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Working longer with working-time flexibility: Only when job commitment is high and family commitment is low?

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Abstract

Objective: This study investigates (a) whether job commitment and family commitment moderate the positive association between flexible working-time arrangements and work hours, and (b) whether childless women and men and mothers and fathers with the same levels of job and family commitment work equally long hours with flexible working-time arrangements.

Background: As working-time flexibility increases at many workplaces due to digital technologies and work overload, so too does the risk of working longer hours. Although previous research has neglected job and family commitment as potential moderators of the relationship between working-time flexibility and long working hours, it has found gender inequalities in working hours among employees with flexible working-time arrangements, which have been attributed inter alia to men's higher commitment to work and lower commitment to family.

Method: Multivariate analyses were conducted based on German Family Panel (pairfam) data for 2018, 2019, and 2020. The sample comprised data from 4,568 employee-years, 1,666 part-time employee-years, and 2,902 full-time employee-years.

Results: Among full-time employees, only those with high job commitment and low family commitment worked longer hours with employer-driven flexibility and working-time autonomy. Mothers with these arrangements worked fewer hours than childless women, childless men, and fathers, unless they had the same levels of job and family commitment as the latter three groups.

Conclusion: These results suggest, first, that among full-time employees with flexible working-time arrangements, job and family commitment are driving factors for working long hours; second, that gender differences in work hours are shaped by parental status; and third, that these differences are due, at least in part, to differences in connectedness to job and family roles.

Key words: working-time flexibility, working-time autonomy, employer-driven flexibility, job commitment, family commitment, gender, parental status, moderation analysis

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1. Introduction

Due to the greater prevalence of digital communication technologies that give employees in various jobs and sectors more autonomy over their work schedules, a growing number of employees have flexible working-time arrangements (Eurofound and the International Labour Office, 2017; Ghislieri et al., 2017). This development was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to a dramatic increase in remote working, and thus in flexible working- time arrangements (Felstead, 2022). At the same time, there is a trend toward work overload, which leads to work-schedule constraints (Kelly & Moen, 2020). Hardest hit by overload are those whose working schedules are flexibilized in the interest of their employers to meet short-term work needs—for example, to cover staff shortages or customer demands at short notice—and who lack resources such as autonomy to buffer these work demands (Koltai & Schieman, 2015).

Previous research has shown that employees in Germany work longer hours when they have flexible working-time arrangements such as working-time autonomy, where they determine their work schedules themselves, or employer-driven flexibility, where schedules are set by the employer with potential changes at short notice (Lott & Chung, 2016). This has negative consequences for the well-being of employees and their families, as long work hours may not only impair health (Yang et al., 2021), but can also lead to work–home conflict (Pak et al., 2021) and work–life conflict (Lott & Chung, 2022), with negative consequences for partners' marital satisfaction and for the family setting as a whole (Liang, 2015). In Germany, workers' work–life conflict due to long hours also contributes to their partners' work–life conflict and affects their partners' satisfaction with their work–life balance (Lott & Wöhrmann, 2022).

Moreover, previous research has found gender inequalities in working hours among employees with flexible working-time arrangements in Germany, where men with flexible working-time arrangements are more likely to extend their working hours than are women (Lott, 2020a; Lott & Chung, 2016). Gender differences in work outcomes with flexible working-time arrangements have been attributed inter alia to men's higher commitment to work and lower commitment to family (e.g., Schieman, 2006).

Commitments have a personal component, where individuals identify strongly with a role, and a behavioral component, where individuals pursue a specific line of action that corresponds to this identification (Bielby, 1992; Johnson, 1973). Assuming that men have higher job and lower family commitment than women, drawing the border between the work and family spheres (Clark, 2000) when working flexibly may be more difficult for them than for their female counterparts. They might also identify more with an ideal worker culture (Williams et al., 2013), where high work investments are expected and rewarded with pay rises and promotions (Leslie et al., 2012). Because of their higher job commitment, men might also be more likely to select into jobs where working-time flexibility, in particular working-time autonomy, is part of high-performance management strategies, and where high job commitment is considered to be an important prerequisite for achieving the organization's goals (White et al., 2003).

However, gender inequalities in working hours among employees with flexible working-time arrangements might also vary according to women's and men's parental status. In the United States, for example, fathers work fewer hours on average than their childless male counterparts (Weinshenker, 2015). For Germany, fathers with experience of parental leave have been found to increase their work hours less when working flexibly (Wanger & Zapf, 2022). Because mothers still take on the greater share of housework (van der Lippe et al., 2011), they (have to) identify more with the family role, and are expected to do so also at the workplace, as has been found for the United States and Germany (Lott & Klenner, 2018; Leslie et al., 2012). Consequently, mothers in Germany use flexible working-time arrangements to balance work and family more often than fathers do, thereby reducing work-to-family conflicts (Abendroth, 2022). Thus, gendered parental status differences might exist due to variations in job and family commitment.

If these variations across gendered parental status groups are a reason for differences in work hours with flexible working-time arrangements, this would mean that—irrespective of their gender and parental status—employees with the same levels of job and family commitment would work similar hours when they work flexibly. As much of the existing empirical evidence on the effect of flexible working-time arrangements on men's and women's working hours is for Germany, this correlation can be assumed to hold for Germany in particular. Following from this, the present study asks the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1: Do job commitment and family commitment moderate the positive associations between flexible working-time arrangements and work hours?

RQ2: Do childless women and men and mothers and fathers with the same levels of job and family commitment work equally long hours with flexible working-time arrangements?

This study makes three important contributions to the literature. First, it sheds light on a previously neglected aspect that might shape the outcomes of flexible working-time arrangements—namely, job and family commitment. According to Bielby (1992), commitments are more than just individual preferences; they are also social bonds that connect individuals to the social structure through associated roles or institutions. By taking job and family commitment into account, variations in connectedness—and thus in the outcomes of flexible working-time arrangements among workers—can be identified, thereby extending previous studies on the outcomes of flexible working (Lott, 2015, 2020a; Lott & Chung, 2016; Chung & van der Horst, 2020; Chung & van der Lippe, 2020).

Second, the intersection of gender and parental status is considered, thereby shedding light on the role of parenthood for gender differences in the outcomes of flexible working-time arrangements (Lott, 2020a; Lott & Chung, 2016) and the associations with job and family commitment. In doing so, these gender differences are scrutinized in more detail, and the reasons for them are examined at least in part in terms of job and family commitment. To date, it has been assumed that differential levels of job and family commitment are one reason for gender differences in the outcomes of flexible working-time arrangements (Lott, 2020a; Lott & Chung, 2016), but this assumption has not yet been tested. Thus, the present study extends the body of knowledge published in a special issue in this journal on the role of parenting in women's and men's work outcomes with flexible working arrangements (for an overview, see Schulz & Reimann, 2022). And third, in light of (a) the fact that the prevalence of flexible work schedules during the COVID-19 pandemic may persist to some extent even though the pandemic has subsided, and (b) increasing workloads with working-time constraints in many jobs, it is crucial to identify vulnerable groups of workers who are extending their workdays through flexible work schedules and thereby putting their own and their families' well-being at risk.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Flexible working-time arrangements and work hours

Following work/family border theory (Clark, 2000) and flexibility enactment theory (Kossek et al., 2005), flexible working-time arrangements that give employees control over their work schedules can enable them to reconcile their jobs with their private lives and help them to organize their paid work and private lives more efficiently (see also Perrons, 1998). Viewed from this resource perspective, flexibility of the border between work and family allows workers to adjust that border—in this case, through work scheduling—to the demands of other domains, such as family (Clark, 2000). This can reduce work–family conflict (Kelly et al., 2014) and promote health and well-being (Moen et al., 2011).

By contrast, flexible working-time arrangements that prevent employees from having control over their work schedules complicate the organization of paid work and hinder the reconciliation of work and private life. Employer-driven flexibility, where the employer sets the work schedules and may make changes at short notice, is a prime example of a working-time arrangement where employees lack control over their work schedules. In Germany, for example, employer-driven flexibility has been found to impair time adequacy and contribute to work-to-home spillover (Lott, 2015, 2020a). One of the main reasons for these consequences of employer-driven flexibility are long work hours (Lott, 2020a; Lott & Chung, 2016).

Surprisingly, and contrary to the assumptions of the resource perspective, in some European countries, in particular Germany and the United Kingdom, working-time autonomy, where employees have full control over their work schedules, has also been found to be related to time inadequacy and work-to-home spillover, especially among men (Lott, 2015, 2020a)—likewise due to long work hours (Lott & Chung, 2016). Following Clark (2000), the increase in work hours with working-time autonomy can be attributed to workers' inability to draw and manage the border between work and private life, and thus to prevent the extension of their work day. According to work/family border theory, work–life-balance outcomes of flexibility between work and family domains will depend largely on the similarities between the domains, the strength of the border between them, and the domain with which the individual primarily identifies

(Clark, 2000). Similar to employer-driven flexibility, the timing of work and family life is not clearly established in the case of working-time autonomy (Kossek et al., 2006). Therefore, whereas flexibility of the border between the two domains does not always lead to a better work–life balance, stronger borders can facilitate work–life balance when an employee identifies more strongly with one of the domains.

This is particularly important because working-time autonomy is not necessarily intended to improve work–life balance, but rather to increase productivity, for example, as part of high-performance management strategies that often go hand in hand with high work demands (Ortega, 2009). High work demands may prevent the use of flexible working-time arrangements for work–life-balance purposes. Moreover, although high-performance management strategies ostensibly give workers control over when and where they work, they mask employers' control over the work process (Brannen, 2005), which is often managed through indirect measures to increase performance and output (Felstead & Jewson, 2000), such as target setting or performance-based pay that incentivizes workers to invest more time in work (White et al., 2003) in order to improve productivity (Appelbaum, 2000).

The ideal worker culture, a broader workplace phenomenon that rewards those employees who prioritize their work over other areas of their lives and has been found to be prevalent in several countries, including Germany (Lott & Klenner, 2018; Lott & Abendroth, 2020; Kelly et al., 2010; Tienari, 2002), is related but not limited to high-performance management strategies (Williams et al., 2013). In such a work culture, working-time autonomy is often perceived as a gift that must be reciprocated by working longer hours (Chung, 2019). Moreover, in an ideal worker culture, the use of flexible working-time arrangements for non-work-related purposes such as family and caregiving is often stigmatized, as has been found for the United Kingdom and Germany (Lott & Klenner, 2018; Chung, 2018). As shown for the United Kingdom and the United States, this so called "flexibility stigma" (Chung, 2018) has negative consequences for career advancement (Leslie et al., 2012). Thus, drawing and managing the border between work and private life is especially difficult for employees who work in an ideal worker culture and for whom the risk of working longer hours with working-time autonomy is therefore relatively high.

2.2 The role of job commitment and family commitment

Job commitment and family commitment can be conceptualized in terms of personal commitment and behavioral commitment (Bielby, 1992). Following Johnson (1973, p. 395), personal commitment is "a strong personal dedication to a decision to carry out a line of action." The level of personal commitment depends on "the extent to which an individual's identification with a role ... is considered central among alternatives as a source of identity" (Bielby, 1992, p. 284). Personal commitment manifests itself, for example, in an individual's central interest (Bielby, 1992). Behavioral commitment, on the other hand, is defined as the "consequences of the initial pursuit of a line of action that constrain the actor to continue that line of action" (Johnson, 1973, p. 397). Because becoming committed "entails increasing obligations to act," the abandonment of that line of action becomes "personally costly" (Bielby, 1992, p. 284). The more "explicit, irrevocable, public, and volitional" an individual's line of action is, the more stable their subsequent behavior will be (Bielby, 1992, p. 284). An individual's line of action may be explicit and public, for example, when others become aware of and perceive this commitment. As personal commitment has "consequences for behavioral consistency in lines of activity" (Bielby, 1992, p. 284), it is conducive to behavioral commitment. For example, individuals whose interests revolve more around the job role than the family role, organize their lives accordingly, for example, by choosing jobs where high work commitment is expected and rewarded. Long work hours can be an expression of high job commitment and low family commitment, but according to research on heavy work investment (Harpaz & Snir, 2014; Snir, 2014), they are not identical with these commitments. In the case of employer-driven flexibility, for example, employees may work longer hours on their employers' orders, and thus these long work hours may be unrelated to their levels of job and family commitment.

According to work/family border theory, individuals' success in drawing and managing the border between the domains of work and private life depends on the strength of that border and on the domain with which the individual primarily identifies (Clark, 2000). Thus, employees with working-time flexibility who have high job commitment and low family commitment may have a higher risk of negative work–family-balance outcomes. Employees with flexible working-time arrangements who identify more with their jobs than with their families, and who organize their lives accordingly, have a weak border between the two domains, and may therefore have a higher risk of working longer hours. Moreover, following signaling

theory (Spence, 1973), employees with high job and low family commitment may also use flexible working-time arrangements to work longer hours in order to signal this commitment and achieve career goals—especially when working in an ideal worker culture and/or in jobs where high-performance management strategies apply. Employees with high job and low family commitment may also identify more with the ideal worker culture and feel a greater obligation to reciprocate flexible working-time arrangements. Following from this, I hypothesize:

> H1a: Working-time autonomy and employer-driven flexible work schedules are related to longer work hours primarily among employees with high job commitment and low family commitment.

Moreover, job and family commitment may be more essential for the work–life-balance outcomes of working-time autonomy than of employer-driven flexibility. Working-time autonomy rather than employer-driven flexibility may be part of high-performance management strategies where high job commitment is not only expected but rewarded (White et al., 2003). In terms of income and career advancement, extra effort may thus pay off more for employees with working-time autonomy than for employees with employer-controlled flexibility. Furthermore, because working-time autonomy gives—or at least promises to give—employees full control over their working time (Brannen, 2005), it may be considered more as a gift that is expected to be reciprocated by working longer hours. Following from this, I hypothesize.

> H1b: Among employees with high job commitment and low family commitment, working-time autonomy is related to longer work hours than is employer-driven flexibility.

2.3 Gendered parental status

Previous research has found that women and men use flexible working-time arrangements for different purposes, and that flexibility therefore has gendered meanings. For example, men in Germany use flexibility to increase their work hours (Lott & Chung, 2016), whereas women use it more to balance work and family demands (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020). Moreover, women in the United States have been found to use flexible working-time arrangements to organize the pace of work and the temporal division of the workday in a family-friendly way (Greenhaus et al., 1989).

Several explanations have been proposed for these gender differences. At workplaces, women—and especially mothers—are generally expected to prioritize family over work, whereas fathers are perceived as breadwinners who prioritize their careers (Williams et al., 2013). These ideal parent norms, which have also been found to be prevalent in Germany (Lott & Klenner, 2018), correspond and contribute to (re)producing the gendered division of labor among couples, which is considered another reason for the gendered meanings of flexibility. Because mothers (have to) take on the greater share of domestic responsibilities (van der Lippe et al., 2011), they need flexibility, and they use it to fulfill these domestic responsibilities more so than men do.

Finally, the gendered meanings of flexibility have also been attributed to men's higher commitment to work and women's higher commitment to family (e.g., Schieman, 2006). In line with "doing gender" theory (Lorber & Farrell, 1991; West & Zimmerman, 2002), individuals behave according to their beliefs about appropriate gender behavior and the underlying normative concepts of feminine and masculine "natures." In interactions, individuals permanently update their actions based on their knowledge about these "natures," which is related to patterns of behavior and action (Gildemeister, 2008) and prescribes different roles and responsibilities for women and men (Lorber, 1994). At the level of the workplace, these different roles and responsibilities are reflected by the ideal parent norms. Due to these beliefs and norms, mothers might demonstrate lower job and higher family commitment than childless men, childless women, and fathers. This might be especially the case in Germany, where the division of unpaid work is much more unequal compared with other Western countries (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2017), and where, in contrast to the United Kingdom (Chung & van der Horst, 2018), mothers reduce their working hours after childbirth even when they have a favorable work schedule (Lott, 2020b). Because mothers (have to) be more committed to the family domain than fathers, they might increase their work hours less when working flexibly. Childless women, on the other hand, might have similar levels of job commitment to childless men, as the ideal parent norm is less powerful for them than for mothers. Moreover, gender role attitudes have been found to change more for women than men

through childbirth (Katz-Wise et al., 2010), and empirical evidence for (western) Germany shows that the traditional division of labor in couples emerges after childbirth (Kühhirt, 2012). Thus, I hypothesize:

H2a: Working-time autonomy and employer-driven flexible work schedules are related to longer work hours more among childless men, childless women, and fathers than among mothers.

This means, conversely, that mothers with the same levels of job and family commitment as childless women, childless men, and fathers may have a similar risk of working longer hours with working-time autonomy and employer-driven work schedules. The finding that women who work full-time increase their work hours with working-time autonomy to a similar extent as men (Lott & Chung, 2016) points in this direction. Thus I hypothesize:

H2b: Childless women and men and mothers and fathers with the same levels of job and family commitment work equally long hours with employer-driven flexibility and working-time autonomy.

3. Empirical strategy

3.1 Data and sample

I used data from Waves 10, 11, and 12 of the German Family Panel (pairfam; 2017/2018, 2018/2019, and 2019/2020), a study that researched intimate relationships and family dynamics in Germany. In 2022, pairfam ended as an independent study, and the sample was integrated into a new data infrastructure, the German Family Demography Panel Study (FReDA). The pairfam sample comprised three birth cohorts, 1991–1993, 1981–1983, and 1971–1973 (Huinink et al., 2011). It was extended to include an additional sample of eastern German respondents, who received the same questionnaires as the respondents in the initial sample. Pairfam had a multi-actor design, where the so-called "anchor persons" were asked to consent to their partners' being interviewed. The anchors completed the anchor questionnaire; their partners received a modified, shorter partner questionnaire. The anchor population comprised persons resident in private households in the Federal Republic of Germany.

Based on the survey waves used in the present study (2017/2018, 2018/2019, and 2019/2020), the sample contained data covering 4,568 employee-years (1,666 part-time employee-years and 2,902 full-time employee-years). As the self-employed have working-time autonomy by definition, and do not have employer-driven flexibility, self-employed workers (who accounted for 128 person-years) were excluded from the analyses. Also excluded were employees who worked reduced hours or were on paid/unpaid (special) leave/vacation due to the COVID-10 pandemic (118 person-years). In addition, all observations with missing values were excluded from the analyses (listwise deletion). The main observation loss was due to the information on job and family commitment (1,148 employee-years). The properties of the study variables are comparable between Waves 10, 11, and 12 (see Table A10 in Appendix).

3.2 Study variables

3.2.1 Dependent variable: Long work hours

The continuous dependent variable, long work hours, was measured with the question: "What, on average, are your actual weekly working hours, including overtime?"

3.2.2 Flexible working-time arrangements

Flexible working-time arrangements were measured with the following survey question: "And once again on the subject of working hours. What is most likely to apply to your case?" The response options were: "Fixed start and end of daily working hours"; "Working hours set by company, some of which vary per day"; "No formal work schedule, set work schedule myself"; and "Flextime with working time account and a certain degree of self-determination over the daily working time within this framework." Employer-driven

flexibility was measured with the item "Work hours set by company, some of which vary per day." Working-time autonomy was measured with the item "No formal work schedule, set work schedule myself."

3.2.3 Gendered parental status

Gendered parental status was measured with the information about the sex of the respondent and whether children lived in the household. The categories of this variable were (1) childless men, (2) childless women, (3) fathers, and (4) mothers.

3.2.4 Job commitment and family commitment

Because the behavioral and personal dimensions of job commitment and family commitment are interrelated (Bielby, 1992; Johnson, 1973), both dimensions were taken into account in the present study. The following job-commitment- and family-commitment-related items were included in Wave 12 of pairfam:

- Most things in my life are related to my job.
- Most things in my life are related to my family.
- Others see me as a career person.
- Others see me as a family person.
- Most of my interests revolve around my job.
- Most of my interests revolve around my family

In past research, a wide range of concepts and measurements for work/job and family commitment have been used (e.g., Evertsson, 2013; Friedman & Weissbrod, 2005; Sumi, 2006; Zhou & Buehler, 2016). In line with Morrow and McElroy (1986) and Bielby (1992), the present study measured commitment in terms of "central interest," "involvement," and "orientation with respect to a certain role," which cover different dimensions (behavioral and personal) of commitment.

Central interest: The pairfam items "Most of my interests revolve around my family" and "Most of my interests revolve around my job" were used to assess central interest and the personal dimension of commitment, where individuals are highly dedicated to and identify strongly with a role or a line of action (Bielby, 1992; Johnson, 1973).

Involvement: The pairfam items "Most things in my life are related to my job" and "Most things in my life are related to my family" measure involvement, and can capture both the behavioral and the personal dimension of commitment, as individuals who agree that things are related mainly to their job/family identify strongly with the role in question and organize their lives to best fulfill that role.

Orientation with respect to a certain role: The pairfam items "Others see me as a career person" and "Others see me as a family person" were used to assess orientation with respect to a certain role and the behavioral dimension of commitment, where individuals pursue a line of action that corresponds to a certain role and is explicit and public and thus noticeable to others (Bielby, 1992).

Respondents answered each item on a scale ranging from 1 *(Do not agree at all)* to 5 *(Fully agree)*. Cronbach's alpha was .73 for job commitment, 0.81 for family commitment, and 0.78 for the combined job/family commitment scale. For the combined scale, the scale of the family commitment items was reversed, and the sum index was generated as follows: The minimum sum value (6) was subtracted from the sum of the responses, and the result was divided by the remaining maximum value (24). The index variable was a continuous variable with 0 as the minimum value and 1 as the maximum value. The higher the value of the index variable, the higher the job commitment and the lower the family commitment.

It should be noted that job commitment and family commitment were observed only in Wave 12, and that the information from Wave 12 was transferred to Waves 10 and 11. There is empirical evidence for the substantial stability of job commitment throughout individuals' work and family trajectories (Evertsson, 2013; Mulvaney et al., 2011). Hyggen (2008) found that work commitment was relatively stable across a 10-year period, with only some individual-level change relative to changes in family life and work experience. Mauno and Kinnunen (2000) found that job and family involvement remained relatively stable during a three-year follow-up period. Even after childbirth, women's work commitment has been found to remain stable over the life course (Moen & Smith, 1986; Mulvaney et al., 2011)—with small changes especially in the first years of motherhood (Evertsson, 2013). To account for changes in job commitment due to the birth of a child and related childcare experiences (Wanger & Zapf, 2022) and difficulties combining work and family (Evertsson, 2013; Mulvaney et al., 2011), the present analyses compared women and men with

different parental status, and controlled for the age of the youngest child (see also section 3.2.5 "Control variables")—a factor that affects work–family conflict. The limitation that potential work-induced changes in job and family commitment, such as the experience of unemployment, could not be taken into account, is discussed in Section 5.

3.2.5 Control variables

Because employees with higher-status jobs more often have access to working-time autonomy (Lott & Chung, 2016), I controlled for eight occupational status groups based on the International Standard Classification of Occupations 2008 (ISCO-08): (1) Legislators, senior officials, managers; (2) Professionals; (3) Associate professionals, technicians; (4) Clerical support staff; (5) Service workers; (6) Craft and related trades workers; (7) Plant and machine operators and assemblers; and (8) Elementary occupations. I also controlled for the respondent's net monthly personal income (open and estimated information combined) and years of education (i.e., years of schooling and vocational education and training). Because access to flexible working-time arrangements depends also on the sector in which a person is employed (Chung, 2019), I controlled for the public sector. At the level of the couple, I controlled for the partner's labor force status with the following categories: (1) in education, (2) on parental leave, (3) homemaker, (4) unemployed, (5) doing military service, (6) retired, (7) not working other, (8) in vocational training, (9) in full-time employment, (10) in part-time employment, (11) in marginal employment, (12) self-employed, and (13) working other. I also controlled for marital status and the age of the youngest child in the household. And finally, I controlled for the respondent's age. Table A1 in the Appendix provides the properties (e.g., M/proportions, SD, minimum and maximum values) of the study variables.

3.3 Method

Linear regression models with and without controls were estimated based on the pooled sample with robust standard errors, where y is working hours and X is a vector of variables for i = 1, ..., n:

$$y_i = \alpha + \beta X_i + \varepsilon_i$$

In a first step, the index variable for job and family commitment was introduced into the models as a moderator variable (Table A3 in the Appendix). In a second step, linear regression models including an interaction term between flexible working-time arrangements and gendered parental status were estimated (Table A5 in the Appendix) to extend previous studies on differences between men and women (Lott, 2020a; Lott & Chung, 2016; Chung & van der Horst, 2018). Finally, linear regression models with an interaction term between flexible working-time arrangements, gendered parental status, and the index variable for job and family commitment were estimated (Table A6 in the Appendix). The complete regression models are provided in Tables S11, A14, and A15 in the Appendix. Regression models without and with control variables were estimated for each step.

For better interpretation of the results, predictive margins based on the models with control variables were estimated using the margins comment in Stata. These margins are illustrated in Figures 1 to 4. Chi-square tests were conducted to determine whether the predictive margins were statistically significantly different.

4. Results

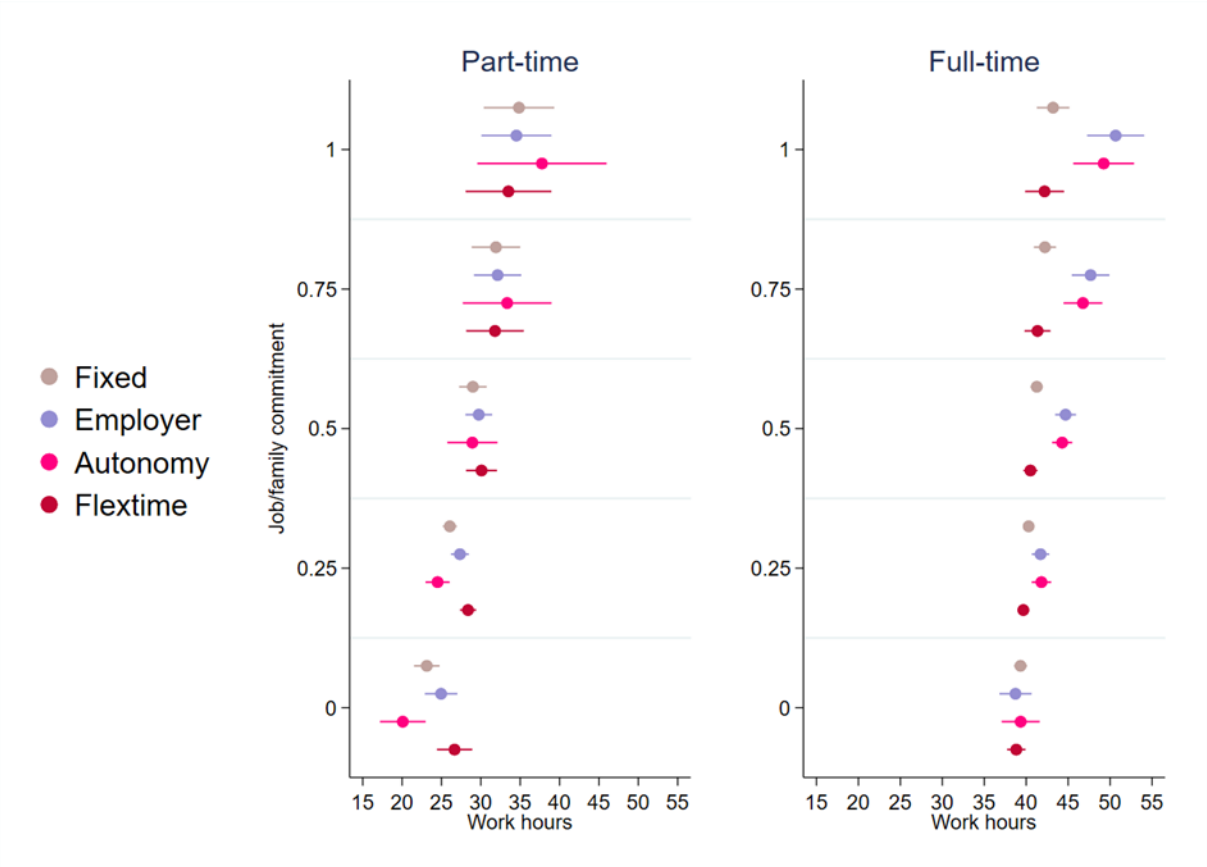
The majority of the employees in the study sample had fixed schedules (42%) or flextime (29%); 16% had employer-driven flexibility, where the employer set the work schedule with changes possible at short notice; and 13% had working-time autonomy, where they set their own work schedule (see Table A1 in the Appendix). This distribution was very similar for full-time employees (40% fixed schedules, 33% flextime, 14% employer-driven flexibility, and 13% working-time autonomy). Part-time employees, by contrast, had flextime less often (21%) and employer-driven flexibility more often (21%) than full-time employees. The average number of weekly working hours for all employees was 36; for full-time employees it was 42, and

for part-time employees it was 24. The average job and family commitment index score was 0.29; the score for full-time employees (0.32) was similar to and the score for part-time employees (0.24) was lower than the average.

4.1 Job commitment and family commitment

It was hypothesized that the associations between employer-driven flexibility and—even more so—working-time autonomy and work hours would be shaped by employees' levels of job commitment and family commitment. The results of the analysis support this assumption, at least in part—but only for full-time employees (for predictive margins, see Figure 1 and Table A2 in the Appendix). While working-time autonomy and employer-driven flexibility were related to long working hours especially among full-time employees with higher levels of job commitment, working hours did not statistically significantly differ between these flexible working arrangements and fixed schedules for any commitment level among part-time employees.

Figure 1: Predictive margins for work hours of full- and part-time employees with flexible working-time arrangements and job/family commitment[1] as a moderator variable



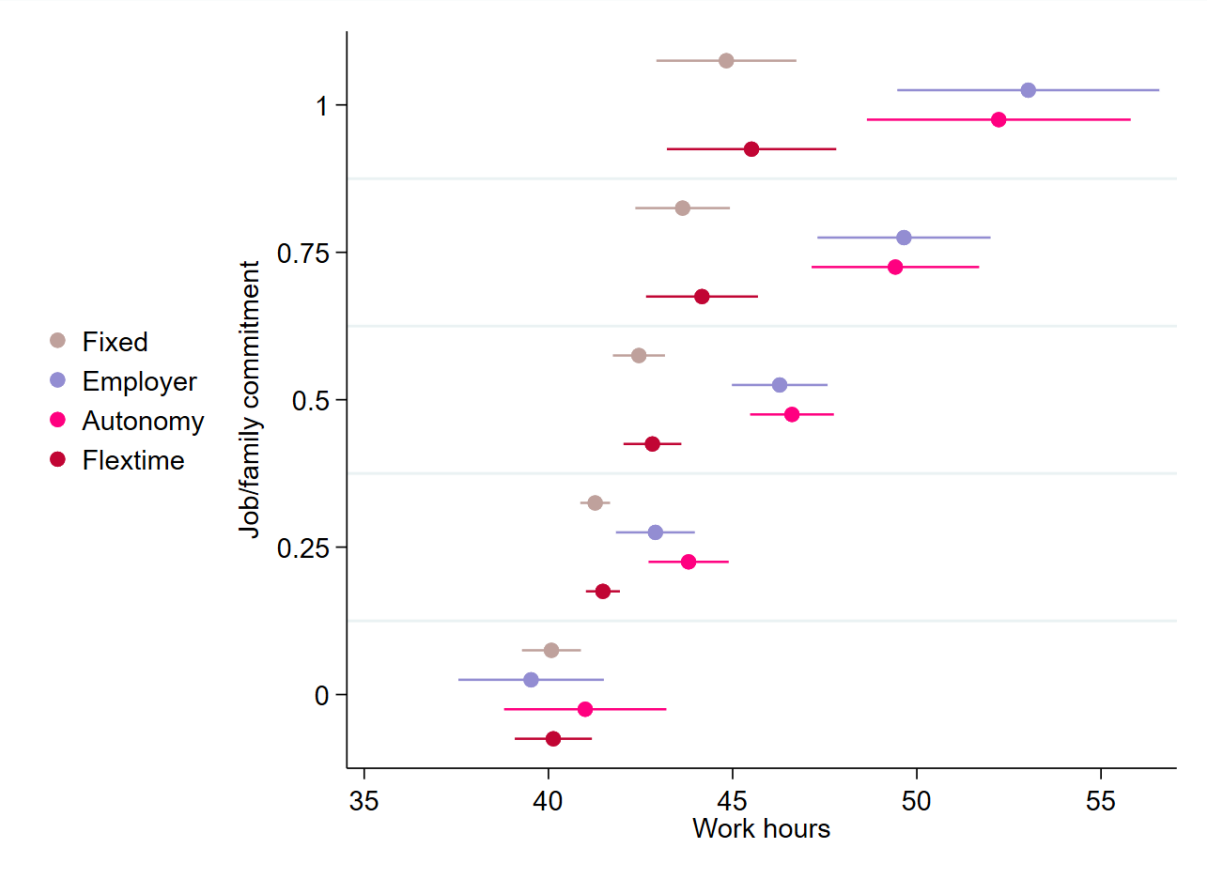
Note: Fixed full = Fixed schedule, full-time employed; Employer full = Employer-driven flexibility, full-time employed; Autonomy full = Working-time autonomy, full-time employed; Flextime full = Flextime, full-time employed; Fixed part = Fixed schedule, part-time employed; Employer part = Employer-driven flexibility, part-time employed; Autonomy part = Working-time autonomy, part-time employed; Flextime part = Flextime, part-time employed. [1]Job and family commitment index variable: the higher the value of the index variable, the higher the job commitment and the lower the family commitment. Pooled sample; pairfam Waves 10–12. Data source: pairfam Version v12

For the subsample of full-time employees, the predictive margins for working-time autonomy and employer-driven flexibility varied by the level of job/family commitment (Figure 2 and Appendix Table A3; for linear regression results, see Table A4 in the Appendix). According to the chi-squared test, full-time employees with higher job and lower family commitment worked statistically significantly longer hours with working-time autonomy and employer-driven flexibility than with fixed schedules or flextime.

Differences between working-time autonomy and employer-driven flexibility were not statistically significantly different. Full-time employees with the highest level of job commitment and the lowest level of family commitment (index value 1) worked on average around 52–53 hours per week with working-time autonomy and employer-driven flexibility, but only 45 hours per week with fixed schedules ($p < .001$). Full-time employees with a medium level of job commitment (index value .5) still worked around 46 hours per week on average with working-time autonomy and employer-driven flexibility, but only 42–43 hours with fixed schedules ($p < .001$). Employees with the lowest level of job commitment and the highest level of family commitment (index value 0) worked similar hours (around 40–41 hours) with fixed schedules if they had employer-driven flexibility or working-time autonomy. Differences between the working time arrangements were not statistically significantly different.

For full-time employees, this confirms Hypothesis H1a, which stated that working-time autonomy and employer-driven flexibility were related to longer work hours primarily among employees with high job commitment and low family commitment. However, because the two arrangements were related to long work hours to the same extent, Hypothesis H1b is not confirmed: Among full-time employees with high job and low family commitment, working-time autonomy was not related to longer work hours than was employer-driven flexibility.

Figure 2: Predictive margins for work hours of full-time employees with flexible working-time arrangements and job/family commitment[1] as a moderator variable



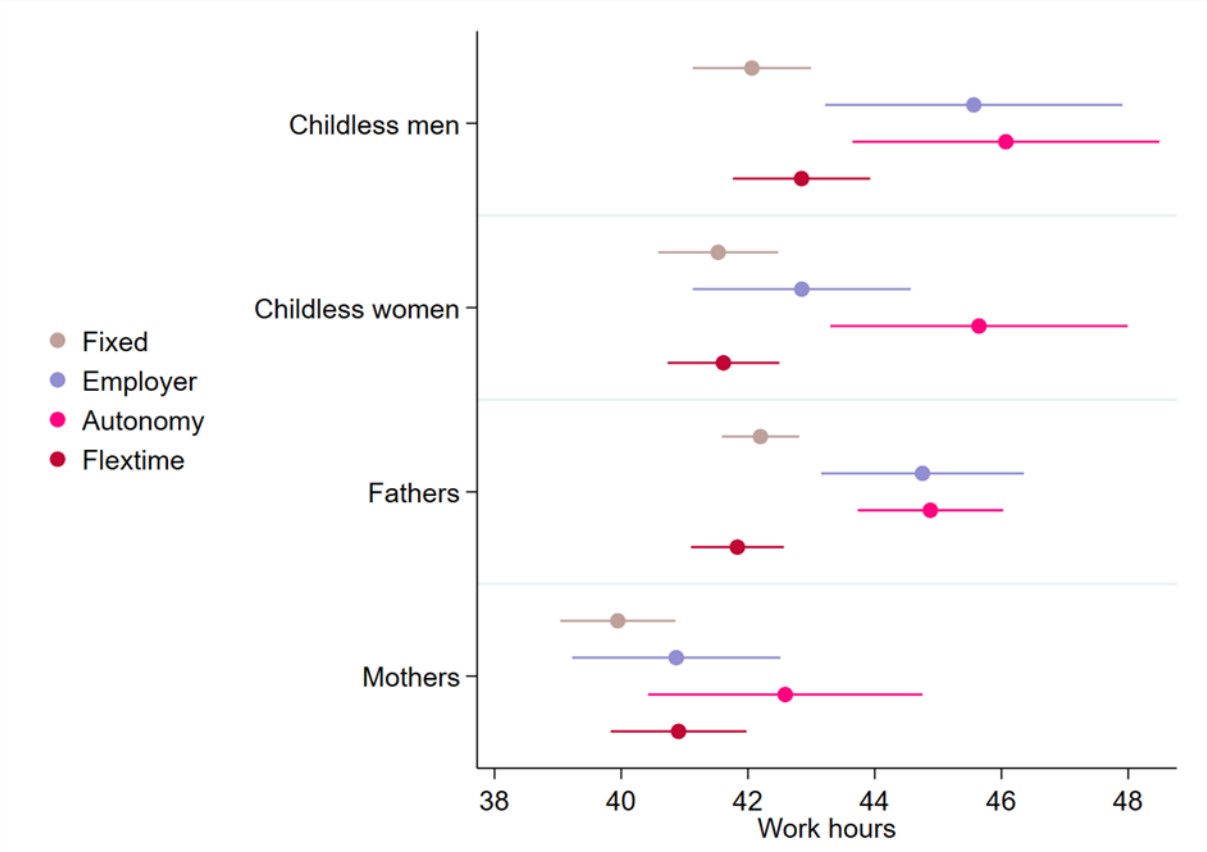
Note: Fixed full = Fixed schedule, full-time employed; Employer full = Employer-driven flexibility, full-time employed; Autonomy full = Working-time autonomy, full-time employed; Flextime full = Flextime, full-time employed; Fixed part = Fixed schedule, part-time employed; Employer part = Employer-driven flexibility, part-time employed; Autonomy part = Working-time autonomy, part-time employed; Flextime part = Flextime, part-time employed .[1]Job and family commitment index variable: the higher the value of the index variable, the higher the job commitment and the lower the family commitment. Pooled sample; pairfam Waves 10–12. Data source: pairfam Version v12

The observed differences between full-time and part-time employees might be due to the fact that because of the non-work-related activities that are the primary reasons for reducing their work hours in the

first place, part-time employees have less time for overtime compared with full-time employees, However, there is also a possible methodological explanation for these differences: In contrast to part-time employees, contractual work hours vary only marginally among full-time employees in Germany (Sopp & Wagner, 2017), and actual working hours seem to be a more suitable proxy for overtime hours for full-time employees than part-time employees.

Due to these methodological concerns and the fact that working hours vary only marginally among part-time employees with different working-time arrangements, the following analyses are restricted to full-time employees. Note, however, that restricting the analyses to full-time employees has particular consequences for the sample of female employees, whose work trajectories in Germany are often characterized by longer part-time phases over the life course (Aisenbrey & Fasang, 2017). Compared with all female employees in the data, full-time-employed women were slightly younger on average and most often had no children or only one child (see Table A12 in the Appendix). Moreover, the relatively small number of mother-years in the sample is due to the exclusion of part-time-employed mothers (1,366 employee-years). This limitation is discussed in Section 5. In order to account for possible differences in the effect of working-time arrangements and working hours between full- and part-time employees, separate analyses were conducted (see Table A13 in the Appendix). This supplementary analysis indicates that the association between gendered parental status, working hours, and job and family commitment does not vary statistically significantly between full- and part-time employees.

Figure 3: Predictive margins for work hours of full-time employees with flexible working-time arrangements and gendered parental status as a moderator variable



Note: Fixed full = Fixed schedule, full-time employed; Employer full = Employer-driven flexibility, full-time employed; Autonomy full = Working-time autonomy, full-time employed; Flextime full = Flextime, full-time employed; Fixed part = Fixed schedule, part-time employed; Employer part = Employer-driven flexibility, part-time employed; Autonomy part = Working-time autonomy, part-time employed; Flextime part = Flextime, part-time employed. Pooled sample; pairfam Waves 10–12. Data source: pairfam Version v12

4.2 Gendered parental-status differences

As shown in Table A5 in the Appendix, among full-time employees, childless women and mothers had fixed schedules more often than childless men and fathers (42% and 46% vs. 36% and 40%), childless women had employer-driven schedules more often than childless men (12% vs. 15%), and mothers had working-time autonomy less often than fathers (10% vs. 14%).

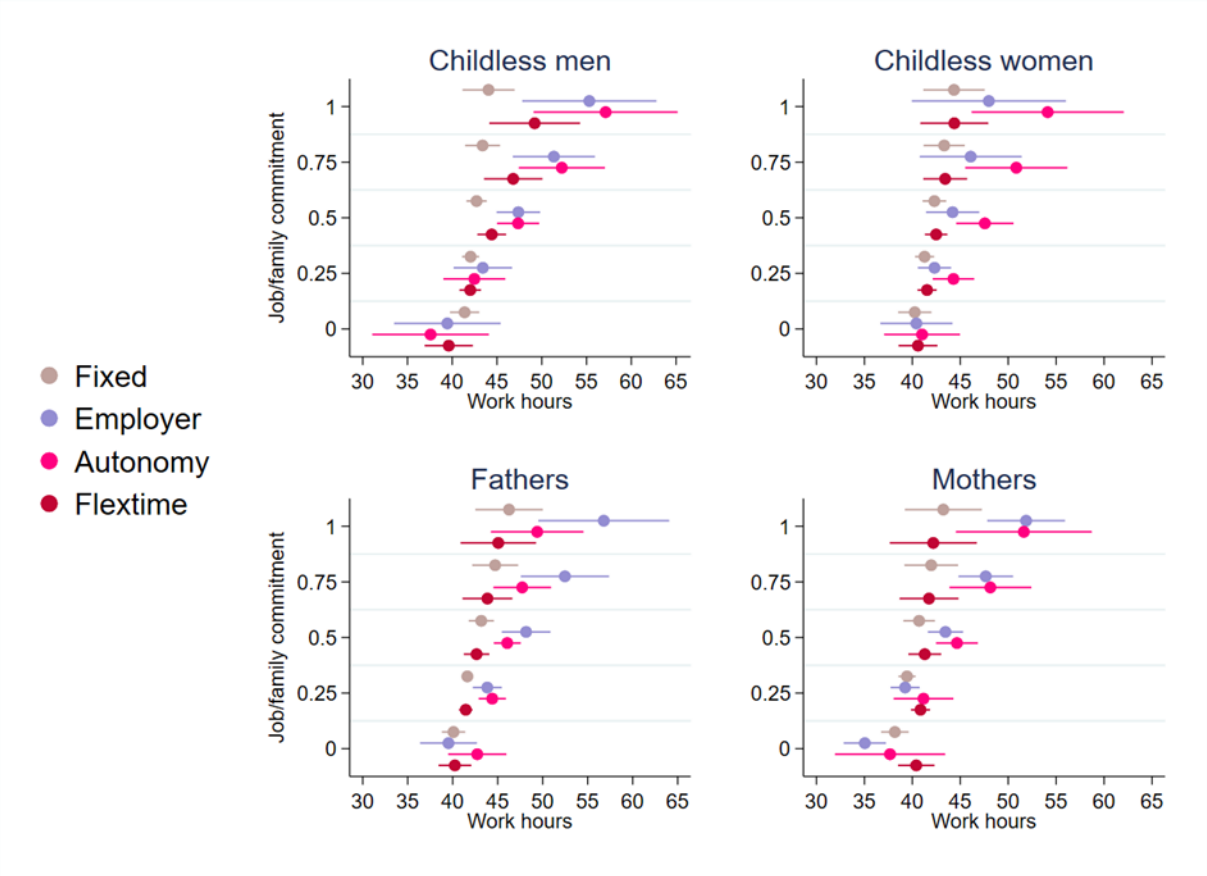
Childless women in full-time positions worked almost two hours less on average, and mothers worked three hours less on average than childless men and fathers (41 hours and 40 hours, respectively, vs. 43 hours). On average, the job and family commitment index score was comparable for childless men and childless women (M =.40 and .36, respectively) and higher than for mothers and fathers (M = .29 and .31, respectively).

Among full-time employees, childless men and fathers worked longer hours with working-time autonomy and employer-driven flexibility than with fixed schedules (see Figure 3 and Appendix Table A6; for linear regression results, see Table A7 in the Appendix). Childless men worked on average around 46 hours with working-time autonomy and employer-driven flexibility, and fathers with these work arrangements worked around 45 hours, but the predictive margins were not statistically significantly different. With fixed schedules, childless men and fathers worked only around 42 hours. The predictive margins for fixed schedules compared with working-time autonomy and employer-driven flexibility were statistically significantly different according to the chi-squared test ($p < .01$ and $p < .001$, respectively). Childless women in full-time positions worked similarly long hours with working-time autonomy compared with childless men and fathers (46 vs. 46 and 45 hours, respectively); the predictive margins were not statistically significantly different. However, childless women with employer-driven flexibility worked fewer hours than childless men with this arrangement (43 vs. 46 hours), and predictive margins were statistically significantly different ($p < .10$).

In contrast to the other groups of employees, mothers' working hours did not vary statistically significantly between the different working-time arrangements (40–43 hours). Mothers worked statistically significantly fewer hours with employer-driven flexibility compared with fathers ($p < .001$) and childless men ($p < .01$). Mothers with working-time autonomy also worked fewer hours (43 vs. 46 hours) compared with childless men ($p < .05$), childless women ($p < .10$), and fathers ($p < .10$) with this working-time arrangement. Hypothesis H2a is thus confirmed primarily for working-time autonomy, which was related to longer work hours among childless men, childless women, and fathers, but not among mothers. However, employer-driven flexibility was related to shorter work hours for both mothers and childless women compared with childless men.

It was also hypothesized that childless women and men and fathers and mothers with the same levels of job and family commitment would work equally long hours with employer-driven flexibility and working-time autonomy. Childless men ($p < .01$), childless women ($p < .05$), and mothers ($p < .05$) with the highest level of job commitment and the lowest level of family commitment (index value 1) worked statistically significantly longer hours with working-time autonomy than with fixed schedules (see Figure 4 and Appendix Table A8; for linear regression results, see Table A9 in the Appendix). According to the chi-squared test, the predictive margins for working-time autonomy and fixed schedules were also statistically significantly different for childless men and women ($p < .001$), mothers ($p < .01$), and fathers ($p < .5$) with a high level of job commitment (index value .75). Childless men ($p < .01$), fathers ($p < .01$), and mothers ($p < .01$) with a high level of job commitment (index value .75) and with the highest level of job commitment and the lowest level of family commitment (index value 1) worked statistically significantly longer hours with employer-driven flexibility than with fixed schedules. The predictive margins for working-time autonomy and employer-driven flexibility did not vary statistically significantly by gendered parental status. Hypothesis H2b is thus confirmed for working-time autonomy and employer-driven flexibility. It should be noted, however, that the confidence intervals of the predictive margins are rather large due to the small sample size and triple interaction term.

Figure 4: Predictive margins for work hours of full-time employees with flexible working-time arrangements and job/family commitment[1] and gendered parental status as moderator variables



Note: Fixed full = Fixed schedule, full-time employed; Employer full = Employer-driven flexibility, full-time employed; Autonomy full = Working-time autonomy, full-time employed; Flextime full = Flextime, full-time employed; Fixed part = Fixed schedule, part-time employed; Employer part = Employer-driven flexibility, part-time employed; Autonomy part = Working-time autonomy, part-time employed; Flextime part = Flextime, part-time employed. [1]Job and family commitment index variable: the higher the value of the index variable, the higher the job commitment and the lower the family commitment. Pooled sample; pairfam Waves 10–12. Data source: pairfam Version v12

5. Discussion

The present study analyzed the role of job and family commitment for the association between flexible working-time arrangements and work hours. Two research questions were addressed: Do job commitment and family commitment moderate the positive associations between flexible working-time arrangements and work hours? Do childless women and men and mothers and fathers with the same levels of job and family commitment work equally long hours with flexible working-time arrangements?

The results show that job and family commitment moderate the positive effects of flexible working-time arrangements on work hours among full-time employees: The more committed they were to their jobs and the less committed they were to family, the longer hours they worked with working-time autonomy and employer-driven flexibility. This finding supports work/family border theory (Clark, 2000), which posits that workers who identify more with their jobs than with their families, and who organize their lives accordingly, for example, by choosing jobs with high job-commitment expectations and rewards, are less successful at drawing and managing the borders between the work and family domains. This has negative consequences for family life, as longer work hours decrease vigor and increase exhaustion, and may thus lead to work-to-home-conflict (Pak et al., 2021), impair both partners' marital and family satisfaction (Liang,

2015) as well as their satisfaction with their work–life balance (Lott & Wöhrmann, 2022), and negatively affect the family setting (Chan & Margolin, 1994). Conflicts between the spheres of work and family in turn affect marital and family satisfaction, family performance, parenting behavior, and mental health (Reimann & Diewald, 2022; Reimann et al. 2022).

Two findings are surprising. First, among full-time employees there was no difference between working-time autonomy and employer-driven flexibility in terms of the impact on work hours: Full-time employees with high job commitment and low family commitment were at risk of working longer hours, irrespective of whether they controlled their own work hours (with possible indirect control by the employer) or their work hours were controlled directly by their employers. Second, with working-time autonomy and employer-driven flexibility, full-time employees with low job commitment and high family commitment worked similarly long hours compared with employees with fixed working schedules or flextime, for whom the risk of working longer hours was generally much lower.

The results show further that mothers' work hours were not affected by flexible working-time arrangements. Childless women, childless men, and fathers worked equally long hours with working-time autonomy, but mothers worked similar hours with working-time autonomy and employer-driven flexibility compared with fixed schedules or flextime. However, with the same levels of job and family commitment, mothers worked equally long hours with working-time autonomy and employer-driven flexibility compared with childless men, childless women, and fathers.

These results indicate that the previously observed gender differences with working-time autonomy (Lott & Chung, 2016) apply mainly to mothers rather than childless men, childless women, and fathers. Moreover, the analyses support previous assumptions (e.g., Schieman, 2006) that variations in job and family commitment are a reason for the gendered effects of working-time flexibility. Indeed, due at least in part to differences in their commitment to job and family, and to the fact that mothers still take on the lion's share of unpaid work (van der Lippe et al., 2011) and therefore (have to) identify more with the family role than the work role, they work shorter hours with working-time autonomy compared with the other gendered parental status groups.

The limitations of the present study should be briefly mentioned. First, for longitudinal analyses, more extensive information on individuals' working-time arrangements and their job and family commitment are needed. In the present study, the observed changes in flexible working-time arrangements were not sufficient to estimate panel models and to fully exclude problems of endogeneity. Therefore, it was not possible to disentangle the effect of employees' job and family commitment and their corresponding selection into specific jobs where high-performance management strategies are implemented or where the ideal worker culture is dominant. To disentangle determinants of work hours at the level of the workplace and at the level of the individual, future research should use panel analyses and include workplace characteristics.

Second, part-time employees had to be excluded from the analyses of gendered parental status differences due to the lack of variation between working-time arrangements among part-time employees and to methodological concerns. This means that the sample for female employees was rather selective. To investigate the role of commitment to job and family for a wider female working population, future research should take part-time employees into account.

Third, the transfer of the information on job and family commitment from Wave 12 to Waves 10 and 11 is problematic, as life events might have changed this commitment at least to some extent. The present study dealt with this limitation by indirectly considering one major life event, namely, childbirth (Evertsson, 2013; Mulvaney et al., 2011), and by investigating gendered parental status differences and taking the age of the youngest child into account. However, major work-related life events, such as unemployment, could be taken into account only insofar as employees were considered who were employed throughout the whole observation period. Nevertheless, future research will need longitudinal information on individuals' levels of commitment to job and family.

Fourth, although there is no gold standard for the measurement of job and family commitment, some studies have used established commitment scales, such as the Work Commitment Scale (Mulvaney et al., 2011), the Job Commitment Scale (Sumi, 2006), or commitment items from the World Values Survey (Evertsson, 2013). These scales or items were not included in whole or in part in the pairfam study. Thus, future research on the work–life-balance outcomes of flexible working-time arrangements should also use commitment items from established scales.

Fifth, only job and family commitment were observed in the data. However, other life roles or domains above and beyond job and family, such as political engagement, voluntary work, or pet care, can also be crucial in people's lives (Kelliher et al., 2019). Commitments other than job and family may therefore shape employees' work–life-balance outcomes with working-time flexibility and should be taken into account in future research. Finally, sixth, organizational differences, for example, regarding work culture (Abendroth & Reimann, 2018) could not be considered in the present study due to the lack of workplace information in the pairfam study. This is also an avenue for future research.

Despite these limitations, the important theoretical implication that emerges from this study is that flexible working-time arrangements vary in their meaning according to the level of personal and behavioral commitment of employees. Previous studies have already shown that the workplace and the implementation of flexible work arrangements—as a high-performance management strategy or a family-friendly workplace policy—influence employees' work–life-balance outcomes (Abendroth & Reimann, 2018). The present study extends this research by showing that workers' connectedness to certain roles is vital for work–life-balance outcomes with flexible working-time arrangements, and that this connectedness shapes the meaning of these arrangements at the level of the individual. It supports previous findings that it is not the working-time arrangements per se that contribute to certain work–life-balance outcomes, but that their meaning is shaped by the broader context—be it at the level of the country, with specific institutional regulations and cultures (Lott, 2020b), at the level of the workplace (Abendroth & Reimann, 2018), or, as shown by the present study, at the level of the individual.

Moreover, the present study shows that work–life-balance outcomes with working-time autonomy and employer-driven flexibility are shaped by job and family commitment to a similar extent. In the case of both arrangements, employees with high job and low family commitment appear to be faced with equally high work demands and to fail to draw a boundary between the work and family domains. For these employees, it does not seem to make a substantial difference whether they control their own work schedules or their work schedules are controlled by their employers. Given that highly job-committed employees with working-time autonomy and highly job-committed employees with employer-driven flexibility were found to work similarly long hours, the reasons for working longer hours with working-time autonomy do not seem to be the dynamics of gift exchange, whereby workers feel the need to reciprocate flexibility by working longer hours (Chung, 2019), or promising income and career prospects that lead them to invest extra time in their work. If this were the case, the work hours of highly job-committed employees would have been even longer with working-time autonomy than with employer-driven flexibility.

Finally, the present study indicates that the gendered effect of working-time autonomy on working hours (Lott & Chung, 2016) is shaped by parental status: Mothers did not work as long hours with working-time autonomy as did childless men or fathers, whereas childless women worked similarly long hours with this arrangement compared with men—irrespective of the latter's parental status. Moreover, job commitment and family commitment partly explain the variation in mothers' and men's/childless women's outcomes with working-time autonomy. This extends previous research that assumed that—but never tested whether—gendered differences in the connectedness to work and family roles are one crucial reason for the gendered meanings of flexibility, and it further shows that this meaning depends on women's and men's parental status.

The present study also has practical implications. It shows that female and male employees—with and without children—who have high job commitment and low family commitment are the vulnerable groups of workers who risk impairing their own and their families' well-being with working-time autonomy. These findings are concerning in light of (a) the increasing prevalence of working-time autonomy, especially among the growing number of remote workers (Felstead, 2022); and (b) increasing workloads (Kelly & Moen, 2020) with increasing work-schedule constraints, especially for workers who cannot control their work schedules. However, as employees with a high level of job commitment are most at risk of extending their work hours with working-time flexibility, company measures to prevent long work hours should be implemented and communicated in such a way that this specific group of employees are made aware of the risks of long working hours for their own and their families' well-being. To avoid alienating them, their interests and commitment should, however, be acknowledged.

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Data availability statement

The code used for the manuscript is available. The data can be requested at https://www.pairfam.de/.

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Information in German

Deutscher Titel

Länger arbeiten mit Arbeitszeitflexibilität: Nur wenn das berufliche Engagement hoch und das familiäre Engagement niedrig ist?

Zusammenfassung

Fragestellung: In dieser Studie wird untersucht, (a) ob berufliches Engagement und familiäres Engagement den positiven Zusammenhang zwischen flexiblen Arbeitszeitarrangements und Arbeitsstunden moderieren, und (b) ob kinderlose Frauen und Männer sowie Mütter und Väter mit gleichem beruflichem und familiärem Engagement bei flexiblen Arbeitszeitarrangements gleich lange arbeiten.

Hintergrund: Da die Arbeitszeitflexibilität an vielen Arbeitsplätzen aufgrund digitaler Technologien und Arbeitsüberlastung zunimmt, steigt auch das Risiko, länger zu arbeiten. Frühere Studien stellen geschlechtsspezifische Ungleichheiten bei den Arbeitszeiten von Beschäftigten mit flexiblen Arbeitszeitarrangements fest, die unter anderem auf das höhere berufliche und geringere familiäre Engagement von Männern zurückgeführt werden. Ob der Zusammenhang zwischen Arbeitszeitflexibilität und langen Arbeitszeiten tatsächlich nach beruflichem und familiärem Engagement variiert, wurde jedoch nicht untersucht.

Methode: Es wurden multivariate Analysen auf Basis der Daten des Beziehungs- und Familienpanels (pairfam) für die Jahre 2018, 2019 und 2020 durchgeführt. Die Stichprobe umfasste Daten von 4.568 Arbeitnehmerjahren, 1.666 Teilzeitbeschäftigtenjahren und 2.902 Vollzeitbeschäftigtenjahren.

Ergebnisse: Unter den Vollzeitbeschäftigten mit arbeitgeber-orientierter Flexibilität und Arbeitszeitautonomie arbeiteten nur diejenigen mit hohem beruflichem und geringem familiärem Engagement länger. Mütter mit diesen Regelungen arbeiteten weniger Stunden als kinderlose Frauen, kinderlose Männer und Väter, es sei denn, sie hatten das gleiche Maß an beruflichem und familiärem Engagement wie die drei letztgenannten Gruppen.

Schlussfolgerung: Diese Ergebnisse deuten erstens darauf hin, dass bei Vollzeitbeschäftigten mit flexiblen Arbeitszeitarrangements berufliches und familiäres Engagement treibende Faktoren für lange Arbeitszeiten sind; zweitens, dass geschlechtsspezifische Unterschiede bei den Arbeitsstunden durch Elternschaft geprägt sind; und drittens, dass diese Unterschiede zumindest teilweise auf Unterschiede im beruflichen und familiären Engagement zurückzuführen sind.

Schlagwörter: Arbeitszeitflexibilität, Arbeitszeitautonomie, arbeitgeber-orientierte Flexibilität, berufliches Engagement, familiäres Engagement, Geschlecht, Elternschaft, Moderationsanalyse

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