

THE CHOICE OF PART-TIME WORK AMONG SWEDISH ONE-CHILD MOTHERS *

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Abstract. Swedish women have become more and more inclined to take up part-time work when they return to the labour market after the first birth. There has been a parallel development in the tendency to reduce working hours among one-child mothers who initially take full-time jobs when they return to market work. Consequently, full-time work has become more transitory among one-child mothers. Conversely, one-child mothers who work part-time tend to stick to this arrangement until it is time for the next child. The length of work experience prior to first birth is positively related to part-time work. Somehow, an 'established' position in the labour market seems to be a prerequisite for both getting and keeping a part-time job after childbirth. There is also a dimension which is captured either by education or by social background (two factors clearly related to each other). A high level of education or 'upper middle class' background is associated with a disinclination to work part-time. Fairly extended work interruptions (of a year or so) in connection with childbirth combined with part-time work seem to constitute a new strategy, which might be called the 'combination strategy'. This way of organizing life after starting motherhood seems to have attracted the kind of women who previously tended toward the 'homemaker strategy' and the kind who in earlier times would have pursued a clearcut 'career strategy'.

Résumé. *En Suède, les mères d'enfant unique préfèrent le travail à temps partiel*

Les Suédoises, qui se remplaçaient sur le marché du travail après leur première naissance, ont été de plus en plus tentées par le travail à temps partiel. Parallèlement, les mères

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d'enfant unique, qui avaient avant cette naissance un travail à plein temps, tendent à réduire leur durée de travail lorsqu'elles reprennent leur activité. Il en résulte que le travail à plein temps devient de plus en plus transitoire pour ces femmes. Réciproquement, les mères d'un enfant qui travaillent à temps partiel tendent à maintenir cette situation jusqu'à la naissance de leur second enfant. Plus la durée de travail avant la première naissance est importante, plus ces femmes prendront à la suite un travail à temps partiel. De toutes façons, une position 'bien établie' sur le marché du travail semble être une condition indispensable pour à la fois obtenir et garder un travail à temps partiel après la naissance. Une autre caractéristique, saisie par le niveau d'éducation ou par les origines sociales (deux facteurs clairement reliés entre eux), joue également: un niveau d'éducation élevé ou une origine dans la 'haute bourgeoisie' sont associés dans le rejet du travail à temps partiel. Des interruptions de travail assez longues (d'environ une année), reliées à la naissance de l'enfant et combinées à un travail à temps partiel, semblent constituer une nouvelle stratégie, que l'on peut appeler une 'stratégie combinée'. Cette façon d'organiser la vie après le début de la maternité semble avoir attiré tant les femmes qui par le passé se dirigeaient vers la 'stratégie du retour au foyer', que celles qui par le passé auraient poursuivi une 'stratégie de carrière' bien tranchée.

1. Introduction

The effect of parenthood on women's employment has been the focus of interest in several recent studies (see for example Jones (1982), McLaughlin (1982), Martin and Roberts (1984), Waite et al. (1985), Ni Bhrolchain (1986), Newell and Joshi (1986)). The effect has generally been found to be negative, i.e., women tend to become less economically active¹ when they start motherhood. There are, however, indications from many countries that this negative effect has diminished substantially over time. Moreover, there seems to be a differential pattern among subgroups of women, differentiated for example by the woman's level of education.

The dynamics of labour-force participation among women of different parities in modern-day Sweden has been a subject of analysis within a research project at the Section of Demography of the University of Stockholm.² Its aim was to analyze the interaction between labour-force participation and fertility over the life cycle. This was done chiefly by modelling the transitions between different statuses

¹ By economic activity we mean paid work in the labour market.

² Life-cycle phases of Swedish women: A study of education, labour force participation and childbearing among Swedish women born 1936 to 1960.

and analyzing the simultaneous influence of various background factors on the transition intensities by means of intensity regression (for a presentation of the method, see for example Trussell and Hamerslough (1983), Allison (1984) and Hoem (1985)). Factors influencing the transition to motherhood (first birth) and later steps in the family-formation process have been analyzed (see for example Etzler (1987) and Hoem and Hoem (1987b)), as well as the transition from and to the labour market after the arrival of the first child.

The research so far undertaken of the labour-market transitions of Swedish women with children deals with the propensity of one-child mothers to stay at home for a period of at least one year after the birth of their first child and their subsequent work-life transitions (prior to getting pregnant with their second child). This article presents research findings on choice of part-time work among one-child mothers. The study includes all women who have had a first birth, provided that they live with a male partner (presumably the father of the child). This means that we follow them only as long as they remain in a partner relationship and censor them at separation (or at the time of a second birth).³

Previous results (Bernhardt (1986, 1987)) indicate that Swedish women (couples) have increasingly adopted a 'strategy' of returning to the labour market in the interval between first and second birth. While prior to the mid-1960s women would typically stop work when they got pregnant with their first child, during the late 1960s and 1970s an extended work interruption in connection with first birth, combined with a 'stepping down' of working hours, became an increasingly attractive alternative for Swedish one-child mothers. Our hypothesis is that these women regarded their home attachment as transitory; they had in reality not left the labour market.

Of the background factors included in the analysis, length of education and early labour-force withdrawal have turned out to be the most influential, but in opposite directions. Highly educated women return quickly to the labour market after the first birth and they work full-time more commonly than do women with shorter education. Women who exhibit early labour-force withdrawal (meaning that they

³ The proportion of one-child mothers who go on to have a second child has remained fairly stable over time. Within five years after their first birth, 75 per cent of the women had a second child (if they were aged 20–24 at first birth).

leave work more than three months prior to the first birth) have a much higher propensity to stay at home one year later and a much lower propensity to start working again in the period following their first child's first birthday. It seems that they intend to stay at home for an extended period of time and not to work in the interval between births.

The analysis is based on data from the Swedish Fertility Survey undertaken by Statistics Sweden in 1981 in which 4,300 Swedish women aged 20 to 44 were interviewed. A substantial part of the interview was devoted to the work history of the woman, giving month-by-month information on activity status (full-time employment, part-time employment, studies and housework being the main categories) from September of the year in which the women reached the age of 16. The interview also covered the complete cohabitation and marriage history as well as information on all live births. It is thus a rich source, well suited for event-history analysis. The retrospective life histories make possible a detailed analysis of the interaction between the two parallel processes of labour-force participation and childbearing.

What role has the increasing possibility of getting a part-time job played in this interaction process? It can easily be seen from the Swedish Labour Force Surveys that part-time work (defined as less than 35 hours per week) increased substantially in the 1970s.⁴ According to Sundström (1987) the increase in part-time work was mostly due to supply factors, i.e., there was an increasing supply of women wanting part-time work, and the labour market adjusted to this by offering more part-time jobs, i.e., by reorganizing (parts of) the labour market. The process has also been described as one of mutual adjustment (Lindgren (1982)). Owing to rising marriage rates from the mid-1930s to the 1950s, the supply of unmarried women to the labour market dwindled. Married women tend to have their primary obligation to their family, and to do the unpaid work in the household (including child care). To the extent that there was any time 'left over', they could, however, be available to the labour market, i.e., the women could adjust their labour supply to their household obligations. The employers adjusted to the characteristics of the only available (female) labour supply and the result was a rapid growth of the extent of

⁴ The whole increase in the participation rate for women during the 1970s (from 52 to 63 per cent) was due to the increase in part-time work (SCB (1981)).

part-time work.⁵ Both Lindgren (1982) and Sundström (1987) seem to agree that for many women the alternative to part-time work is not full-time work in the labour market, but full-time work in the household, i.e., no employment. Our findings do lend some support to this hypothesis.

Women are confronted with life-course choices in a way that (most) men are not. The choices they make about their level of economic activity in connection with the first birth are likely to influence their future lives in many ways (see for example the discussion in Skrede (1982)). It is commonly assumed that there is some kind of 'personality trait' or attitudinal dimension, from strongly 'home-oriented' at one end of the spectrum to strongly 'work-oriented' at the other (see for example the discussion in Hoem and Hoem (1987a)). One can also envisage this aspect as a basic orientation characterizing each woman (and man?) which, to begin with, influences the choice of education (length and type) which in turn greatly influences later options. Values and alternatives 'determine' the choices made at a particular point in life. These choices in turn influence values and later alternatives and so on in a sequential manner.

We would hypothesize that the employment 'choices' made in connection with the first birth are among the first signs of a more long-term 'strategy', not necessarily overtly expressed, with regard to the future relationship to the labour market envisaged by the woman at this point in her life. Of course, one important life-course choice is already made when the woman becomes a mother. This step having been taken, what are the possible strategies? The traditional option of course is the 'homemaker strategy', i.e., the woman intends to stay at home for an extended period. In previous times this normally meant for the rest of her life (barring divorce or the death of her husband). Nowadays it is more likely to be limited to the time when the youngest child starts school or reaches a certain age such as 12 or 15. This strategy does not preclude temporary work in the labour market,⁶ most probably for economic reasons, but the first choice of the woman is to devote herself full-time to meeting the needs of her family.

⁵ An important prerequisite for this development was of course a general labour shortage at the time.

⁶ Preferably paid work that can be done in the home, or very little part-time work, for example a cleaning job for a few hours per week. See Sundström-Feigenberg (1987) for ways in which women contribute to family income.

Another strategy could be called the 'work-career strategy'. Women with this approach make relatively short work interruptions in connection with childbirth and their first choice is to work full-time or close to full-time rather than to reduce working hours when they get children. These women probably always have been a minority. There has been an apparent growth in continuous work attachment. Nevertheless, it must be kept in mind that this has more and more been combined with a reduction of working hours. At least a year-long work interruption in connection with childbirth and part-time work seems to constitute a new strategy, which we would like to call the 'combination strategy'. The women do not leave the labour market when they become mothers, but they enter a special category, that of the part-time employed. They have one foot in the home and one in the labour market. It is probably a very sensible strategy, at least in the short run, as they manage at the same time to keep an attachment to the labour market and avoid a situation where they would not be able to fulfil satisfactorily the roles of wife and mother. It may be noted that the 'combination strategy' is encouraged by the progressive tax system in Sweden. According to Tegle (1985) this may be one of the reasons why part-time work increased so rapidly in the 1970s: 'One clear effect of the tax system is the relationship between net and gross relative wage rates for full-time versus part-time earnings. A progressive tax system makes this relationship more beneficial for part-time employment, given the same gross wage rates, and since progressivity has increased over time, this could in part explain the expansion of part-time employment over time'.

2. The Swedish setting

Sweden has one of the highest female employment rates in the industrialized world. In fact, for the age group 25–29, Swedish women are only slightly less economically active than their Finnish counterparts and just above the level that Danish women attain (OECD (1979)). In 1982 there were 2 million women and 2.3 million men in the Swedish labour force. Women thus constituted almost half the labour force, measured as the number of persons economically active. This means an activity rate for men of 90 per cent and for women of 80 per cent (age group 20–64). Thus Swedish women have approached activity rates close to those of the male population. However, 47 per cent of the

women worked part-time (less than 35 hours per week), while this was true of only seven per cent of the males. Unlike women, men with children below the age of seven were less inclined to work part-time than men in general. Women also give different reasons than men for working part-time: among women in the 25–44 age group 85 per cent said they were busy taking care of their own household or that they did not want full-time work, while this applied to only 30 per cent of male part-time workers in the same age group. On the other hand, 40 per cent of the males said they worked part-time because of studies or because they were unable to find a full-time job. This was true of only 12 per cent of the females (SCB (1986)).

Part-time work is much more common in certain parts of the labour market, in particular retail trade, health care and education. Moreover, part-time work is more common in sectors and occupations with lower pay; in the same occupational category, part-time workers generally have lower hourly wages than those working full-time, although there are exceptions, such as nurse assistants⁷ (SCB (1986)). The possibility of getting a part-time job, or 'reducing' working hours within the same job, thus varies a great deal depending on occupation and sector of the economy.⁸

Since 1979 all parents of pre-school children have a legal right to part-time work. Previously this applied in the public sector of the economy only. In the private sector it was up to the individual employer to grant a reduction in working hours. However, the existence of a legal right is no guarantee of its smooth and universal implementation. This was the conclusion reached by a group of researchers studying the impact of the new law in four different places of work: a factory, a hospital, a department store and a government department (Calleman et al. (1984)). Although the study refers to the early 1980s, i.e., after the end of our own observation period in 1981, some of their findings will be related because they shed some light generally on the working conditions faced by women with small children.

Only in the government department did the women find it easy to reduce working hours when they returned to work after childbirth. In

⁷ The reason is probably that nurse assistants working part-time more often work at inconvenient hours (evenings, nights and weekends), which entail higher hourly wages.

⁸ Newell and Joshi (1986) found for Britain that occupational downgrading is relatively common in connection with first birth, particularly for women returning to part-time work.

fact, in the government sector such rules had applied long before the new law was enacted in 1979. The rules are also more generous since they apply until the child reaches 12 years of age (instead of eight, as is stipulated in the law). However, the reduction of working hours often meant that the woman had to do more or less the same amount of work as previously, but in a shorter time and with less pay (monthly income). To the extent that this is generally the case, it is of course an advantage for the employer to have employees working part-time. In the factory, however, work was organized in eight-hour shifts, and the employer considered it impossible to find someone who could substitute for just two hours of work (the law stipulates that the normal eight-hour work day can be reduced to six hours). Part-time work was thus uncommon in the factory, and to the extent that it existed, it meant half-time, i.e., a work schedule of four hours every day or full-time work every second week (meaning that two half-timers shared the same job). The solution for married or cohabiting female factory workers with children was to work an evening shift, i.e., full-time but in the evening, so that the partner could come home from work and take care of the children while the mother was working. If the women insisted on part-time work, they were transferred to the so-called pool, which meant that they would substitute for sick or otherwise absent workers, or do other 'extraordinary' tasks of short duration. Belonging to the pool was seen as doing less qualified work and thus entailed lower pay, in addition to the less satisfactory working conditions. Being less qualified, it also involved greater risk of temporary or permanent dismissal in case of work shortage.

In the department store, on the other hand, women returning to work after childbirth changed their work schedule so that they worked late afternoons and early evenings and perhaps Saturdays. In that way, they needed to find child care for a few hours per day only (perhaps grand-mother or a neighbour?). In the hospital, finally, the most common solution for women returning to work after childbirth was to work evenings, nights and/or weekends, when the partner (father of the child) would be at home. Thus, except for the government department, all these solutions involved sharing child care responsibility with the father, instead of placing the child in a public day-care centre or in family day care. This may be partly a matter of preference and partly due to economic reasons (no costs for child-minding). Although the public provision of day care in Sweden has greatly improved during the

1970s, the supply is still not enough to meet the demand. According to the Swedish Fertility Survey in 1981, roughly half of the children of pre-school age whose mother worked or studied for at least 20 hours per week, had public day care. For the other half, day care was provided by relatives, neighbours, nursemaids, or by having one parent work when the other one was at home and vice versa.

There is a great dividing line in the Swedish labour market between those with permanent and those with temporary jobs. There was a new law enacted in 1974 which stipulates that, as a general rule, people should be employed on a permanent basis and cannot be laid off except for 'pertinent reasons', such as work shortage. Thus people with permanent positions have full job security. Temporary jobs can last for up to six months only, unless the worker is substituting for somebody on leave of absence (for example on maternity leave), in which case the employment lasts until the permanent job-holder returns. Of course, women have full job security in connection with childbearing in the sense that pregnancy and childbirth is no valid reason for dismissal. Neither do maternity-leave benefits depend on whether the job is permanent or temporary. However, many women who move from one temporary job to another will probably try to postpone childbearing until they have a permanent job to return to after maternity leave.

Swedish women are granted a substantial period of paid maternity leave. Starting in 1955 with three months, it was increased to six months in 1963. Further improvements were implemented in the latter half of the 1970s. Since 1980 it has been twelve months. The right to paid maternity leave used to be restricted to women with at least nine months of gainful employment prior to childbirth. Since 1974 all women, irrespective of previous employment, have been entitled to a minimum level of maternity benefits. However, employed women receive 90 per cent of their prior wage (since 1980 for nine out of twelve months). As was also noted by Gustafsson and Lantz (1985), there are strong economic incentives in Sweden to be employed prior to childbirth.⁹ Since 1979 parents also have the right to be on leave of absence for up to 18 months after childbirth (although only part of it with economic compensation). This right applied in the public sector even before that. In the private sector, the individual employer could of

⁹ Since 1980 the level of maternity benefits has been calculated on the basis of the income which the women had prior to the previous birth, if the next child was born within two years.

course be 'generous' and extend the leave of absence, if he was interested in having a particular female employee return to work, for example if she had company-specific skills. Most women, however, work in jobs where they are easily replaceable.

Strictly speaking, maternity leave in Sweden should be called parental leave. Since 1974 the leave may be shared between the parents. Both parents are also entitled to stay at home and take care of a sick child for a certain number of days each year. Such leave is paid at the normal sickness insurance rate, i.e., it is earnings-related. The proportion of fathers taking advantage of their right to parental leave increased from 1974 to 1978, after which it has remained fairly stable around five percent. Fathers are, however, responsible for almost half of the parental insurance for short-term child care (mostly to enable one of the parents to stay home from work when the child is sick) (Gustafsson and Lantz (1985)).

Every resident in Sweden is entitled to medical care, including termination of pregnancy and contraceptive advice, a basic old age pension and family allowances, irrespective of any gainful activity. Social security benefits, such as the sickness-insurance scheme and unemployment compensation, are of course dependent on the individual having (had) a job. There is also a supplementary earnings-related pension, the size of which depends on the number of pension points accumulated during economically active years. Women (and men) working part-time face the risk of getting lower pensions¹⁰ (SCB (1986)). Another risk with part-time work is that unless the individual works for at least 17 hours per week, he or she is not entitled to unemployment benefits or compensation in the case of temporary lay off.

Finally, a few remarks on equality between the sexes in Sweden with regard to occupations and earnings. A recent study of income differentials in Sweden (SCB (1986)) shows that the gap between the earnings of male and female full-time, all-year workers decreased in the 1973–85 period. Still, it is not negligible. Women employed by the central government had 91 per cent of the salary of their male counterpart in 1985, compared to 80 per cent in 1973. The corresponding figures for

¹⁰ It is necessary to have an annual income exceeding a certain base level to get any pension points at all for that particular year. If the base level is exceeded, the number of points obtained will depend on the level of annual income.

local government employees (75 percent of whom are women) are 87 and 74 per cent. In the private sector there are remarkable differences between manual and non-manual workers, manual workers being much more equal. In 1985 female manual workers earned 90 per cent of their male co-workers' earnings, while the corresponding figure for non-manual workers was only 70 per cent. A penetrating study of this category, i.e., white-collar workers in the private sector, showed that, even when schooling and labour-force history were held constant, women earned only 80–84 per cent as much as men (Gustafsson (1979)). To a large extent this is probably due to the segregated job market, i.e., women are found in different occupations than men. Jonung (1984), in a comparative study of Sweden, U.S., Germany and Great-Britain, found that 'the degree of occupational segregation appears to be higher in Sweden than in the other countries'. On the other hand, the Swedish labour market seems to have become somewhat less sex-segregated over time.

3. Part-time work among women who have taken up employment within one year after first birth

Previous analyses (Bernhardt (1986)) showed that the probability that a women will still be at home one year after her first birth has decreased sharply over time. There were noticeable differences between educational groups (level of education achieved prior to first birth). Highly educated women already had a low degree of home attachment at the beginning of the period under study (roughly from the mid-1950s onwards) and there was no period effect, i.e., the propensity to remain at home for at least one year remained constant over time. Women with a medium level of education were, on the other hand, more inclined to start working in the intermediate period (1968–74) than at the beginning, but then backtracked a little. Finally, women with a low level of education dramatically decreased their home attachment over time. Thus in the late 1970s there were relatively small differences between educational groups.

These results were obtained using multivariate analysis (logistic regression). Analyzing further work-life transitions among women who were still at home one year after the first birth by means of intensity

Table 1

Activity status one year after first birth. Percentage distribution by calendar year of birth of child and woman's own level of education.

Calendar-year	Education	Activity status				Total	
		Home	Studies	Part-time			Full-time ^c
				Short ^a	Long ^b		
Before 1967	Low	76	1	5	3	15	100
	Medium	63	4	9	3	21	100
	High	38	15	12	4	31	100
1968-74	Low	61	1	17	3	18	100
	Medium	44	3	20	6	27	100
	High	27	13	14	7	39	100
1975-80	Low	48	1	25	11	15	100
	Medium	44	4	25	12	15	100
	High	32	6	22	12	28	100

^a Short part-time = 16-24 hours per week.

^b Long part-time = 25-34 hours per week.

^c Full-time = at least 35 hours per week.

regression (Bernhardt (1987)), showed that the propensity to take up employment, either full-time or part-time, had increased substantially over the observed period, especially for the beginning of the second year after the first birth. From this we drew the conclusion that the meaning of being at home one year after the first birth had changed radically. While previously it could be interpreted as a clear manifestation of an intention to remain at home in the interval between births, this was much less clear for mothers who had their child in the late 1970s (and who were still at home one year later). Thus the 'home-maker strategy', as manifested by remaining a full-time housewife in the interval between first and second birth had lost even more ground than is suggested by the proportion still at home one year after the first birth.

The reverse of home attachment is labour-force attachment. With the exception of women with a high level of education prior to first birth, practically all women were either at home or in the labour market one year after the first birth (see table 1). Women who take up employment may 'choose' to work full-time or part-time. We have therefore analyzed the probability of part-time work among women

who had taken up employment within one year of the first birth by means of logistic regression.¹¹ The results will be presented below.

In order to provide an overall picture of the situation, data are first presented on the observed distribution by activity status one year after the first birth of women with different levels of education who gave birth to their first child in different calendar periods. It is clear that the growth of part-time work over time was much more pronounced among women with a low level of education than among women with a medium or high level. Thus the shorter the education the more unequivocally had the women responded to the increasing availability of part-time jobs. The proportion working full-time one year after the first birth increased with the level of education, but over time the trend was pretty much the same in all educational groups, i.e., an increase in the 1968–74 period and then a decline. Especially noticeable is the pronounced decline in full-time work among women with a medium level of education in the late 1970s, when they reached the same proportion as women with a low level of education (15 percent), while highly educated women were twice as inclined to take up full-time work. On the other hand, women with a high level of education had become much less inclined to be full-time students one year after their first birth, a category which hardly exists among women with shorter education. It is uncertain whether this implies that thanks to better contraceptive technology or free access to abortion, women with more education were better able to complete their education before starting childbearing or whether, for economic reasons, they combined studies with part-time work (and therefore are counted as part-time workers).

In terms of our previously hypothesized ‘strategies’, it would seem that the ‘homemaker strategy’ is best represented by women with a low level of education who had their first child before 1975. The ‘work-career strategy’, on the other hand, seems to characterize highly educated women who started motherhood before 1975, while the ‘combination strategy’ is most characteristic of women with a low or medium level of education who gave birth to their first child in the late 1970s.

¹¹ It would probably have been preferable to analyze this complicated situation, where women are confronted by several alternatives (home, part-time or full-time work), by means of logistic regression with multiples outcomes. Here we have assumed that women first choose between employment or being at home, and then, if they choose employment, take up either part-time or full-time work, i.e., two consecutive either-or situations.

Table 2

Final model for the probability of part-time work among one-child mothers who had taken up employment within one year of first birth. Logistic regression coefficients.

Intercept		0.1167
<i>Calendar period</i>		
Before 1967		-0.3093
1968-74		-0.0314
1975-80		0.3406
<i>Prior activity</i> ^a		
Full-time work		-0.3737
Part-time work		0.7124
Student		-0.2359
At home		-0.1029
<i>Work experience</i> ^b		
Under 1 year	<i>Education</i>	
	Low	-0.6803
	Medium	0.0904
1-5 years	High	-0.2737
	Low	0.0269
	Medium	0.1801
More than five years	High	-0.0898
	Low	0.4401
	Medium	0.2267
	High	0.0800

^a Prior activity: women are classified as being *at home* if they stopped working or studying more than three months prior to delivery. If not, they are classified as either *students* or working *full-time* or *part-time* according to the nature of the activity in the latest spell of at least six months duration.

^b Work experience: accumulated number of months employed up to the arrival of the first child.

Part-time work as defined here means 16 to 34 hours per week.¹² As can be seen from table 1, one year after the first birth this usually means 'half-time', i.e., 16-24 hours per week. There are relatively small differences between educational groups.

What factors then decide the choice of part-time work, provided that the woman has taken up employment one year after her first birth? The results of the logistic regression analysis performed are shown in table 2. The factors originally included in the analysis were: calendar year of first birth, educational level, social background, prior activity, work

¹² Women who combine housework with market work amounting to fewer than 16 hours per week were counted as housewives.

experience up to first birth, and civil status (cohabiting or married). All pairwise interactions were tested and two were found to be significant (at the five per cent level), namely social back-ground \times civil status and education \times work experience. As neither civil status nor social back-ground were found to be significant as main factors and the coefficients for the interaction did not show any easily interpretable pattern, this interaction was excluded despite its significance. For the final model we were then left with the main factors of calendar period of birth and prior activity and the interaction between educational level and work experience.

The coefficients for the period factor show a strong positive gradient, i.e., part-time work became more prevalent over time among women who had taken up employment within one year of their first birth.

The regression coefficients for prior activity indicate that having a part-time job before the delivery greatly increased the probability that the new mother would work part-time one year later. These are probably women who made the adjustment to their new family situation and reorganized their daily life, well in advance of the arrival of the child. The proportion working part-time immediately prior to first birth was small but had increased slightly over time. The overwhelming majority of women (70–75 per cent) worked full-time up to at least three months prior to the first birth. These women had the lowest probability of working part-time one year later, while women who stopped working three months or more prior to the first birth (here classified as 'at home') and students were slightly more inclined to be working part-time (if they worked at all).

Table 3

Standardized frequencies for part-time work among one-child mothers employed one year after birth. Women giving birth in the 1968–74 period and working full-time prior to delivery. Per cent.^a

Work experience	Education		
	Low	Medium	High
Under one year	13	40	24
1–5 years	35	45	32
More than five years	58	47	40

^a Calculations based on model parameters in table 2.

In order more easily to interpret the meaning of the interaction, we have calculated the predicted probabilities for the various combinations of these two factors. For the purpose of the calculation we assumed that the woman was working full-time prior to first birth and that she had her child in the intermediate period (1968–74). We then found (see table 3) that work experience was of relatively little importance for women with a medium level of education. Regardless of time employed prior to first birth, between 40 and 50 per cent of working women with a medium level of education would be in a part-time job one year after first birth (if working at all). For women with a low level of education, on the other hand, work experience greatly increased the probability that the work would be part-time. Highly educated women show an intermediate pattern: work experience increased the probability of part-time work, but not as strongly as for women with a low level of education.

In interpreting this result, two things should be kept in mind. First, the average length of work experience prior to the first birth increased over time, as women postponed the arrival of the first child.¹³ Moreover, the increase in work experience was more pronounced for women with a low level of education.¹⁴ Second, the proportion taking up employment within one year increased most noticeably for women with a low level of education. It is thus for women with a low level of education but at least five years of work experience (meaning that they were generally over 22 when they gave birth to their first child) that we have the most clearcut abandonment of the 'homemaker strategy' in favour of the 'combination strategy'.

Women with little work experience are likely to have a more tenuous attachment to the labour market, for example they are less likely to have permanent jobs. This probably explains the general trend, regardless of level of education, for short work experience to mean lower probability of part-time work. To have worked for a while and have a more 'established' position in an occupation or place of work, puts the individual in a better bargaining position with regard to part-time work. For planning-minded women this is likely to be one important reason to postpone the arrival of the first child; i.e., among women

¹³ Average age at first birth increased from 24.4 in 1974 to 26.0 in 1980.

¹⁴ The percentage with at least five years of work experience increased from one-third in the period before 1968 to two-thirds in the period 1975–80 (for women with a low level of education).

with at least five years of work experience there is a selection of women whose intention is to reduce working hours after getting their first child.

The most unlikely to be working part-time one year after the first birth were thus women with either a low or a high level of education in combination with a very short work experience (perhaps none at all). These were two distinctly different groups of women, who in all probability had widely divergent motives for their lack of interest in part-time work. Women with a low level of education and less than one year of work experience are the teenage mothers often premaritally pregnant (see Bernhardt (1986, table 6)). These young mothers are highly likely to be at home for at least one year (probably for the whole interval between first and second birth). If they do take up employment, most likely because they must contribute to the family income, they may not have any choice other than to work full-time. Conversely, highly educated women with no or very little work experience are likely to be employed one year after first birth (if they do not continue their studies), and the part-time alternative is not very attractive to them for career reasons.¹⁵ They are in a hurry to get themselves 'established' and working part-time would tend to run counter to such an effort.

4. The transition from full-time to part-time work

Of all married or cohabiting one-child mothers who took up employment within two years of the birth of their first child, half opted for full-time work. These women faced the challenge of combining at least 35 hours of paid work, usually outside the home,¹⁶ with the care of a small child (and of course the regular daily household chores). This is no easy task. The extent to which women persevere in the endeavour could be regarded as an indication of the seriousness of their desire to

¹⁵ Also economic reasons may play a role, since many of these women will have incurred debts in order to obtain their higher education.

¹⁶ In fact we have included in the employed category women working as child-minders in their own home (full-time or part-time depending on the hours of work reported). For this particular analysis it might have been preferable to limit the employed to women actually working outside the home. However, these child-minders represent a rather small group. Of a total of close to 29 000 different spells of activity that the 4 300 interviewed women reported, 257, i.e., one per cent, were periods when they worked as child-minders in their own home.

keep a strong attachment to the labour market (or of the strength of the necessity of additional family income).

Do one-child mothers working full-time actually stick to this arrangement or do they give up and leave the work force or modify their situation by reducing their working hours? Observed occurrence/exposure rates for various transitions among one-child mothers working full-time are shown in fig. 1. The time variable refers to time since the start of this work spell, i.e., since the woman returned to work after childbearing.¹⁷ Clearly, from the beginning of the second year, the most likely event for these women was having a second child.¹⁸ Transitions back to home or to part-time work were considerably less common. In fact, these rates are quite low, indicating a considerable amount of tenacity among one-child mothers working full-time. The relative position of the curves for the two transitions (full-time to home and full-time to part-time) show that in the first period (before 1968) women were more likely to go back home than to switch to a part-time job, but this was reversed later. Women having their first child in the late 1970s were more likely to reduce their working hours than to stop working.¹⁹ Thus even women taking up full-time work after their first birth (many of whom presumably followed the 'work-career strategy') became increasingly likely to take advantage of the possibility of part-time work and thus abandon the 'work-career strategy' in favour of the 'combination strategy'.

Using these rates to calculate the proportion of 'survivors' (in the life-table sense), assuming that second-child pregnancies could be eliminated, we find that the proportion still working full-time after two years falls from 74 per cent in the period before 1968 to 64 per cent among women having their first child in the late 1970s. Thus, even in this period with the growing popularity of the 'combination strategy', almost two-thirds of the women taking up full-time employment after

¹⁷ Some women did not report any break in their economic activity in connection with childbirth. We have then treated them as if they did not work for the first six months after delivery. Thus for women reporting a short break and then a return to work within six months (a total of 225 one-child mothers) as well as for those reporting no break at all (a total of 110) we have counted time from month six onwards.

¹⁸ As women are entitled to start their maternity leave from two months before the expected delivery, we have 'frozen' their employment status at that point in time.

¹⁹ Roughly one-third of the women who stopped full-time work to become housewives had a second child within six months: i.e., when they left work they were already conscious of being pregnant.

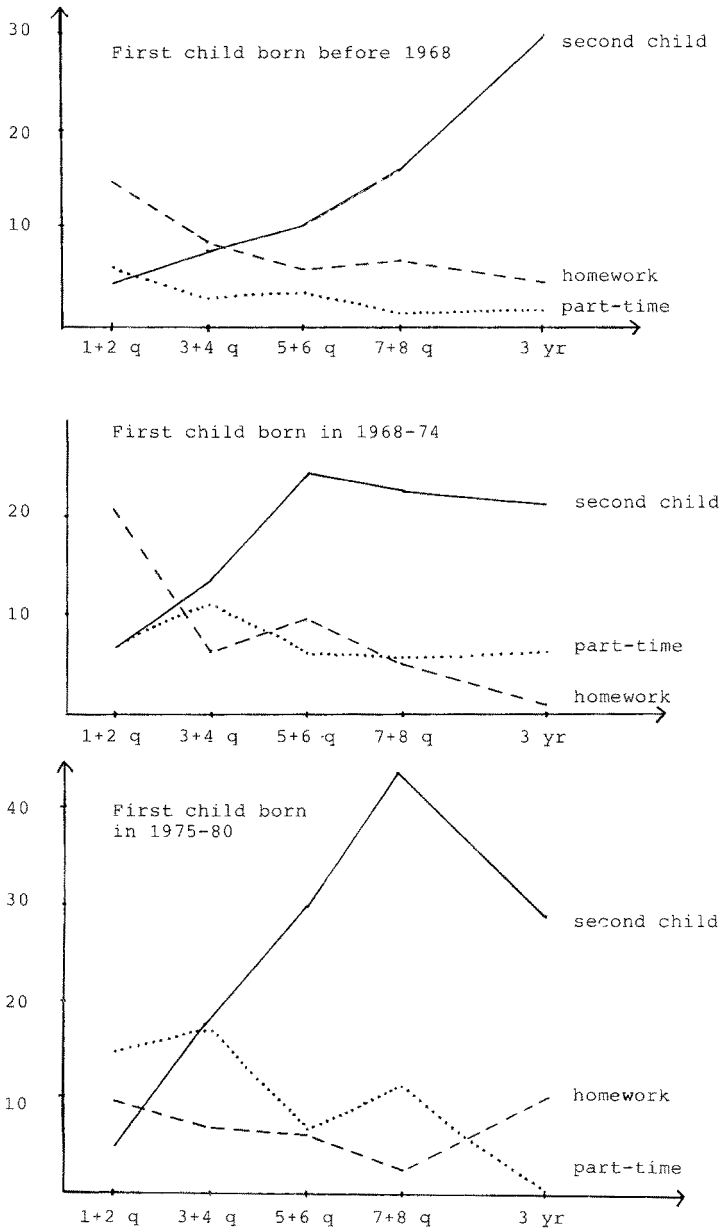


Fig. 1. Transitions among one-child mothers who have taken up full-time work. Observed occurrence/exposure rates per 1000 women-years.

their first birth would still be working full-time after two years (provided they did not have a second child).

The transition from full-time to part-time work among one-child mothers thus increased its prevalence over time. Who were the women most likely to reduce working hours, if any such groups can be distinguished? To answer that question we have analyzed the transition from full-time to part-time work by means of intensity regression. The factors included in the analysis (in addition to the duration variable, which is time counted since the return to work) were: starting-time, civil status, social background, calendar period of first birth, educational level and work experience. The variable 'starting-time' refers to when the women started working again after childbirth (less than 6, 6 to 17 and 18 to 23 months after the first birth). The regression coefficients show a positive gradient, i.e., the later full-time employment is started the greater the inclination to switch to part-time work later. This seems reasonable, if starting-time is taken as an indication of which 'strategy' the women follow, i.e., the sooner they take up employment the more likely it is that their inclination is toward the 'work-career strategy'.²⁰ The variable 'starting-time' was not significant, however. Neither was 'work experience', although the coefficients were in the expected direction, i.e., women with very short work experience were less inclined to switch to part-time work. This is consistent with the interpretation of our results concerning the importance of work experience for the choice of part-time work among women who took up employment within one year of the first birth (see section 3). The coefficients for the three variables 'education', 'civil status' and 'social background' were trivially small, and could be removed without diminishing the fit of the model. No interactions were needed and thus we were left with a model with only one variable in addition to duration, namely calendar year of first birth. The relative risks shown in table 4 indicate that the propensity for one-child mothers to switch from full-time to part-time work doubled between the period before 1968 and the 1968–74 period. In the late 1970s there was an additional increase of 50 per cent. The coefficients of the duration variable demonstrate that women were most inclined to

²⁰ Another possible interpretation is that women who were able to postpone the return to work beyond the legally stipulated maternity leave, mostly worked in the public sector, where flexibility in setting hours of work has existed for a relatively long period of time (see section 5).

Table 4

The transition from full-time to part-time work among one-child mothers. Final model. Relative intensities.

<i>Calendar period of first birth</i>	
Before 1967	0.44
1968–74	1.00 ^a
1975–80	1.49
<i>Duration</i>	
1 + 2 quarter	1.00 ^a
3 + 4 + 5 + 6 quarter	0.93
7 + 8 quarter + 3 year	0.55

^a Base category.

reduce working hours in the first half year after they had taken up employment. The longer they worked, the more inclined they were to let things remain as they were. In fact, after a year or two most women had stopped working because they had opted for another child. One-child mothers still working full-time after two or three years were those women who either did not want another child, had difficulties in conceiving or were planning a long interval between births (perhaps for career reasons?).

It may seem surprising that nothing else really matters beside the calendar year in which the child was born, i.e., when the woman started motherhood. Educational level has for example often been found to be of great importance for the work behaviour of women (see for example Bernhardt (1986, 1987)). The tendency to abandon the ‘work-career strategy’ in favour of the ‘combination strategy’ was, however, equally strong regardless of the educational level of the woman. One possible interpretation of this is that for most women it is a very tall order to work full-time and have (the main) responsibility for a young child. If they have a chance to reduce hours worked in the market during this period of their lives, most women will do so. It simply makes sense, given the way our society is presently organized.

5. The transition from part-time to full-time work

Are there one-child mothers who step up their working hours, i.e., who shift from part-time to full-time work in the period when their

child is still quite young? In the terminology used above, one could perhaps characterize these women as being inclined toward a 'work-career strategy'. A woman who has managed to get a part-time job when returning to work after having her first child is likely to be thinking in terms of a 'combination strategy'. To step up working hours while the child is still quite young would seem to indicate either economic necessity²¹ or that the woman is dissatisfied with her work situation.

In many occupations part-time work is likely to involve a set-back in career possibilities. In some places the woman may be put under pressure from the employer or from her fellow-workers to go back to full-time work. In many part of the labour market, work is still organized according to the principle that workers are men without family responsibilities interfering with their work commitment. A job-holder is presumed to be able to work at least eight hours a day five days a week, from nine to five or shift-work as the case may be.

Observed occurrence/exposure rates for various transitions among one-child mothers working part-time are shown in fig. 2. The time variable again refers to time since the woman started working again after childbirth. Similar to what was found for one-child mothers working full-time, getting a second child is the most likely event, except at the very beginning. Transitions back home or to full-time work are much less common, and their frequency does not seem to vary much over the duration intervals. Nor is there any apparent trend over time, i.e., women having their first child in the late 1970s show the same low inclination to abandon their part-time work (except if they are about to have their second child) as women who had their first birth before 1968. Contrary to what we found for one-child mothers taking up full-time work, women working part-time apparently did not have any preference for either of the two options, full-time work in the labour market or full-time work in the household. Their main strategy seems to have been to stick to part-time work until it was time to have a second child. This hypothesis is substantiated if we calculate the proportion of 'survivors' (in the life-table sense), the way we did in section 3. Assuming that second-child pregnancies could be eliminated,

²¹ Note, however, that we deal with married or cohabiting women only, so women who step up working hours for economic reasons after a divorce or a separation are not included in our analysis.

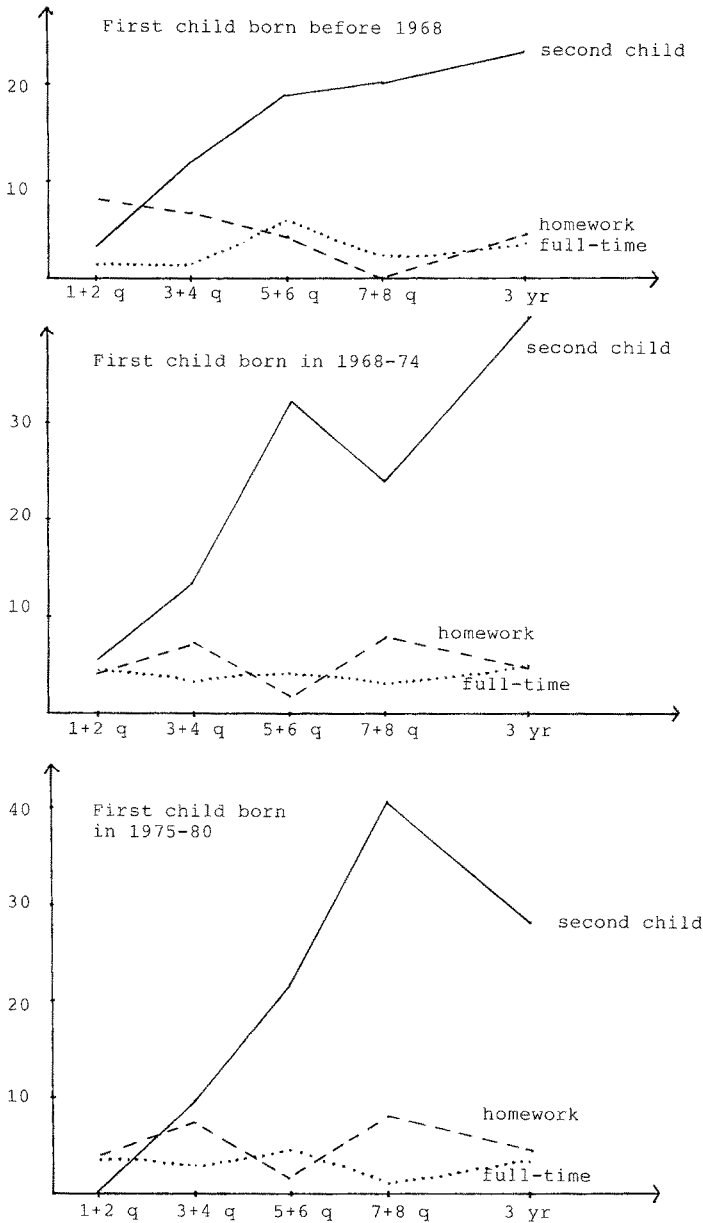


Fig. 2. Transitions among one-child mothers who have taken up part-time work. Observed occurrence/exposure rates per 1000 women-years.

83 per cent would still be working part-time after two years. This proportion is the same, regardless of calendar year of the first birth.

Clearly, switching from part-time to full-time work was an unlikely event among one-child mothers. Still, there might be particular groups of women more inclined than others to take such a step. We have therefore analyzed the transition from part-time to full-time work using intensity regression. The factors included in the analysis were starting-time, civil status, social background, educational level, calendar year of first birth and work experience. Since there was practically no variation in the level of the observed occurrence/exposure rates for different duration intervals, we tested if all the durations could be combined into one interval without diminishing the fit of the model and found this to be the case. As could be expected on the basis of the curves in fig. 2, the period factor could also be excluded. Likewise, the educational variable was again found to be unnecessary, i.e., there were no significant differences between women at different levels of education.²² The starting-time factor, although not significant, exhibits an interesting pattern: most likely to step up working hours were one-child mothers who went back to work when their child was between 12 and 18 months old. We suspect that starting-time in fact captures the effect of employment in the public sector, since public-sector employees have for a long time had the right to keep their job beyond the legally stipulated paid maternity leave (up to 18 months). In the public sector there has also been a greater 'permissiveness' for employees to increase and decrease working hours more or less at their own discretion. In the private sector, on the other hand, the individual who managed to get a part-time job, would have to stick to it. As no interactions were found necessary,²³ we were left with a final model containing the main factors of work experience and civil status (see table 5).

It is not so surprising that cohabiting one-child mothers have a higher propensity to step up working hours than do married women. This is consistent with earlier findings, for example that cohabiting

²² The relative coefficients of the educational variable indicate that longer education means slightly higher propensity to increase working hours.

²³ All pairwise interactions were tested but only one was found to improve significantly the fit of the model, namely the interaction between social background and work experience. However, since this interaction seemed to be significant because of one rather extreme sub-group, comprising only two per cent of all women, namely daughters of unskilled workers, farmers and self-employed with a work experience of less than one year, we decided to exclude it despite its significance.

Table 5

The transition from part-time to full-time work among one-child mothers. Final model. Relative intensities.

<i>Work experience</i>	
Under one year	1.60
1–5 years	1.00 ^a
More than five years	0.59
<i>Civil status</i>	
Cohabiting	1.99
Married	1.00 ^a

^a Base category.

women are less likely to be at home one year after first birth (Bernhardt (1986)), and that among those still at home, cohabiting women are more likely to take up full-time work (Bernhardt (1987)). As previously, we are inclined to interpret this more in terms of a selection process, i.e., that women who choose not to formalize their partner relationship by a wedding ceremony tend to be women with a strong work orientation in the first place. An alternative explanation would be that it reflects differences in income security between married and non-married women.²⁴ The longer the work experience prior to the first birth, the lower the propensity to abandon part-time work in favour of longer working hours. This corresponds well with the findings in sections 3 and 4. Somehow, an 'established' position in the labour market seems to be a prerequisite for both getting and keeping a part-time job after childbirth. We suspect that it has to do with the necessity of 'securing a foothold' in the labour market, perhaps primarily in terms of having a permanent job, before it is possible to claim exception from the general rule, which in most parts of the labour market still is full-time work.

6. Conclusions

Part-time work has greatly increased its popularity among Swedish one-child mothers. The growth in part-time work was especially noticeable toward the end of the 1970s.

²⁴ Women living in informal cohabitations tend to have considerably higher dissolution rates, for example (see Hoem and Hoem (1988)).

Analyzing the probability of part-time work among women who took up employment one year after first birth, we found a strong positive period effect. The proportion taking up part-time work among women who returned to employment after their child's first birthday, also increased over time.²⁵ The propensity to reduce working hours among women working full-time also shows a strongly positive period effect, indicating that full-time work became more transitory among one-child mothers. The only transition that shows no period effect, i.e., where the propensity remained constant over time, is the stepping up of working hours from part-time to full-time. Thus, the evidence is overwhelming: part-time work became the preferred solution among Swedish women who had just entered motherhood.

Sweden has been characterized as a country 'in pursuit of sexual equality' (McIntosh (1979)), and there is no doubt that in comparison with most other advanced industrialized countries, Sweden is a relatively egalitarian society (see Bernhardt (1988)).

The extent to which Swedish women, in particular women with small children, are involved in paid work outside the home, is often regarded as a clear indication of how advanced sex-role equality has become in Sweden. Among young couples today it is probably regarded as quite old-fashioned for the women to be completely out of the labour force for any length of time. Yet, it can be questioned whether the 'combination strategy', as we have called it, is anything but a modern version of the old sex-role structure with male dominance and female subordination. We have a new pattern of male-female interaction, characterized by an increasing prevalence of informal cohabitation rather than formalized marriage, increasing dissolution rates and a lessening economic dependence on the part of the women in a partner relationship. A woman pursuing a 'combination strategy' is not completely economically dependent on her husband, nevertheless she has largely suppressed her own (long-term) economic and other interests during the phase of her life when she has small children. Haavind (1985) writes, in a recent article dealing with the changing relationships between men and women, that according to the new rules of the game 'a woman is positively judged as feminine according to her capacity to have male

²⁵ The proportion of transitions to part-time work among all transitions to employment increased from between 40 and 50 per cent among women having their first child before 1968, to between 60 and 70 per cent among women giving birth in the late 1970s (Bernhardt (1987)).

dominance look like something else – something she wants, something caused by necessity or practical reasons or something caused by love'. The choice of part-time work after the arrival of the first child seems to be a clear example of such 'feminine' behaviour.

Judging from the behaviour of Swedish one-child mothers, the 'combination strategy' has attracted adherents both from the kind of women who previously tended toward the 'homemaker strategy' and from the kind who in earlier times would have pursued a clearcut 'work-career strategy'. To ascertain whether the women continue to follow the trajectories they have embarked on at the time of the first birth, or whether these strategies are modified along the way, it would be necessary to analyze the work-life transitions of two- and three-child mothers as well, and to follow the life courses of these women over an extended period of time, i.e., beyond the childbearing and childrearing period. We would hypothesize that the attractiveness of the 'combination strategy' strengthened with the development of a tighter labour market during the 1980s. A very important question, which cannot be answered on the basis of the data set available here, is what the long-term consequences will be with regard to earnings, occupational careers and satisfaction with their life situations, of the life-course choices that these women made in the connection with their first birth.

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