

File ID 72596
Filename Chapter 4 Employment Choices and Pay Differences between Non-Standard and Standard Work Arrangements in Four European Countries13

SOURCE (OR PART OF THE FOLLOWING SOURCE):

Type Dissertation
Title Balancing work and family life in Japan and four European countries: econometric analyses on mothers' employment and timing of maternity
Author E. Kenjoh
Faculty University of Amsterdam
Faculty of Economics and Business
Year 2004
Pages 223
ISBN 90-5170-776-2

FULL BIBLIOGRAPHIC DETAILS:

<http://dare.uva.nl/record/220440>

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demands for increasing part-time work and equalisation of the employment conditions across full- and part-time workers. Earlier, the women's movement had demanded shorter working days, but realising that travel time would not be reduced, the interest for part-time work among women had grown. Women also wanted to stay in the labour market after marriage and/or after giving birth to children⁸. Skilled women increasingly wanted to combine part-time work with family responsibilities. Moreover, women's increasing skills made the costs of replacing these employees higher. Besides, with high unemployment, women's incomes were needed in the family. Towards the end of the 1980s, 40-45 percent of potential female re-entrants, after childbirth, were looking for a job. By the early 1990s, there were 100,000 female re-entrants per year (OSA, 1995). Many of these women preferred to work part-time. Employers began to recognise the benefits of part-time work in optimising personnel strategies, for example, in the banking sector (Tijdens, 1997). In the tight labour market of the 1990s, fears of labour shortages further encouraged employers who otherwise would have been reluctant to accept part-time workers (Tijdens, 1998).

The situation in Sweden in the late 1990s was the opposite of that in the Netherlands. In Sweden, women's demands for part-time jobs were receding after the peak of the 1970s. Swedish legislation views full-time, regular contracts as the norm for both men and women, and special leaves are in place to make it possible to combine a regular full-time job with family responsibilities. Since 1974, parental leave covers both fathers and mothers, and they can choose to split the twelve months of leave with benefits of 75-90 percent of previous earnings. A couple can choose between the mother staying home full-time, the father being full-time at home, both part-time at home or any other combination. They can also change the mix as many times as they wish. When the child is 18 months old, the job protection period expires, but the mother or the father has the right to shorten working hours in her or his regular job to 30 hours a week until the youngest child is eight years old. Mostly it is the mother who uses this right (Gustafsson, 1994).

⁸ The labour force participation rate of Dutch women was traditionally very low compared to other European countries. From the second half of the nineteenth century until the mid-1980s, the participation rate of Dutch women had continuously been the lowest among the following seven European countries: the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Sweden and Britain (Pott-Buter, 1993: 21). However, the participation rate of women aged 15-64 increased rapidly from 36.1 percent in 1980 to 64.5 percent in 1999 (OECD, 2001c).