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Part-time work and perception of life satisfaction

Working paper

Abstract

Part time work is a direct product of globalization. More dynamic and competitive labor markets require new forms of employments that are flexible, increase efficiency and stimulate competitiveness. This explains why part time work as such has become more diffuse in many Western European countries, including also Italy in the later years.

At the micro level, part time work offers flexibility and adaptability to employers but is also attractive among workers and among workers, notably among women. The reason for the latter is its role in the reconciliation of the “conflict” between work and family, which mostly affects women given that they are responsible for home matters despite working. Indeed, part time work enables an individual to manage the time more effectively and balance better between the two aspects of private life. However, it is also true that part-time jobs are often limiting because they are concentrated in certain sectors, might offer comparatively worse career prospects and might belong to the category of “lower importance” jobs. This is exactly why it is difficult to provide a clear cut on the topic.

But, rather than focusing on advantages and disadvantages of part time work in comparison to full time, based on objective evaluation, this paper intends to provide a comparison of different perceptions of satisfaction that are experienced by female employees performing these jobs.

Several main hypotheses are tested; the hypothesis that women who work part time will experience higher satisfaction with the division of their time within and outside of the family was confirmed in the data. Similarly, the hypothesis that part time workers experience better time management was in accordance with the final results. The hypotheses on life satisfaction, however, were not fully justified with the data. Socio demographic characteristics bring changes in patterns of life satisfaction but not always in the expected direction. Overall, women who work part time are less satisfied with their life when compared to full-time workers.

Part time jobs were responsible for most of the net job creation in Europe since the 1980s (Smith, 1998, Delsen, 1998). This is a result of new employment strategies on the part of employers that require more flexibility in order to adapt to market changes and pressures that came as a result of globalization. But the growth in part-time work also accounts for a growing increase of female labor force participation in the recent decades. Therefore, its presence is not only related to the general industrial restructuring but also more women in the labor market. Overall, part-time is seen as a form of employment that reconciles “private” and “public”, leading to higher personal satisfaction of workers but also higher employment at the state level (Faro, 2004).

Part-time work is a form of non-standard and flexible employment; indeed part time work emerges in early 70's establishing itself as one of the first models of nonstandard work organization. Today, however, one can argue that part-time work is not anymore a non standard form but work with its regular characteristics and some special features regarding the actual number of working hours. Part time is “normal” work with the number of hours less than „normal” (Kalleberg, 2000). What makes it slightly different; however, is its gender dimension and the level or quality of this work across different occupations. Many suggest that part-time offers a woman a range of choices to cope and balance her personal life with work, or better maintain a role of a successful working mother and wife. Indeed, this type of employment allows a compromise and might be an optimal solution. On the other hand, part-time jobs are often of a dual character encompassing both good and bad jobs. It has been argued that part-time jobs are often of bad quality, do not enable progress and characterize marginal sectors. These are universal trends although specific treatment of part-time work is influenced by the cultural differences and legislative context in the countries.

Different theories attempt to explain the choice of women to work part time. As functional approach suggests, the main role of a woman is to take care of family. If the work still enables a woman to be active on both private and public side, such arrangement is welcome. Instead of “family benefit” explanations, Catharine Hakim highlights preferences and woman’s personal motivation. Part-time women workers in her classification are treated as a proxy for home centered women. Accordingly, for people, both men and women, who choose to work part time, work is of less importance in comparison to family. Still, she distinguishes different part-time jobs when qualifying part-time as a qualitatively different work from the full-time.

This brings us to another already mentioned issue: the division and the quality of part time. As argued above, one of the main features of part-time employment is its concentration in certain sectors or industries, which are low paid and offer less career

opportunities. Part-time workers often earn less given the same qualification or education and do not have the same benefits. However, there is a growing number of higher-level part time jobs, especially in the countries where the legislative framework is encouraging this form of employment. This gives rise to a view that part time is diverse rather than homogeneous and that experience of part time employment depends primarily on its characteristics rather than its definition. The overall legislation on part time work is another factor that plays a role in part-time experience.

Widespread of part time work, especially among women, along with lack of clarity on heterogeneity of this group of jobs has also created a large discussion about pros and cons of this work for the employees. The area of interest concerns material benefits, career opportunities and the differences in work conditions. However, the evaluation of realistic factors might not always be possible, also because such comparison gives an objective evaluation but doesn't really take into account the differences in preferences that exist among people. The research is much more difficult to perform once preference to manage multiple life domains (functionalist approach) or have more personal space (Hakim) is taken into account. The preferences are highly subjective.

The goal of this study is to contribute to the research on evaluation of part time work in relation to the full time opportunity. However, rather than focusing on advantages and disadvantages of part time work in comparison to full time, based on objective evaluation, this paper intends to provide a comparison of different perceptions of satisfaction that are experienced by female employees performing these jobs. Several main hypotheses are tested; the first hypothesis predicts that those women who work part time will experience higher satisfaction with the division of their time within and outside of the family. This is consistent with the theory that suggests that part time offers the best balance between work and family (Kahne, 1992). Similarly, the second hypothesis states that part time workers experience better time management because they are able to more equally focus on different daily tasks. Less time at work enables a better engagement on other daily duties. A key issue in the third hypothesis is overall satisfaction with personal life. We hypothesize that a difference in life satisfaction is not a clear cut and that it depends on objective characteristics such as age, marital status, occupation, education or geography: 3a. Better education brings more life satisfaction in comparison to less education regardless of the type of work. The hypothesis is in relation to common division of jobs according to which the most educated get the best working positions and conditions 3b. However, high education and high occupational status might have a downward effect on life satisfaction when women are working part time. Less evidence of life satisfaction was expected for this particular group comparing to full timers. The reason behind is a wasted societal and personal investment of highly qualified women when they are not performing a full time job 3c. Children and prime age for forming a family may have an upward effect in life satisfaction for part timers since this option reduces the role conflict and helps better reconciliation of family and work responsibilities.

Methods

Data

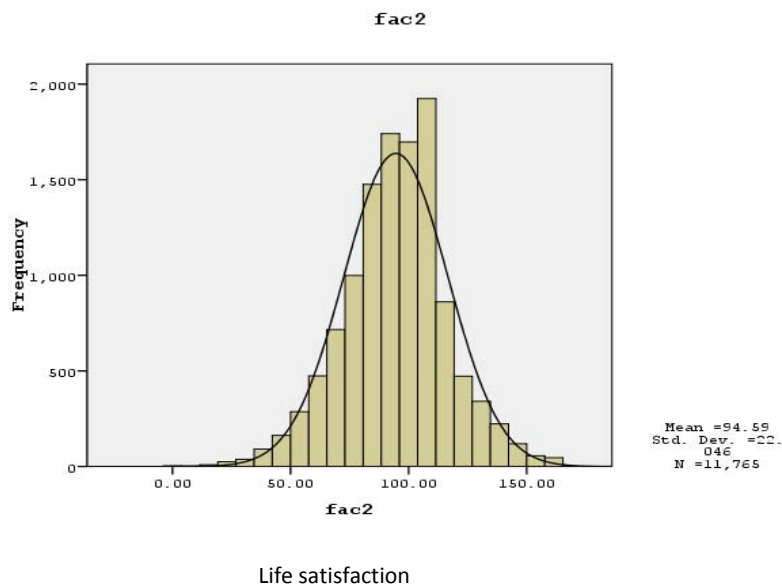
The dataset was the TIME BUDGET survey INDAGINE STATISTICA MULTISCOPO SULLE FAMIGLIE 2002/2003. It was chosen on the basis of good representation of variables on time use and satisfaction.

The analysis is done on Italy and the main focus group are women, single and married with and without children, 20-50 years old, employed as dependent workers. Only first part of the analysis used a sample of male dependent workers in the same age group for the sake of possible comparisons.

Variables

The following independent variables were selected for a further analysis: gender, age, education, marital status, and occupation, the type of work and sectors, regions within Italy. The variable part time work presents a simple declaration of an individual on the type of work that is performed; the individuals are asked if they work full time or part time. Even though a number of working hours was first considered as a main criterion for the division of work on part-time and full time, it was later excluded from the analysis because it produced distorted results.

Three indices (factorial scales) were constructed on part of the dependant variables. The first index- time management ranges from 0 to 138, 46, the second one-life satisfaction is from 0 to 161, 54, while the third one-time satisfaction goes from 0 to 140. These indices are composite measures that consist of a number of questions in relation to the final dimensions that they cover: time management, life and time satisfaction. The index on time management contains the questions on whether a person is able to reconcile her/his time with the office hours of offices, posts, shops, schools and places for leisure activity, but also with the time of her partner. The scale goes from: "It is not difficult to reconcile my time with various activities" to "It is difficult to reconcile my time with various activities". The index items were chosen after performing factor analysis. The internal consistency of scale was assessed by Cronbach's alpha: 0.822. The second index covers satisfaction with different aspects of life: satisfaction with economic situation, health, work, relations with friends, free time, quality of free time and general satisfaction with life. The index came from a factor analysis; the Cronbach alpha of internal consistency of items is 0.718.



The third index is a composite measure of time satisfaction with the elements: satisfaction with time dedicated to personal development, partner, children, work, friends, hobby and rest. Cronbach alpha was 0.764. All the dependant variables are composite because, in this part of the analysis, we are interested in overall satisfaction with time division and life rather than satisfaction with separate components.

Statistical analysis

Statistical procedures included descriptive analysis, factor analysis and reliability tests, t-tests and one way ANOVA.

Results

Anova and t-tests were used to test the differences in satisfaction among part timers and full timers overall but also in relation to various socio-demographic characteristics of workers.

First, the differences in satisfaction were measured for each gender, on each index for full time and part time work.

Time management

The time management mean value for both men and women who work part time is 44, 16 while the same value for full timers is significantly higher-51, 04. The same tendency in results is present for female workers: The average mean of 42, 98 for part-timers is almost 9 points lower than the score for full timers (51, 21). No significant relation is found between time management and the type of work for men. This index is answering the question of

how difficult is to manage the time, ranging from “not difficult” to “difficult”. The maximum index value is 138.46.

In our hypotheses we predicted that part timers would demonstrate better time management and our data confirmed it. Part- timers are found to be in better control of their time overall and the same is true also for women.

Life satisfaction

With regard to overall life satisfaction index the results were similar between the groups. Lower scores of life satisfaction were found for part-time workers for each gender and overall, for both men and women but the differences are only in several points. The results for women are significant only at 10%.

Obviously, despite that fact that the differences are very small (1-3 points) the results still show that full time workers are more satisfied with their life. Women and men who work full time differ with their life satisfaction with men being a little more satisfied.

Time satisfaction

Our reasoning on time satisfaction was supported by our data. Part-time workers for each gender and overall are much more satisfied with their time division in comparison to their full time counterparts. However, large differences exist when comparing gender at only part time or full time level: With regard to full-time work, men score 10 points higher on time satisfaction in comparison to women. The difference is even more striking for part time work, it is almost 16 points. On average, regardless of the type of work, men score 9 points higher on time satisfaction. This is in line with the common view according to which women are much more in conflict with time trying to manage various aspects of life while men are less involved in family matters and as a result more satisfied with their time division.

The results are summarized in the table 1.

Time management, Life satisfaction and Time satisfaction scores

Table 1.	Women		Men		Total sample	
	Mean (Std. Dev)		Mean (Std. Dev)		Mean (Std. Dev)	
Time management	Score		Score		Score	
full-time	51,21 (31,96)		50,94 (34,50)		51,04 (33,56)	
part-time	42,98 (32,42)		54,53 (34,66)		44,16(32,81)	
Total	48,74 (32,31)		51,04 (34,50)		49,99 (33,54)	
	,00 F=22,62 [^]		,44 F= ,59		,00 F=19,64	
Life satisfaction						
full-time	93,98 (22,10)		95,39 (21,61)		94,86 (21,81)	
part-time	92,67 (23,34)		92,09 (25,03)		92,56 (23,65)	
Total	93,68 (22,40)		95,27 (21,76)		94,59 (22,05)	
	,08 F=3,04		,018 F=5,57		,00 F=13,47	
Time satisfaction						
full-time	58,35 (40,36)		68,90 (45,28)		65,13 (43,88)	
part-time	66,18 (40,01)		83,40 (45,26)		67,89 (40,86)	
Total	60,61 (40,41)		69,25 (45,33)		65,52 (43,48)	
	,00 F=22,84		,00 F=9,41		,07 F=3,27	

[^]- F statistic and p values for differences in means between groups using one way ANOVA and t-tests.

Table 1. Time management, Life satisfaction and Time satisfaction scores for each gender and total sample according to their work status (Part-time/Full time).

Second, the life satisfaction index was analyzed in more detail. However, the differences in satisfaction were recorded only for women but for different subcategories of women workers according to their education, family status, geography, occupation or age. The analysis showed different patterns of life satisfaction of women depending on these characteristics.

Age

Life satisfaction gradually decreases from the age group 21-25 to the age group 40-50 for both categories of workers. The differences exist among part timers and full timers within the same age groups. In the age group 21-25, part time workers are more satisfied than full time workers. The difference is small but might mean that part-time offers more personal space and the time for leisure activities, which are very important for satisfaction in this age group. Moreover, satisfaction at this age is generally high which corresponds to less responsibility and lower role conflicts in comparison to other groups.

Our hypothesis that the age group 26-40 (prime age for family and children) is likely to be more satisfied when working part-time than full time did not receive support in the

data. Full timers reported higher scores of satisfaction (3-4 points) in the group 26-35 and equal satisfaction in the group 36-40.

Women 40-50 years old are almost equally satisfied regardless of the work (0.5-1 point) but far more dissatisfied than any other age group.

Education

Educated full time workers score higher on life satisfaction than less educated. The lowest scores are reported by those with elementary education- 87, while workers with secondary, medium or high education are 5, 7 or 9 points more satisfied. These results support our hypothesis of general positive effect of education on life satisfaction.

The hypothesis of downward effects of high education on satisfaction for part time workers versus full timers could not be tested.

Occupation

For full time work, the highest occupations score highest satisfaction. Satisfaction declines with lower occupational levels. The pattern is the same when occupational effect is considered for both groups of workers together. However, high level occupation in part time does not bring equal satisfaction as in full time which justifies our hypothesis that high occupation has a downward effect on satisfaction in part time employment due to potential waste in human capital. Results for part time are significant at 10%.

Family

Single women working full time report higher satisfaction than those working part time with the difference of almost 7 points. Lack of own family or children puts more emphasis on work which is why professional aspirations play an important role in overall satisfaction. Satisfaction does not change much with the type of work once women are married and have children. The most satisfied part timers are women without children although they show also high scores on satisfaction in the other type of employment. Clearly factor that negatively influences overall life satisfaction are children due to difficulties that they might bring in reconciling private and professional interests. The results for part time work are significant at 10 %.

Geography

The Anova analysis shows the following:

- Regions indeed play a role in overall life satisfaction of women. Independently of whether work is part time or not, women are more satisfied with their life in the North and Center of Italy than in the South. The most prosperous region of Northern Eastern Italy is where women are the most satisfied. On the contrary, in the Southern Italy women are least satisfied.

- In all the regions, women who work full time are slightly better off and more satisfied. It is, however, true that in some regions the score differences between part-time and full time work is somewhat higher (Southern Italy).

The results are presented in table 2.

Life satisfaction	Part time work	Full time work	Total sample (women)
	Mean (Std. Dev)	Mean (Std. Dev)	Mean (Std. Dev)
Age group	Score	Score	Score
21-25	102,50 (22,10)	99,98 (21,78)	100,53 (21,86)
26-30	94,69 (24,98)	98,08 (23,10)	97,46 (23,48)
31-35	92,25 (24,74)	96,13 (22,80)	95,10 (23,38)
36-40	91,44 (21,88)	91,45 (21,08)	91,45 (21,30)
41-50	89,50 (22,21)	90,05 (20,88)	89,94 (21,16)
Total	92,67 (23,34)	93,98 (22,10)	93,68 (22,40)
	,00 F=7,71^	,00 F=29,33	,00 F=35,17
Education			
High education/University	93,16 (22,35)	96,64 (21,04)	96,11 (21,27)
Medium	94,36 (22,88)	94,41 (21,87)	94,40 (22,08)
Lower secondary	91,14 (23,99)	92,49 (22,88)	92,1 (23,20)
Elementary	91,65 (22,62)	87,99 (20,46)	89,18 (21,17)
Total	92,67 (23,34)	93,98 (22,10)	93,68 (22,40)
	,19 F=1,60	,00 F=7,78	,00 F=8,81
Occupation			
Upper-medium	93,77 (20,00)	96,67 (21,63)	96,43 (21,47)
Medium	94,01 (23,76)	94,88 (22,00)	94,71 (22,36)
Workers	91,00 (22,89)	91,53 (22,23)	91,37 (22,43)
Total	92,67 (23,34)	93,98 (22,10)	93,68 (22,40)
	,095 F=2,36	,00 F=11,00	,00 F= 14,17
Family			
Single	90,63 (22,53)	97,35 (21,64)	96,60 (21,82)
Family with children	92,31 (23,21)	92,60 (22,37)	92,52 (22,59)
Family without children	97,65 (24,84)	98,13 (20,35)	98,06 (21,01)
Total	92,67 (23,34)	93,98 (22,10)	93,68 (22,40)
	,08 F=2,50	,00 F=21,21	,00 F=22,58
Geography			
North-Western Italy	92,97 (22,45)	94,95 (21,98)	94,51 (22,09)
North Eastern Italy	97,09 (23,36)	98,14 (22,83)	97,87 (22,97)
Central Italy	92,92 (24,10)	93,95 (21,38)	93,71 (22,05)
Southern Italy	85,49 (22,70)	89,31 (21,05)	88,59 (21,41)
Islands	88,69 (22,80)	88,36 (21,75)	88,44 (21,97)
Total	92,67 (23,34)	93,98 (22,10)	93,68 (22,40)
	,00 F=7,49	,00 F=20,95	,00 F=27,51

Discussion

This paper dealt with the perceptions of satisfaction of part time and full time female workers on the sample of Italian population. In order to classify and explain the potential differences in satisfaction among workers in different types of work arrangements, both activities and perceptions were considered. The workers were compared on ability to manage time in everyday activities but also on more subjective dimensions such as opinions on how satisfied they feel with their time and their life. The first part of the analysis covered general differences on all the three aspects while the second part investigated one dimension-life satisfaction more profoundly. In this process several hypotheses were tested; Majority of them were found to exist while some were not supported by the data.

Tested on time management, life and time satisfaction, part time workers, both men and women were found to be different from full time workers on all three components, with the least difference on life satisfaction. Part time workers manage their time more easily and have less trouble accommodating various schedules. They also are more satisfied with the way their time is divided on various aspects of life. Nevertheless, part timers are not overall more satisfied with their life. The data actually indicate the contrary. Part time workers majorly, if not in all categories, are less satisfied than those who work full time. Once the analysis is deepened involving socio demographic characteristics of female part time workers, various patterns were discovered but still in none of the categories, except from one, satisfaction with life was higher in part –time employment. The age group 21-25 was the only outlier. On the work and family balance, it does seem that part time helps families on a range of tasks and highly improves time management, but this is not equally reflected in higher satisfaction with life of those women who perform part-time jobs. The results on the impact of high education and high occupational levels on life satisfaction were in accordance with our hypotheses.

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