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Wheatley, Daniel

DOI:

[10.1177/0950017016631447](https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017016631447)

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*Document Version*

Peer reviewed version

*Citation for published version (Harvard):*

Wheatley, D 2017, 'Employee satisfaction and use of flexible working arrangements', *Work, Employment & Society*, vol. 31, no. 4, pp. 567-585. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017016631447>

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# Employee satisfaction and use of flexible working arrangements

Daniel Wheatley\*

Version accepted in *Work, Employment and Society* 6<sup>th</sup> January 2016

## Abstract

This paper considers the impact of flexible working arrangements (FWAs), using the *British Household Panel Survey* and *Understanding Society*, 2001-2010/11. Results of panel logit, ANCOVA and change-score analysis are indicative of positive impacts from use of a number of FWAs, including homeworking having positive effects for men *and* women on job and leisure satisfaction. However, findings reveal gaps in availability and use of FWAs, and highlight the gendered nature of flexible employment. Flexi-time, the most common FWA among men, has positive effects as it facilitates management of household responsibilities while maintaining full-time employment. Part-time and homeworking are also positive, consistent with men using FWAs with a greater degree of choice. Women more often are constrained in their use of FWAs, often into working reduced hours. Consequently, FWAs have negative impacts for some women, on job (part-time when used for extended periods, flexi-time), leisure (job-share, flexi-time), and life satisfaction (job-share).

**Keywords:** employee flexibility, flexible working arrangements, gender, satisfaction levels, work-life balance.

**\*Address for Correspondence:** Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, B15 2TT. **Email:** d.wheatley@bham.ac.uk

## Introduction

Within post-industrial economies, including the UK, there has been significant expansion of flexible working arrangements (FWAs) in the last two decades, driven by, amongst others, the work-life balance agenda. Work-life balance or 'integration' aims to improve conditions for workers by altering work practices (Atkinson and Hall, 2009:652; Fagan et al, 2012). It is

defined as the ability of individuals, regardless of age or gender, to combine work and household responsibilities successfully, or with minimum conflict (Clark, 2000: 751). The household-workplace interface has become increasingly blurred (Bulger et al, 2007), creating a range of challenges for workers and their households. This is recognized by the UK *Work-Life Balance Campaign*, introduced in March 2000, which promotes the potential mutual employee-employer benefits of work-life balance policies and practices (BIS, 2010). Since its inception there has been a rise in non-standard employment contracts, and increased emphasis on flexible working (Lewis and Plomien, 2009). The *Flexible Working Regulations (FWRs)*, since 2003, have offered workers a range of leave options and the legal right to request a FWA (see Deakin and Morris, 2012:750-2).<sup>1</sup>

This paper contributes, empirically, to our understanding of the impact of the use of FWAs, offering insight into the gendered nature of flexible employment. FWAs should, in principle, offer significant employee and employer benefits, however extant literature suggests that benefits cannot be assumed with respect to gender (Atkinson and Hall, 2009; Lewis and Humbert, 2010). Formal FWAs focused on the arrangement of work-time (flexi-time, compressed hours, annualised hours), reduction of work-time (part-time, term-time, job-share), and location of work (homeworking) are investigated using UK data from the *British Household Panel Survey* and *Understanding Society*, 2001-2010/11. The UK provides an interesting case for the investigation of FWAs due to its comparatively liberal stance on employment policy, including government/welfare policies encouraging employment among mothers (Lewis and Campbell, 2008:535-6). Panel logit analysis is applied to explore the relationship between the use of FWAs and measures of both ‘overall’ satisfaction (life satisfaction), and individual satisfaction with domains of life (job, amount of leisure time). ANCOVA and change-score analysis is subsequently conducted to provide causal evidence

on the impacts of FWA use, reflected in changes in satisfaction. The analysis considers arrangements individually following recent research which identifies patterns of availability and use vary considerably (McNamara et al, 2012:961). The focus is on FWAs which impact on the timing and location of paid work, rather than broader discussion of leave options (e.g. maternity/paternity leave, career breaks) and flexibility in contracts (e.g. temporary, subcontracting, self-employment). Understanding of the gendered nature of flexible employment is enhanced through investigating: (1) whether gendered patterns are present in availability and use of FWAs; (2) whether FWAs have impacts with respect to employee-reported satisfaction, and; (3) whether gender distinctions are present in impacts of FWAs?

### **Work-life balance and flexible working**

Drivers, and patterns, of FWA use vary considerably (van Wanroy et al, 2011), but remain gendered (Teasdale, 2013:400). FWAs have the potential to provide increased control over work. However, while men may use FWAs with a greater degree of choice, enabling retention of full-time hours and associated benefits (Sullivan and Smithson, 2007), women's FWA use may be more indicative of constraint (Atkinson and Hall, 2009). The impacts of the gendered nature of flexible employment, however, remain debated.

#### *'Win-win' outcomes and employee satisfaction*

Evidence is indicative of potential 'win-win' outcomes from work-life balance policies including FWAs. Benefits for employers include: healthier and more contented workforce; increased productivity; improved recruitment/retention; reduced absenteeism; reduced accommodation costs e.g. through hot-desking; reduced use of health-care benefits, and; knowledge sharing and skill development arising from workers covering roles or reorganisation of work tasks (Fagan et al, 2012:40; BIS, 2010). Meanwhile, employee

benefits include work-time flexibility (Tietze et al, 2009), reductions in work-life conflict and work-stress, and alleviation of the pressures of the ‘school run’ through avoiding peak journey times (Wheatley, 2012). Greater job satisfaction and improved work-life balance are reported among those using various arrangements (Gregory and Connolly, 2008; Kelliher and Anderson, 2008; Wheatley, 2012a). FWAs may offer women specific benefits as, compared to men, their job satisfaction is more likely to be reduced by work-life conflicts as they are more often ‘overloaded’ by household contribution (Ergeneli et al, 2010:692). It has, though, been suggested that use of FWAs can reduce job quality – identified as an important factor in determining relative job satisfaction (Brown et al, 2012) – and can have negative career implications (Kelliher and Anderson, 2008). Evidence on the impact of a number of arrangements, meanwhile, remains conflicting e.g. part-time (Fagan et al, 2012; Gregory and Connolly, 2008), requiring further investigation.

#### *Availability and use of FWAs*

Work-life balance policies have driven increased availability of FWAs (Gregory and Milner, 2009). There remain concerns, though, over the extent of formalisation, and gaps between policy and practice (Gambles et al, 2006). The *Work-Life Balance Campaign* has been criticised for its managerialist approach and focus on preserving existing constructs of work (Fleetwood, 2007). Employers increasingly require employee flexibility for the employer, including the use of numerical (fixed-term, agency, mandated part-time work) and functional (shift-work, overtime, varying work weeks using balancing-time accounts) flexibility (Raess and Burgoon, 2013:2-3). Work-time flexibility can be ‘employee-friendly’, e.g. providing greater control over the timing/location of paid work. Indeed, autonomy and control over paid work are argued as central to employees ‘enjoying’ work (Spencer, 2009:66). However some employers, focused on ‘employer-friendly’ flexibility, are unwilling to offer the same

flexibility they expect from employees. In particular, employers make ‘allowance decisions’ (Poelmans and Beham, 2008) and can reject requests citing ‘business need’, based on justifications set-out in the *FWRs* (see BIS, 2010). Employees report lesser access to arrangements where supervisors remain unsupportive of flexible working (McNamara et al, 2012:957). There is a need for balance between creating flexibility for employees, while also ensuring businesses can continue to operate. Meanwhile, FWAs need to be managed carefully to avoid resentment among co-workers burdened with additional responsibilities/workload due to reduced contributions of colleagues (Teasdale, 2013:409). The tendency for ‘employer-friendly’ flexibility, however, creates disconnect between work-life balance ideals, and practical design and implementation of FWAs. Gaps present between availability and use of FWAs may represent ‘symbolic’ policy implementation by employers (McNamara et al, 2012:938), but concurrently a lack of commitment to actively improve employee welfare. This raises questions regarding the availability of FWAs, and allowance decisions by employers which can impact their use, potentially creating difficulties for employees in achieving work-life balance (Gregory and Milner, 2009:123).

#### *FWAs and gendered employment*

Both policy and employer discourse presents work-life balance and flexible working as gender-neutral (Lewis and Campbell, 2008). However, organisations and occupations remain vertically and horizontally gendered (Teasdale, 2013:400). In practice work-life balance and flexible working continue to be viewed as a ‘women’s issue’. Women are more often constrained into working flexibly, as child/elder care remain primary drivers for FWAs (Atkinson and Hall, 2009:659). Organisational discourses regarding time and commitment, though, remain centred on the ‘ideal male worker’ defined by unbroken career trajectories, constant availability and visibility (Lewis and Humbert, 2010; Guillaume and Pochic, 2009).

The notion of the ideal worker, therefore, is in conflict with flexibility. Household responsibilities remain perceived as a private, and women's, concern influencing FWA design and allowance decisions (Lewis and Humbert, 2010). Those who do not fit the ideal worker model often face career marginalisation (Wheatley, 2012). Flexible working policies have been criticised for their perpetuation of the ideal worker model (Hall and Atkinson, 2006; Lewis and Humbert, 2010), and rigid conformity to '9 to 5' norms in work-time (Wight and Raley, 2009) resulting in negative career repercussions from the 'choice' to work flexibly (Wheatley, 2012; Atkinson and Hall, 2009:663). Where organisations equate commitment with long hours this perpetuates gendered social constructs and inequity at work *and* home (Lewis and Humbert, 2010:242). Problems are more pronounced among women, due to the greater likelihood of them using FWAs to facilitate the management of their dual role as domestic worker and mother (Sullivan and Smithson, 2007:458; Lewis and Humbert, 2010). As a consequence flexibility may be 'restrictive' rather than 'optimal' among women (Tomlinson, 2006:602). 'Optimal' flexibility may be found, for example among the highly skilled who are able to negotiate FWAs e.g. reductions in work-time following maternity leave. However, more common is 'restrictive' flexibility, characterised by potential career implications and lower-skilled employment (in part as employers assume other workers can 'step-in' and complete tasks of those working flexibly). The relative impact of the flexibility experienced by working women, though, remains unclear.

### **Flexible working: evidence from the extant literature**

The UK 2011 *Workplace Employee Relations Survey* (WERS) reveals relatively widespread availability of FWAs. Approximately 56% of employees report availability of part-time, 34% flexi-time, 30% homeworking, 19.3% job-share, 19% compressed hours, and 16% term-time (van Wanroy et al, 2011). It should be noted that FWAs remain more common in the public

than private sector (Wheatley, 2012; van Wanroy et al, 2011). In part, this reflects the nature of some private sector workplaces, but also evidences divisions between sectors in engagement with work-life balance. Evidence, though, is indicative of extensive availability, but only limited use, of FWAs (Gregory and Milner, 2009; Gambles et al, 2006). Organisations may offer employees informal flexibility, including working at home occasionally or varying the length of the working day, as an alternative. This is often highly valued by employees as it increases control over paid work (Hall and Atkinson, 2006:383). However, research indicates that informal flexibility is only common among managerial/professional workers (Golden, 2009:46-7). Moreover, it doesn't provide the consistency, including planning, necessary to facilitate work-life integration.

#### *Flexi-time, compressed hours, and annualised hours*

Flexi-time (or flextime), compressed hours, and annualised hours are formal FWAs which focus on the arrangement, rather than reduction, of work-time (Atkinson and Hall, 2009:651). Flexi-time refers to flexible starting and finishing hours, often centred on core hours e.g. 10am-3pm (Lee and DeVoe, 2012:299). It usually enables retention of full-time equivalent hours (Stavrou, 2005:931). Compressed hours involves working fewer but lengthier days e.g. nine day fortnight. Finally, annualised hours is an arrangement whereby employees complete a contracted number of hours per year, with allocation determined through agreement between employee and employer, or by the employer in response to 'business need' (Stavrou, 2005:931). In the latter case, though, annualised hours may result in uneven workloads and uncertainty over the length of the work day/week, potentially creating work-life imbalance.

Research has indicated that use of flexi-time may improve work-life balance (although evidence predominantly pertains to public sector applications) and reduce work pressure

(Russell et al, 2009:89-91). If implemented as part of an employee-centred strategy flexi-time can increase profitability of firms (Lee and DeVoe, 2012:311). Men may, more often, use this FWA as it does not reduce earning capacity (Atkinson and Hall, 2009:660). Practical limitations are present in use of flexi-time due to conflicts with meetings, and problems accessing workplace car parking if arriving later to work. This may create particular difficulties for women, who often combine their commute with the 'school-run' and other household tasks, potentially limiting the use, and benefits, of this FWA (Wheatley, 2012).

### *Part-time and reduced hours*

Part-time work, often defined as working under 30 hours per week, is a major source of employment in the UK, especially among women where it accounts for approximately 40% of employment (Connolly and Gregory, 2008:F52). Other reduced hours options include term-time which offers certainty over incomes while working only during term-times, with extended breaks during school holidays. This FWA is more common among the professions. It is also, in some cases, 'employer-friendly' and driven by the ability to contract employees for term-time only. Part-time work can represent an 'accommodation' option that employees 'choose' to better integrate work and life. Part-time work may increase job satisfaction among working women, although impacts on life satisfaction are less clear (Gregory and Connolly, 2008:F2). It can also reduce work pressure (Russell et al, 2009:89).

However, part-time work can reflect constraint resulting from household responsibilities and/or employer demands (Fagan et al, 2012:23; Fagan and Walthery, 2011:273-5), where employers use these FWAs to generate numerical flexibility. Part-time (and other reduced hours) jobs are often perceived poor quality and temporary employments (Fagan et al, 2012).

Evidence from the UK *Labour Force Survey* identifies 12.2% of employees working part-time report they do so due to lack of full-time opportunities (Green and Livanos, 2015:1226). Use of work-life balance policies which involve reduced hours (extending to job-share) are often less desirable as pay reductions render these arrangements financially infeasible for many employees (Hall and Atkinson, 2006:380). Reduced hours can improve work-life balance while maintaining an organisational presence, but imposes costs through work intensification and pay reductions (Lewis and Humbert, 2010:246). Other potential concerns include reduced responsibilities, reduced opportunities for promotion (including senior roles), increased work intensity (completing full-time workloads/not taking breaks), and poor workplace support (McDonald et al, 2009:153-4).

Women's position of constraint, which increases their propensity to use reduced hours FWAs results in them disproportionately experiencing the disadvantages of working part-time (Russell et al, 2009:83). The household division of labour, including provision of care for dependent children, reduces work-time among women who often face occupational downgrading from a career into lower-skilled, feminised employment (Fagan et al, 2012:23-4; Connolly and Gregory, 2008:F72). Women working part-time face significant barriers to career progression, including reduced training/development opportunities, and exclusion from decision-making (Tomlinson, 2006:602-3). In contrast both past, and more recent, evidence suggests men use part-time with a greater degree of choice, at either end of a career. Younger men work part-time while studying, while older men use part-time as part-retirement (Delsen, 1998:64; Gregory and Connolly, 2008:F4). These differences in part-time employment may, though, perpetuate gender segregation and gender wage gaps (Plantenga and Remery, 2010), with potential implications for reported satisfaction with work and other aspects of life.

### *Job-share*

Job-share is a less well-known and researched FWA, often bundled with other options within 'part-time' or 'reduced hours' categories (e.g. Poelmans and Beham, 2008; Stavrou, 2005). Job-share involves one full-time position being shared between two employees. Job-sharers are responsible for the entire job with each benefiting, in principle, from improved work-life balance while retaining full-time career opportunities and status. The job is divided, often equally between sharers, in respect to task/time/role or other employer-specific criteria (Branine, 2004:137). Salary, leave and other benefits are divided pro-rata. Job-share has the potential to provide 'win-win'. Employers benefit from improved productivity, resilience, leadership, commitment, retention and knowledge sharing (Stavrou, 2005). Difficulties encountered include: communication problems between sharers, often requiring other employees to act as a link; one sharer being more competent than the other, and; increased work intensity if sharers are each given full-time workloads (McDonald et al, 2009). Institutional barriers create further challenges. Job-share can result in marginalisation and reduced responsibilities (Foster, 2007:74), and may only be granted where 'seamless' work handover is possible (McDonald et al, 2009:149). In some cases part-time or homeworking may be favoured to avoid disruption and costs involved in searching for a job-share 'partner' (Poelmans and Beham, 2008:401). However, where jobs are extensive and senior, workload may act as a rationale for job-share (Durbin and Tomlinson, 2010:633). Most job-sharers are mothers, using it to maintain secure paid employment while enabling active involvement with children (Russell et al, 2009:83). Limited use of job-share could reflect inconsistent policies (including promotion/awareness) within organisations (Smith and Elliott, 2012:677).

### *Homeworking*

Homeworking takes a number of forms (working mainly, sometimes, or at various times at home). In addition to offering many of the common benefits associated with FWAs, it provides spatial flexibility allowing the commute to be avoided entirely (Wheatley, 2012). Homeworkers benefit from greater elasticity in both the location and timing of work, in some cases moulding work-time to their preferences (Tietze et al, 2009). A number of studies indicate greater job satisfaction (see Wheatley, 2012a; Morganson et al, 2010), with specific benefits derived from greater control and autonomy (Kelliher and Anderson, 2008:428). Greater satisfaction with amount/use of leisure time, though, is not as evident especially among women (Wheatley, 2012a:233). It has been suggested homeworking does not challenge the gendered nature of employment (Sullivan and Smithson, 2007:459). Women use homeworking to manage the need for flexibility where children and significant household responsibilities are present, including performing the school-run. Leisure benefits may thus be limited. In contrast, decisions to homework among men are often determined by, and to increase control over, work (Sullivan and Smithson, 2007:458). As with other FWAs homeworking can be 'employer led'. Employers may impose rigid temporal structures, often around '9 to 5' norms, and monitor employees due to concerns about misuse of work-time (Wight and Raley, 2009). Opportunities for homeworking are limited where managers remain sceptical. Employee concerns centre on negative career implications due to lack of face-to-face interaction, loss of social networks, and poor management practice limiting training/promotion. Invasion of privacy, due to health and safety policy, represents a considerable barrier to employee interest (Tietze et al, 2009). Homeworking can also increase work pressure, potentially undermining work-life balance (Russell et al, 2009:89).

FWAs have the potential to offer employee and employer benefits. Employees can benefit from improved work-life balance/integration. However, poor design and implementation may

create disconnect between the desire to provide ‘work-life balance policies’, and ‘business need’ which influences FWA allowance decisions that favour certain arrangements. Evidence on the impacts of flexible working appears conflicting. FWA use appears highly gendered, and the FWAs more commonly used by women are associated with a number of potential difficulties. The extant literature suggests men use FWAs, including flexi-time and homeworking, with a greater degree of choice, while women’s use of FWAs, including reduced hours, may be more indicative of constraint.

### **Empirical analysis: FWAs and employee satisfaction**

This paper uses panel data from the *British Household Panel Survey* (waves 11-19) and *Understanding Society* (wave 2) from 2001-2010/11. The BHPS is an annual survey of adult members (aged 16+ years) of a nationally representative sample of over 5,000 households (10,000 individuals) (BHPS, 2010). *Understanding Society* subsumed the BHPS in 2009, incorporating the BHPS sample in wave 2. *Understanding Society* is a multi-topic longitudinal sample survey of 40,000 households, aiming to improve understanding of social/economic change in Britain at household and individual levels (Understanding Society, 2012). Initial analysis uses cross-sectional data extracted from *Understanding Society* providing recent large-scale employee-reported data on availability and use of FWAs (availability not captured in the BHPS). The analysis considers responses to separate questions regarding availability and use, removing some of the conceptual concerns regarding conflation of these concepts (McNamara et al, 2012).

#### *Availability and use of FWAs*

Consistent with WERS2011, data from *Understanding Society* is indicative of widespread availability of FWAs: 73.5% of employees reported at least one FWA available in their

organisation. Meanwhile, FWAs remain more common in the public (83.7% report availability of at least one arrangement), than private, sector (67.2%). Table 1 presents data on both availability and use of FWAs, evidencing substantial gaps between availability and use of a number of FWAs and important gender distinctions. Flexi-time is the most commonly used FWA among men (19.3%). Around 15% of women also report using this FWA. Flexi-time is often more desirable from the employers perspective as they perceive these employees as contributing the same work effort. This arrangement is therefore likely to be more popular among employers than, for example, compressed hours. Compressed hours, while available at 12.5% of workplaces, is only used by 2% of employees. It creates challenges for employers, e.g. scheduling meetings, as it leaves employees absent for one or more days per week. Meanwhile, employees may be guarded against work leaking into non-work days.

#### TABLE 1 HERE

Part-time work is the most common FWA used by women (44.7%). Term-time is used predominantly by women, reflecting the continuing gender norms regarding provision of care for school-aged children (Garcia et al, 2007). It is also found mainly in the public sector, as expected given the application of this FWA in educational institutions. Gaps between availability and use are particularly pronounced for job-share. Availability of job-share is reported by 14.4% of men and 24.8% of women. However, just 2.1% of respondents report using job-share, with the majority women. A portion of those working part-time (Durbin and Tomlinson, 2010:633) and homeworking (Poelmans and Beham, 2008:401) may be cases where employers consider the impact of requirements for flexibility can be managed without the need for more ‘costly’ FWAs including job-share. Homeworking, while not as commonly

available, is relatively widespread in use among both men (10.1%) and women (4.7%), possibly reflecting ‘win-win’ as employees gain flexibility while employers benefit from reduced costs.

#### *Regression analysis: data and methodology*

To provide initial insight into the impact of the use of FWAs ordered logit regression is applied. This provides a robust method when using discrete ordered choice dependent variables. The dependent variables comprise employee-reported satisfaction with job, amount of leisure time, and life overall. These are Likert scale questions where 1 = completely unsatisfied, 4 = neither satisfied or unsatisfied, and 7 = completely satisfied. The dependent variables are regressed against employee-reported use of FWAs, and relevant controls. Separate analysis is performed for men and women following the distinctions evident in the descriptive analysis. Compressed and annualised hours, FWAs which focus on the arrangement rather than reduction of work-time, are combined in the regression models following the descriptive analysis which identified marginal (and statistically insignificant) use.<sup>2</sup> Control variables have been selected based on existing literature pertaining to satisfaction (see Dolan et al (2008) for a summary), including age; disability (Lucas, 2007); education (Khattab and Fenton, 2009); presence of dependent children (Garcia et al, 2007); economic activity, working hours (Philp and Wheatley, 2011), and; income.

An advantage of panel data is that it enables observation of changes in responses. The analysis, therefore, considers changes in satisfaction between periods using two methods, ANCOVA and change-score analysis, providing strong evidence regarding causality in the relationships observed. ANCOVA incorporates the measure of satisfaction for the previous year to adjust for initial differences in satisfaction, while change-score analysis considers the

differences in satisfaction between survey waves for those who report a change in status i.e. begin using a FWA. The approach follows Lim and Putnam's (2010) research into satisfaction, but is distinct in some respects. The BHPS enables consideration of change in satisfaction after one-year of FWA use, and the change two years after a respondent has reported use, the latter measure offering some indication of impact of more extended use. The BHPS also allows exploration of both domain (job, leisure) and overall life satisfaction (as opposed to only life satisfaction in Lim and Putnam (2010)). The logit models are summarized in Table 2.

#### TABLE 2 HERE

##### *Logit estimation results: demographics*

The controls included in the analysis provide results consistent with the extant literature. A non-linear relationship is found between satisfaction and age. Satisfaction increases with age, but diminishes in the middle part of individuals' lives. Married women generally report greater satisfaction (Khattab and Fenton, 2009:22). However, married men are less satisfied with their leisure time, likely reflecting the impact of dependents. Consistent with this finding, dependent children are associated with lower leisure satisfaction. School-age dependent children aged 5-11 and 12-15 are also associated with lower life satisfaction. Parents of school-age children face additional time constraints creating particularly negative impacts on leisure satisfaction (Garcia et al, 2007). Long term illness/disability has a strong negative association with satisfaction among men and women. These findings are consistent with Lucas (2007), but contra those of Khattab and Fenton (2009:20-1) who found no significant relationship. Education is less clear: men with degree level education report lower

satisfaction, possibly reflecting the role of expectations among those with degrees which may not be met at least early in the career (Khattab and Fenton, 2009:18).

#### *Time-use and occupation*

Lengthier working hours, overtime and housework are associated with dissatisfaction (Philp and Wheatley, 2011). Men reporting lengthier work-time do report greater job satisfaction, indicative of the mediating effect of occupation. Both men and women in more senior occupations, shown to work lengthier hours, generally report greater job satisfaction (and life satisfaction for women), but as expected given their lengthier work-time this is not borne out in leisure satisfaction. Among men the positive association between overtime and job satisfaction could reflect overtime being used to top-up income, perhaps where dependents are present. Income is positively associated with job satisfaction among men, and life overall for both genders. Working in the private sector is associated with lower satisfaction, although only statistically significant for job (men) and life (women).

#### *Arrangement and location FWAs*

Flexi-time is associated with lower life satisfaction among women, but greater satisfaction among men. These findings are indicative of the differing drivers of flexi-time for men and women. Flexi-time is often driven by the presence of dependent children among women, but its effectiveness is limited by the practicalities of the school-run and obtaining workplace car parking (Wheatley, 2012). Meanwhile, for men its use may represent more of a choice. Use of compressed/annualised hours is associated with lower job satisfaction among both men and women, but greater leisure satisfaction among men, indicative of these FWAs delivering some benefits to men. Homeworking is associated with greater job satisfaction, consistent with Wheatley, 2012a. Homeworkers also report greater satisfaction with leisure, indicative

of the wider benefits of the use of this FWA, although associations are not found between life satisfaction and homeworking.

#### *Reduced hours FWAs*

The panel logit models reveal part-time use among men is associated with greater job and life satisfaction. This relationship is not present among women when other factors are controlled, contra Gregory and Connolly (2008). The lack of statistical significance is perhaps not surprising given the high proportions of women using this arrangement, and could reflect heterogeneity in those using part-time. Part-time may reflect ‘optimal flexibility’ among some women. However, for others it may be, at least perceived, poor quality, represent a lack of ‘choice’ (Fagan et al, 2012; Green and Livanos, 2015), and low earnings and reduced career opportunities (McDonald et al, 2009:153-4). Meanwhile, the findings could evidence greater choice among men using part-time. Job-share, another reduced hours option, is also negatively associated with leisure and life satisfaction among women. This is consistent with some of the negative impacts reported (Durbin and Tomlinson, 2010), and for women could reflect the influence of other determinants (which also drive use of job-share), for example, dependent children (Wheatley, 2012a; Russell et al, 2009). Job-share does not generate statistically significant effects among men, likely due to the small numbers of men using this arrangement. Term-time work is associated with greater job satisfaction, likely a reflection of the mediating effect of occupations in which this FWA is present. While these findings are indicative of the use of FWAs affecting satisfaction, the impact of unobserved effects cannot be discounted. Further investigation is conducted using ANCOVA and change-score models summarized in Table 3.

#### *ANCOVA and change-score results*

The ANCOVA and change-score analysis provides important causal evidence on the impacts of the use of certain FWAs, revealing statistically significant positive effects on satisfaction. Among men the use of part-time, term-time, job-share, flexi-time and homeworking is significantly related to positive changes in at least one of the measures of satisfaction considered, evidencing a more general pattern of increases in satisfaction associated with use of FWAs. Working part-time is associated with positive effects on job, leisure and life satisfaction among men, although these effects are not present among those reporting use of this FWA for more extended periods (two year change-score analysis). Although uncommon in use, other reduced hours options appear positive among men in relation to job (term-time) and leisure (job-share) satisfaction.

Part-time work among women generates more nuanced results, further evidencing heterogeneity. Initial use of this FWA has significant positive effects on job satisfaction. However, more extended use (two years) is associated with statistically significant negative effects. Interestingly, the change-score models suggest use of part-time among women has significant positive effects on leisure satisfaction even following more extended use, a finding not present among women using any other FWA. The ANCOVA models indicate both job-share, and flexi-time, may have negative effects on leisure satisfaction among women (although this is not borne out in the change-score analysis). Job-share is also found to have significant negative effects on life satisfaction, reflecting the aforementioned difficulties associated with this FWA. Consistent with the logit models, term-time increases job satisfaction among women. Finally, homeworking has positive effects for both men (leisure) and women (job).

TABLE 3 HERE

In summary, the ANCOVA and change-score models confirm and extend the findings of the logit analysis with respect to the: (1) positive effects of flexi-time, part-time, job-share and term-time among men; (2) potential negative impacts for women using flexi-time and reduced hours FWAs (part-time and job-share), and; (3) the general positive impact (job and leisure satisfaction) of homeworking.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

This paper has contributed to our understanding of the impact of FWAs, reflected in changes in employee-reported satisfaction, offering insight into the gendered nature of flexible employment. An analysis of causality, using logit, ANCOVA and change-score analysis of BHPS/*Understanding Society* panel data, evidences divergent outcomes for men, for whom flexibility represents more of a choice, and women who are more constrained in their use of FWAs. The extant literature highlights the potential for ‘win-win’ in the use of FWAs. This potential, though, would suggest greater use than is presently found. Evidence is indicative of relatively widespread availability. However, FWA use remains inconsistent, relatively uncommon (with the exception of part-time and flexi-time), and gendered.

The empirical findings provide a number of specific contributions. Firstly, the empirical analysis evidences the presence of gendered patterns in use, and impacts, of FWAs. Men, more often, use flexi-time perhaps enabling increased flexibility and control over work while retaining full-time hours and associated benefits including pay (Stavrou, 2005:931). Reduced hours, where in use, may be utilised with a greater degree of choice by younger men (combined with study) or by older men as part-retirement (Delsen, 1998: Gregory and Connolly, 2008). In contrast, women more often reduce hours using part-time, or less

frequently job-share, as a result of constraints imposed by their greater household contribution. Secondly, strong causal evidence is found regarding the impacts of FWAs. A number of FWAs have statistically significant positive effects on satisfaction. Important gender specific findings are, however, present. Flexi-time has statistically significant positive effects on men's job and life satisfaction, but the logit and ANCOVA models suggest negative impacts for women reflecting the practical challenges for women using this FWA (Wheatley, 2012). Reduced hours have more nuanced impacts for women: the logit models find no statistically significant relationship between part-time and satisfaction, while the ANCOVA and change-score analysis suggests part-time may increase satisfaction. However, reduced hours FWAs have significant negative effects on job (part-time when used for extended periods) and leisure/life satisfaction (job-share). The findings pertaining to part-time could reflect a level of heterogeneity among women. Some women are able to use reduced hours 'optimally' e.g. those using part-time following maternity leave. In contrast, those using reduced hours for lengthier periods, often through constraint, may be 'trapped' in 'restrictive' flexible employment (Tomlinson, 2006). This corresponds with the notion of some part-time jobs being poor quality (McDonald et al, 2009:153-4) and supports Fagan et al's (2012:40) suggestion that efforts are needed to improve the quality of part-time options. It should also be noted, though, that the analysis does suggest women working part-time encounter benefits with respect to leisure satisfaction, perhaps through facilitating management of household contribution (see Garcia et al, 2007; Philp and Wheatley, 2011). Finally, the empirical analysis provides clear evidence of the positive impacts of homeworking on job and leisure satisfaction for both men *and* women, extending extant literature (Wheatley, 2012a) and evidencing the general benefits of increased control over both the timing and location of work, enabling better management of work alongside household responsibilities.

The research presented is subject to certain limitations. The *BHPS/Understanding Society* lacks employer-reported data on availability/use of FWAs which would enable assessment of gaps in knowledge pertaining to FWA availability. Meanwhile, research should also explore the relative incidence and impact of informal flexibility, shown to offer employees greater control over the distribution of work-time (Hall and Atkinson, 2006; Atkinson and Hall, 2009). It will also be important for future research to consider the effects of the recent extension of ‘right to request’ in the *FWRs*. What the findings do suggest is that FWAs have positive effects on satisfaction, but that current implementation of formal FWAs in UK organisations remains heavily gendered, and is not generating positive outcomes for at least some employees. There remain significant availability-use gaps for certain FWAs, and less than desirable outcomes for some women using reduced hours. The problems associated with reduced hours options are evident in the lower employee-reported satisfaction. Moreover, these problems are highly gendered due to the predominance of use among mothers (Fagan et al, 2012) for whom these FWAs may provide the only route to continued employment. The findings suggest current policy and workplace practice needs to be revisited. Employers remain unwilling, especially given recent economic uncertainty, to offer truly ‘employee-friendly’ policies, and instead focus on ‘business need’. This is particularly apparent in the constrained use of part-time (Green and Livanos, 2015). Employers may view availability as important to be seen as engaging in ‘good’ HR practice, but remain averse to ‘costs’ associated with granting arrangements (Poelmans and Beham, 2008). This approach, though, preserves current workplace practice designed around the ideal worker (Lewis and Humbert, 2010; Fleetwood, 2007). The findings in this paper indicate that flexibility should not only be granted in conditions of constraint: offering flexibility with a greater degree of ‘choice’ has significant potential benefits in regard to employee satisfaction. A central implication of these

findings is that employers need to: (1) dissolve gendered constructs which remain attached to flexible working; (2) facilitate 'choice' in the use of FWAs, and; (3) improve the quality of reduced hours options. Additionally, the findings have important broader implications for policymakers and society, through evidencing limitations in the *FWRs*, and the persistence of social norms which impact care arrangements and act as a source of constraint among many working women, perpetuating gendered structures within organisations *and* home. Change needs to be enacted if the benefits of flexible working are to be truly realised.

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<sup>1</sup> The Flexible Working (Procedural Requirements) Regulations, SI 2002/3207, and Flexible Working (Eligibility, Complaints and Remedies) SI 2002/3236 are amendments to the Employment Act 2002, s47, consolidated in the Employment Rights Act 1996, ss80F–80I. Initial policy applied to parents of young and disabled children. New laws on leave options included parental, paternity and adoption leave, while maternity leave rights were extended. The *FWRs* were extended to include carers of certain adults and parents of older children in 2007, employees with parental responsibility for children under 16 in 2009, and from June 2014, every employee after 26 weeks employment service.

<sup>2</sup> Compressed hours is collected directly in *Understanding Society*, but in the BHPS is derived from '9 day fortnight' and '4½ day week'.

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### **Author Biography**

**Dr Daniel Wheatley** FRSA is Principal Lecturer in Economics and School Standards and Quality Manager at Nottingham Business School. He completed his PhD entitled: 'Working 9 to 5? Complex patterns of Time Allocation among Managers and Professionals in Dual Career Households,' in December 2009. His particular areas of interest are flexible working, time-use, work-life balance, travel-to-work, and subjective well-being. His work has appeared in *Cambridge Journal of Economics; Gender, Work and Organization; Industrial Relations Journal; New Technology, Work and Employment*, and; *Personnel Review*. He can be contacted at: [daniel.wheatley@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:daniel.wheatley@ntu.ac.uk).

Table 1: Availability and use of flexible working arrangements, *Understanding Society* 2010/11

Flexible working arrangement	Available (%)			Use Arrangement (%)		
	Men	Women	$\chi^2$	Men	Women	$\chi^2$
Flexi-time	27.7	31.0	***	19.3	14.9	***
Compressed hours	11.9	13.0	**	2.3	1.9	
Annualised hours	6.3	6.8		2.8	1.1	***
Part-time	37.1	69.4	***	15.3	44.7	***
Term-time	10.3	22.7	***	2.7	9.5	***
Job-share	14.4	24.8	***	0.9	2.7	***
Homeworking	14.7	11.2	***	10.1	4.7	***
n	6,493	8,100		3,972	6,745	

Source: Understanding Society Wave 2, 2010-11.

Notes: Figures show percentages of employees reporting availability and use of flexible working arrangements.  $\chi^2$  significance of 1%, 5% and 10% are denoted by \*\*\*, \*\* and \* respectively.

Table 2: Ordinal logit panel models: satisfaction and flexible working, *BHPS* and *Understanding Society*

Ordinal logit panel models						
Variable	Men			Women		
	Satisfaction with job	Satisfaction with amount of leisure time	Satisfaction with life	Satisfaction with job	Satisfaction with amount of leisure time	Satisfaction with life
Working hours	0.005**	-0.022***	0.002	-0.008***	-0.024***	-0.007***
Overtime	0.007***	-0.036***	-0.005**	-0.003	-0.035***	-0.013***
Housework	-0.001	0.001	-0.002	0.003*	-0.008***	-0.002
Care	0.002	-0.003	-0.005***	0.004***	-0.011***	-0.011***
Age	-0.119***	-0.111***	-0.145***	-0.066***	-0.057***	-0.074***
Age <sup>2</sup> /100	0.148***	0.137***	0.171***	0.081***	0.069***	0.079***
Long term illness/disability	0.022	-0.197**	-0.352***	-0.146*	-0.261***	-0.398***
<i>Marital status: reference is single/never married or in civil partnership</i>						
Married	-0.009	-0.105***	0.331***	0.191***	0.060**	0.478***
Separated/divorced	-0.010	-0.112**	-0.113**	0.006	-0.127***	-0.120***
Widowed	0.018	0.176**	-0.196***	-0.108**	0.051	-0.254***
No. children under 2	0.085*	-0.436***	0.105**	-0.061	-0.637***	0.267***
No. children 3-4	0.091*	-0.260***	0.067	-0.061	-0.552***	-0.062
No. children 5-11	0.030	-0.125***	-0.033	0.039*	-0.272***	-0.044*
No. children 12-15	0.012	-0.082***	-0.066**	0.069**	-0.177***	-0.127***
<i>Education level: reference is degree</i>						
A Level	0.068*	0.176***	0.037	0.154***	-0.073**	-0.085**
GCSE	0.269***	0.302***	0.175***	0.274***	-0.019	-0.010
No qualifications	0.439***	0.374***	0.258***	0.366***	0.073	0.055
<i>Occupation group (UK SOC2000): reference is elementary occupations</i>						
Managers and senior officials	0.304***	-0.152***	0.067	0.160**	0.007	0.136**
Professionals	0.357***	-0.095	0.158**	0.165**	-0.029	0.159**
Associate professional & tech	0.224***	-0.070	0.071	0.131**	0.182***	0.170***
Admin. and secretarial	-0.242***	-0.158**	-0.297***	-0.068	0.113**	0.020
Skilled trades	0.212***	0.012	0.134**	-0.182	0.144	0.096
Personal service	0.233***	-0.061	-0.067	0.284***	0.123**	0.173***
Sales and customer service	-0.116	-0.311***	-0.273***	-0.094	-0.006	-0.009
Process, plant, machine ops.	-0.017	0.040	0.006	-0.314***	0.155	0.088
Private sector	-0.240***	-0.249***	-0.167***	-0.163***	-0.124***	-0.109***
Annual income ('000s)	0.009***	0.001	0.008***	-0.001	-0.002*	0.004***
<i>Use of flexible working arrangements</i>						
Flexi-time	0.199***	0.103***	0.096***	-0.022	0.012	-0.061**
Compressed/annualised hrs	-0.049**	0.068***	-0.002	-0.063***	-0.013	-0.035
Part-time	0.482***	0.069	0.271***	0.046	-0.028	0.015
Term-time	0.139**	0.079	-0.067	0.037*	0.039	0.015
Job-share	0.148	-0.021	-0.086	-0.082	-0.189**	-0.224***
Homeworking	0.340***	0.298***	0.146	0.572***	0.210**	0.123
<b>Model Diagnostics</b>						
Pseudo R-squared	0.015	0.029	0.015	0.010	0.020	0.012
LR statistic	894.070	1994.508	811.731	678.718	1537.945	764.006
Prob(LR statistic)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Log likelihood	-29541.110	-32882.630	-27265.630	-32119.940	-37181.440	-31709.400
Restr. log likelihood	-29988.140	-33879.880	-27671.490	-32459.300	-37950.420	-32091.400
Avg. log likelihood	-1.446	-1.699	-1.412	-1.399	-1.720	-1.470
Panel observations	20,424	19,359	19,312	22,962	21,616	21,576

Source: *British Household Panel Survey* and *Understanding Society*, 2001-2010/11.

Notes: significance levels of 1%, 5% and 10% are denoted by \*\*\*, \*\* and \* respectively.

Table 3: Panel change models: satisfaction and flexible working, *BHPS* and *Understanding Society*

Variable	Panel change models								
	ANCOVA: Satisfaction with job <sup>a</sup>	Change in satisfaction with job (1 year) <sup>b</sup>	Change in satisfaction with job (2 year) <sup>b</sup>	ANCOVA: Satisfaction with amount of leisure time <sup>a</sup>	Change in satisfaction with leisure (1 year) <sup>b</sup>	Change in satisfaction with leisure (2 year) <sup>b</sup>	ANCOVA: Satisfaction with life <sup>a</sup>	Change in satisfaction with life (1 year) <sup>b</sup>	Change in satisfaction with life (2 year) <sup>b</sup>
<b>Men</b>									
Satisfaction (previous year)	0.769***			0.889***			1.123***		
<i>Use of flexible working arrangements</i>									
Flexi-time	0.018	0.127***	0.077***	0.067	-0.037	-0.013	0.093**	0.033	0.020
Compressed/annualised hrs	0.008	-0.014	-0.037	0.074	-0.027	-0.053	0.056	-0.003	-0.050**
Part-time	0.469***	0.147**	0.032	0.198**	0.122***	0.040	0.212***	0.100***	-0.029
Term-time	-0.044	0.207**	0.190**	-0.017	-0.057	-0.048	-0.203	0.094	-0.011
Job-share	0.143	-0.094	0.084	-0.108	0.012	0.395**	0.018	-0.100	0.106
Homeworking	-0.050	0.241**	0.029	-0.027	0.418***	0.244***	0.031	0.101	0.014
Constant	(omitted)	-0.021**	-0.006*	(omitted)	-0.029***	0.014***	(omitted)	-0.009	0.004
Pseudo R-squared	0.085	0.001	0.001	0.128	0.001	0.001	0.137	0.001	0.001
Panel observations	17,777	22,253	20,379	17,193	21,268	17,443	17,122	21,180	17,358
<b>Women</b>									
Satisfaction (previous year)	0.670***			0.841***			1.150***		
<i>Use of flexible working arrangements</i>									
Flexi-time	-0.073**	0.119***	0.006	-0.080**	0.018	0.027	-0.019	-0.002	0.010
Compressed/annualised hrs	-0.059	0.023	-0.025	-0.005	0.049	-0.054	-0.093**	0.082***	-0.033
Part-time	0.077*	0.069*	-0.043***	0.030	0.069**	0.094**	0.055	0.047*	-0.007
Term-time	0.071	0.155***	0.032	0.024	0.044	0.003	0.080	-0.032	-0.011
Job-share	-0.080	0.061	0.074	-0.096**	0.106	-0.089	-0.115**	-0.060	-0.126**
Homeworking	0.429***	0.191*	0.265***	0.033	0.117	0.035	0.117	-0.087	0.021
Constant	(omitted)	-0.055***	-0.035***	(omitted)	0.036***	0.044***	(omitted)	-0.018**	-0.012
Pseudo R-squared	0.066	0.001	0.001	0.115	0.001	0.001	0.131	0.001	0.001
Panel observations	19,814	26,222	23,913	19,083	24,919	20,843	19,010	24,833	20,769

Source: *British Household Panel Survey* and *Understanding Society*, 2001-2010/11.

Notes: significance levels of 1%, 5% and 10% are denoted by \*\*\*, \*\* and \* respectively.

<sup>a</sup> Estimated with ordinal logit regression with all control variables.

<sup>b</sup> Estimated with OLS.