000-19,999	16	<b>2:</b> 5yrs, 4yrs
<b>Emma (FG)</b>	36	Family solicitor	Private	20,000-24,999	21	<b>3:</b> 7yrs, 5yrs, 18 months <b>2:</b> 6yrs, 4yrs
<b>Erica</b>	37	Consultant in a hospital accident and emergency department in a hospital.	Public	25,000-30,000	35-40	
<b>Eve</b>	37	Supermarket warehouse worker.	Private	Under 10,000	18	<b>3:</b> 13yrs, 11yrs, 7yrs <b>3:</b> 10yrs, 7yrs, 2yrs
<b>Faye (FG)</b>	41	Family solicitor	Private	20,000-24,999	21	
<b>Genevieve</b>	47	Managing editor, executive producer responsible for scheduling producers for TV programmes; also production role.	Voluntary	60,000-70,000	37	<b>3:</b> 12yrs, 8yrs, 5yrs
<b>Grace</b>	32	Sales assistant in a health food shop.	Private	Under 10,000	15	<b>1:</b> 8yrs
<b>Hannah</b>	39	Midwife.	Public	20,000-24,000	18	<b>2:</b> 13yrs, 11yrs
<b>Helen</b>	41	Clerical officer with an administrative support role.	Private	15,000 – 19,999	36	<b>2:</b> 18yrs, 12yrs
<b>Hilary</b>	38	Health visitor.	Public	-	36	<b>1:</b> 13yrs
<b>Indira</b>	34	Commissioner officer.	Public	25,000-30,000	37	<b>3:</b> 10yrs, 9yrs, 3yrs

<b>Isobel (FG)</b>	36	Administrative co-ordinator.	Public	20,000-24,000	36	1: 11yrs
<b>Jan</b>	42	Works for a Primary Care Trust as a Nursing Care Practitioner.	Public	-	18	3: 18yrs, 15yrs, 6yrs
<b>Jane</b>	47	Human Resources Manager.	Public	20,000-25,000 (pro-rata)	25	2: 10yrs, 7yrs
<b>Janet</b>	33	Responsible for the staffing, budget and service delivery of housing schemes across a specific region.	Private	25,000-30,000	40	1: 9yrs
<b>Janice (FG)</b>	34	Works for housing benefits and assessment for a local authority.	Public	10,000-14,999	18.5	2: 18yrs, 12yrs
<b>Jill</b>	39	Primary school teacher.	Public	15,000-19,999	14	1: 2yrs
<b>Joy</b>	35	Administrator for local county council.	Public	Under 10,000	17.5	2: 8yrs, 6yrs
<b>Julia</b>	39	Social Worker.	Public	25,000-30,000	37	1: 5yrs
<b>Karen</b>	34	Advertising accounts manager.	Private	25,000-30,000	30	1: 2yrs
<b>Katie</b>	43	Works in a supermarket.	Private	Under 10,000	23	1: 13yrs
<b>Kelly</b>	38	Manager of a sheltered housing scheme.	Voluntary	20,000-24,999	40	1: 15yrs
<b>Kim</b>	41	Trainee teacher.	Public	15,000-19,999	45-50	2: 8yrs, 5yrs

<b>Laura</b>	50	Social worker & some consultancy work.	Public	35,000 -40,000.	21* (Social work)	2: 13yrs, 10yrs
<b>Lily</b>	34	Computer programmer: Financial Services.	Private	10,000-14,999	25	2: 4yrs, 3yrs
<b>Linda</b>	43	Works in a law firm doing marketing and also giving assistance to lawyers.	Private	Over 30,000	40-50	2: 15yrs, 10yrs
<b>Lisa</b>	27	Bakery assistant at supermarket.	Private	Under 10,000	18	2: 9yrs, 4yrs
<b>Louise (FG)</b>	39	Marketing and consulting role for small company.	Private	10,000-14,999	21	1: 3yrs
<b>Margaret (FG)</b>	39	Benefits Team Leader.	Private	30,000-40,000	36	2: 16yrs, 5yrs
<b>Marianne</b>	38	Government Lawyer.	Public	40,000-50,000	37	1: 5yrs
<b>Marie</b>	45	Advocate at family support centre.	Voluntary	25,000-30,000	36	3: 7yrs, 16yrs, 19yrs
<b>May</b>	44	Mail sorter.	Private	Under 10,000	18	3: 20yrs, 18yrs, 13yrs
<b>Megan</b>	35	Events organiser.	Public	Over 30,000	37	1: 4yrs
<b>Michelle (FG)</b>	33	Design engineer.	Private	Over 30,000	37	1: 2.5yrs
<b>Naomi</b>	35	Electrical engineer for a small company.	Private	20,000-24,999	37-40	1: 4yrs
<b>Nicola</b>	43	Alliance Relationship Director.	Private	80,000-90,000	50+	1: 8yrs
<b>Pam (FG)</b>	39	Family solicitor.	Private	20,000-24,999	21	2: 7yrs, 4yrs

<b>Paula</b>	40	IT technician for large company.	Private	10,000-14,999	21	2: 7yrs, 4yrs
<b>Pauline</b>	29	Mail sorter.	Private	Under 10,000	17	2: 4yrs, 18months
<b>Rachel</b>	41	National design officer.	Private	25,000-30,000	37	5: 16yrs, 13yrs, 4yrs, 3yrs, 1yrs 1: 6yrs
<b>Rebecca</b>	44	Administrator.	Public	15,000-20,000	28	
<b>Rose</b>	34	Works as a personnel assistant in the Human Relations department of a charity.	Voluntary	15,000-19,999	35	3: 4yrs, 4yrs, 2 yrs
<b>Sally</b>	33	Copywriter at advertising company.	Private	Over 30,0000	38-60	2: 5yrs, 1.5yrs
<b>Samantha</b>	39	Mail sorter.	Public	Under 10,000	15	3: 12yrs, 11yrs, 8yrs
<b>Sarah</b>	36	Administrator in health sector.	Public	10,000-14,999	30	3: 12yrs, 9yrs, 7yrs
<b>Siobhan</b>	33	Associate solicitor in large commercial law firm.	Private	50,000-60,000	40	1: 20 months old
<b>Sophie</b>	43	Technical officer in the pollution team within environmental health.	Public	10,000-14,999	22.5	2: 12yrs, 9yrs
<b>Stella</b>	42	Community Programme Manager.	Voluntary	30,000-40,000	40	1: 4yrs
<b>Stephanie</b>	34	Personal Assistant.	Public	15,000-19,999	40	1: 10 months
<b>Sue</b>	36	Section manager in a supermarket.	Private	20,000-25,000	40-50	2: 7yrs, 8yrs

<b>Teresa</b>	36	Qualified baker at supermarket.	Private	10,000-14,999	28	<b>2:</b> 14yrs, 11yrs
<b>Victoria</b>	27	Senior care assistant in a residential home.	Voluntary	10,000-14,999	37	<b>1:</b> 1 yr 10 months
<b>Wendy</b>	38	Participation officer for a children and young people's project.	Voluntary	15,000-19,999	30	<b>3:</b> 16yrs, 12yr, 2yrs

\*Working hours were specified by women and were variable. This generally refers to women's contracted hours.

G – Focus Group participants

## Appendix 2: Focus Group participants – Netherlands

	Job	Partner	Partner's hours	Age of Children	WH before*	WH after*	Childcare	Age
<b>Marijke</b>	Risk management bank (recently stopped with management function).	Yes	32	2: 4yrs; 2 yrs	Full-time	32 hours	3 days formal, rest informal.	35
<b>Esther</b>	Senior reward officer, bank.	Yes	20	1: 9yrs	Was finishing studies when pregnant	40	Works 1 day at home, rest informal	40
<b>Judith</b>	Teacher/advisor? Works with company.	Yes	Full-time	2: 14yrs; 11yrs	Full-time.	Initially, full-time, now more flexible.	European school with 8:30-16:30 days	?
<b>Hella</b>	Internal accountant, bank (previous management).	Yes	38	1: 5yrs	Full-time.	First 36 hours, now 32 hours officially, with 2 hours parental leave so works 30.	Initially 3 days formal, now 2 days formal.	39
<b>Nynke</b>	Teacher facilities management.	Yes	Full-time (40 hours?)	2: 11yrs; 9yrs	Full-time.	28 hours (70%)	Combination of formal and informal care.	43

<b>Loes</b>	Project manager, bank.	Yes	60+		<b>2:</b> 13yrs; 7yrs	Full-time.	32 hours, officially 36 but 4 hours parental leave.	Previously formal care, but now children older, informal.	40
<b>Tamara</b>	Teacher.	Yes	4 days		<b>1:</b> 5yrs	4 days	Still same hours but 3.5 long days.	1 day formal childcare, rest informal.	34
<b>Mies</b>	English teacher, college.	Yes	28		<b>2:</b> 5yrs; 3yrs	36	36	Informal care.	36
<b>Sofie</b>	Communication teacher.	Yes	Full-time +		<b>3:</b> 7yrs; 5yrs; 1yrs	Full-time, with 1 <sup>st</sup> child 90%, with 2 <sup>nd</sup> child 80%	24-28 hours.	Au pair and informal care.	40
<b>Corine</b>	Notary employee.	Yes	32		<b>1:</b> 3yrs	37.5	First to 24, then back to 32.	1 day formal, 2 days informal.	31
<b>Yvonne</b>	Advisor Private banking.	Yes	4 days		<b>2:</b> 6yrs; 5yrs	Full-time, then 4 days	3 days.	Informal.	32

<b>Hester</b>	Teacher.	Yes	36-38	2: 5yrs; 3 yrs	60-70 hours, then switched jobs, worked 24 hours 2 years prior to children.	24	Formal childcare.	41
<b>Annemarie</b>	HRM manager, catering.	Yes	32	1: 3yrs	40	24	2 days formal	30
<b>Isabella</b>	Law teacher.	Yes	-	3: 16yrs; 14yrs; 12yrs	38? (in any case, full-time)	Stay at home mum until the children are school age, then full-time.	No	52

- **WH before** – Working hours before having children **WH after** – Working hours after having children.

### Appendix 3: Interviews in the Netherlands

<b>Name</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Company/Employer</b>
Dr. Christine Baaijens	Researcher on Working Time	Dehora Consultancy Group
Henk Hanssen	HRM consultant on father-friendly policy	Ikvader.nl
Dr. Rikki Holtmaat	Professor Discrimination Law	Leiden University
Dr. Trudie Knijn	Professor of Economics	University of Utrecht
Dr. Saskia Keuzenkamp and Mariëlle Cloïn	Policy Researchers	Social and Cultural Planning Office
Dr. Janneke Plantenga	Professor of Economics	Utrecht School of Economics
Dr. Alexandra van Selm	Policy Advisor	E-quality
Dr. Kea Tijdens	Professor of Women and Employment	Erasmus University Rotterdam
Anonymous	Trade Union Representative	A Dutch trade union organisation
Anonymous	Employers' Organisation Representative	A Dutch employers' organisation
Anonymous (A)	Policy-makers	Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment
Anonymous (B)	Policy-makers	Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment
Anonymous	Policy officer	Social and Economic Council
Hans van Bennekum	Director and HR-manager	Carl Schenk BV, Rotterdam



This report presents findings from the ESF Objective Three funded project into women, work-life balance and progression in the UK and the Netherlands. The project was based in the School of Social Science, Liverpool John Moores University. The report provides an analysis of qualitative research into women's lived experiences of work-life balance and an evaluation of the effectiveness of work-life balance policy as a means of addressing women's progression in the labour market.

