Factors Influencing Flextime Usage Among Employed Married Women

The 1997 Current Population Study was used to examine characteristics of flextime users among employed, married women and factors influencing the odds that an employed, married woman would use flextime. Odds of using flextime are greater for employed married women with higher education, a preschool aged child, who reside in the west or Midwest compared to the south, and who are employed in farming, fishery, or forestry related occupations compared to management or professional occupations.

Jodi R. Billings, University of Missouri[1]
Deanna L. Sharpe, University of Missouri[2]

Introduction

In 1960, about 32% of married women were employed. By 1996, that figure had almost doubled (61.2%). The labor force participation rate of married women with children under 6 years old changed even more dramatically; at 18.6% in 1960, by 1996, the rate was 62.7% (US Bureau of the Census, 1997). These statistics suggest that married women tend to be employed and, once employed, to remain so even after children are added to the family.

Several factors may account for these trends. In the economic boom following World War II, there was substantial growth in jobs such as health care, retail, sales, and clerical where female labor predominated. Women have attained higher levels of education in recent years. In 1960, 42.5 percent of women had completed four years of high school or more; 5.8 percent of women had completed four years of college or more. In 1996, 81.6 percent of women had completed four years of high school or more; 21.4 percent of women had completed four years of college or more. Women earned half of the master's degrees and over a third of the doctoral degrees awarded in 1994 (US Bureau of the Census, 1997). During the 1980s and 1990s, many families have compensated for declining real wages and an increasing tax burden by sending the wife into the labor market to work or, if already employed, to work more hours (Mishel, Bernstein, and Schmitt, 1997).

A critical problem facing families with two working spouses and children is balancing time demands of work and family. Hochschild (1997) identifies three shifts that working parents have. The first shift is work. The second shift is time spent in household activities such as household chores, domestic management, and parenting. Research indicates that employed women undertake the majority of the second shift, resulting in high levels of work/family conflict (Fox and Nickols, 1983; Hochschild, 1989, 1997; Nickols and Metzen, 1982; Robinson, 1977; Sanik, 1981). The third shift is time spent with children dealing with the emotional consequences of increased time spent in the first and second shifts. The third shift has come to be known as the time bind, and it is at the heart of work and family conflict.

Galinsky & Stein (1990) found that a flexible work schedule or "flextime" is employee's first choice for helping loosen the time bind and meet conflicting work and family time demands. With a flextime schedule employees choose their arrival and departure time, working a certain number of required hours per day and work week. Employees must be on the job during a core time set by the employer. Introduced in the US in the 1970's, flextime is now used by about a third of workers (Work and Family Resource Kit, 1989).

Flextime has recently been the focus of public policy. The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) passed by Congress nearly 60 years ago mandates premium pay for working over 40 hours per week. Designed to give employers an economic incentive to limit hourly work time, it now hinders flexible work schedules. Amendments to the FLSA that would ease restrictions on overtime hours have been introduced in Congress. The Federal Employees Flexible and Compressed Work Schedules Act was passed in 1978, amending the FSLA to give Federal employees the opportunity to use flexible work schedules. In 1997, Senator John Ashcroft of Missouri sponsored the Family Friendly Workplace Act which would allow private sector employees to take time and a half off in lieu of time and a half pay; banking up to 240 hours and retaining the option of exchanging banked hours for pay at a later date, if desired (Workers, 1997).

Proponents of changing the FLSA argue that the 60 year old law does not meet current social and economic needs (Workers, 1997). Opponents of changing the FLSA fear offers of compensatory time in lieu of pay would

only intensify problems of rising work hours and poorly distributed working time (Golden, 1997). To inform the flextime debate, it is important to examine the characteristics of those who do and do not use flextime as well as the factors associated with flextime use.

To date, relatively few studies of flextime have focused on a broad segment of the labor market. Rather, most studies have been localized surveys of employer and employee opinion of the value of a flextime schedule. The purpose of this paper is to use data from the 1997 Current Population Survey to compare the characteristics of employed, married women who do and do not use flextime and to examine the factors that influence the probability that an employed, married woman will use a flexible work schedule (flextime).

Review of Literature

Presser (1989) and Mellor (1986) used the Current Population Survey, May 1985 Supplement to analyze flextime use. Presser (1989) found that married women were more likely to have flexible work schedules than unmarried women, and mothers of school-aged children were more likely than mothers of preschool age children to use flextime. Mellor (1986) found that 9.1 million full-time workers reported using flextime; men reported higher incidence of use than women; whites were more likely than Black or Hispanics to use flextime; and flexible work schedules were most common in age groups 35 to 44 and 65+.

Ezra and Deckman (1996) used the Survey of Federal Employees to see what family friendly policies the government provided for full-time, white collar employees and how satisfied employees were in balancing work and family. Their study examined the influence gender, marital status, flexible work schedule, compressed work schedule, presence of children under age 6, child care availability/satisfaction and spousal employment had on mother's, father's, and nonparent's satisfaction with work/family balance. Results indicated that mothers of children under age 6 were less satisfied with work/family balance than mothers with older children, and parents with flexible work schedules were more satisfied with work/family balance compared with parents who did not use this type of work schedule.

Ralson (1990) examined flextime use by women employed by two southern companies. Winett and Neale (1980) considered gender, age, number and age of children and years on the job as factors affecting flextime use. Both studies found employees on flextime schedules reported decreased absenteeism, easier coordination of work and family responsibilities, and increased job productivity. Bohen and Viveros-Long (1981) compared standard schedules to flextime in two agencies. Their sample was predominately white and almost evenly split between women and men. Consistent with other studies, results indicated that flextime workers experienced less work/family stress than standard time employees, and 33% of flextime employees reported spending more time with family.

Most existing research has compared use of a traditional work schedule with a flextime schedule. Employees or employers report on the benefits or problems with flextime. This study adds to existing research in two important ways. First, it examines the usage of flextime by married women while controlling for factors such as race, occupation, and region of residence, factors that have received little or no attention in previous research. Second, this study uses the 1997 Current Population Survey, the most recent national survey available on flextime.

Method

Data

This study uses data from the Current Population Survey, May 1997 Supplement on work schedules. The survey is a household sample survey focusing on the noninstitutionalized civilian population of the United States. Census Bureau staff collected the data using interviews conducted May 1997 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1998). Data on work schedules were asked of persons 15 years old or older who were currently employed.

Sample

Employed, married women were selected for this study because research indicates this group is likely to face competing time pressures from work and family (Fox and Nickols, 1983; Hochschild, 1989, 1997; Nickols and Metzen, 1982; Presser, 1989; Robinson, 1977; Sanik, 1981). Women with and without children at home were selected because, although children do increase time pressures between work and family, they are not the only reason flextime is used. Focusing on employed, married women with and without children, it is possible to examine the influence of presence of children on the probability of flextime usage while controlling for the influence of marital status and other socio-economic and demographic factors. Sample size was 9,204; 2,784 used flextime while 6,420 did not. Responses in the logistic regression were weighted to give a more accurate representation of the United States population. Due to statistical software limitations, responses were not weighted in the t-test results.

Variables

The dependent variable was dichotomous, coded 1 if the employed, married woman used a flextime schedule, 0 otherwise. Independent variables were selected to account for variations in personal, family, and employment characteristics and included: age, education, and race of the woman; number of household members; youngest child less than 6 years old, youngest child between age 6 and 11, youngest child between age 12 and 17; family income level, homeownership, woman's occupation and whether or not she is a government worker.

Age was measured in years. Education level was measured as a set of categorical variables: less than high school, high school degree (reference category in the multivariate analysis), some college, earned college degree, earned master's or doctoral degree. Higher educational levels are expected to increase the odds of an employed, married woman using flextime.

Race is measured as a set of categorical variables: white (reference group), Black, Indian, or Asian. Previous research indicates that whites have a higher rate of flextime use than Blacks or Hispanics (Mellor, 1986).

Larger household size and young children can increase family time demands. The number of household members is a continuous variable. Age of the youngest child was divided into three categorical variables: youngest child less than 6 years old, youngest child between age 6 and 11, and youngest child between age 12 and 17. Having a larger family and having a preschool age young child are expected to be associated with a greater likelihood of using a flextime work schedule.

Income was measured as a series of categorical variables: < $10,000, $10,000-$19,999, $20,000-$29,999, $30,000-$39,999, $40,000-$49,999, $50,000-$59,999, $60,000-$74,999, and > $75,000 (reference group). Home-ownership (coded 1 if homeowner; 0 otherwise) was included to proxy both home maintenance and repair time demands and wealth holdings.

Region of residence was included to control for regional differences in availability of flextime. In the multivariate analysis, the southern region was the reference category.

Not all occupations are amenable to a flextime work schedule. To control for possible occupational differences in flextime availability, dummy variables for occupation were used in the analysis. Occupations were divided into managerial/professional/sales (the reference category in the multivariate analysis), service, production/manufacturing, and farm/forestry/fishing. It is expected that use of flextime schedules is more likely for women employed in management and professional jobs versus other occupations.

Previous research indicates that a large percentage of federal workers use flexible work schedules. It is expected that government workers would be more likely to use a flexible work schedule (Ezra and Deckman, 1996). Government worker was coded 1 if employed by federal, state, or local government; zero otherwise.

Empirical model

Since the dependent variable in this study, use of flextime, is a dichotomous variable, ordinary least squares regression is not appropriate (Aldrich and Nelson, 1984). Consequently, logistic regression is used in this study.

To assess the influence of selected socio-economic and demographic factors on use of flextime by employed, married women, the following model was used:

$$\text{Probability(use flextime)} = 1/(1 + e^{-z}) \qquad (1)$$

where z is a linear combination

$$z = b_0 + \Sigma b_i x_i + e$$

and b_0 is a constant; b_i is a vector of parameter coefficients; x_i is the vector of independent variables; e is a random error term. In this form, the dependent variable can be thought of as the probability that an employed married woman will use a flextime work schedule. To facilitate computation, the model may be rewritten as:

$$\text{Log [probability(use flextime)/probability(do not use flextime)]} = b_0 + \Sigma b_i x_i + e \qquad (2)$$

Using this format, the dependent variable is called the log odds where odds are defined as the ratio of the probability that an event will occur to the probability that it will not. The b_is are interpreted as measuring change in the log

odds given a one unit change in the independent variable. Computational results for the log odds give the sign and level of statistical significance for each independent variable.

Findings

Means of selected characteristics of employed, married women who do and do not use flextime are reported in Table 1. A t test of mean differences was performed to indicate statistically significant mean differences at the 0.001 level. Results indicated that, compared with those who did not use flextime, flextime users had relatively higher levels of education; were more likely to be white, to have household before tax income of $75,000 and above, reside in the Midwest, to work in management or farm related occupations and to not be a government worker.

Results of the logistic regression are reported in Table 2. Since it is easier to think of odds versus log odds, discussion will focus on odds[3]. All else equal, the odds of using a flextime schedule are significantly higher for employed, married women with a master's degree or higher compared to employed, married women with a high school degree. However, having less than a high school diploma resulted in decreased odds of flextime usage compared to having a high school degree.

Having a young child less than six years of age significantly increased the odds of working a flextime schedule after controlling for other factors. This result is consistent with research that indicates children under age six are relatively more time intensive and their presence is correlated with higher levels of work/family conflict compared with school aged children (Higgins, Duxbury, and Lee, 1994).

Employed, married women with household before tax income levels ranging from $10,000 to $74,999 have decreased odds of using flextime compared with those having household incomes of $75,000 and above.

All else equal, married women employed in the production/manufacturing sector had lower odds of using flextime compared with women employed in management, professional, or sales occupations. But, married women employed in farming, forestry, or fishing had higher odds of utilizing flextime compared to those employed in sales, management, or professional, a surprising result that may be due to relatively low numbers in farm related work.

Residence in the West or Midwest was associated with greater odds of working a flextime schedule compared to residence in the South. Contrary to expectations and previous research (Ezra and Deckman, 1996), government workers were less likely to use a flexible work schedule.

Contrary to previous research (Ezra and Deckman, 1996; Mellor, 1986; Presser, 1989; Winett and Neal, 1980) age, race, having the youngest child between 6-11 or 12-17 were not significant factors in the analysis. Also not significant were the number of household members, homeownership, residence in the Northeast (compared to the South), and working in service related occupations (compared to managerial or professional occupations).

From the results of the descriptive and multivariate analysis, a general profile of the flextime user among employed, married women emerges. The flextime user is likely to be white, highly educated, with a family before tax income of $75,000 or more, employed in a managerial/professional or farming occupation. She is more likely to have a preschool aged child, and live in the West or Midwest

Summary and Suggestions for Future Research

Married women in the workforce, especially those with preschool aged children, face competing time demands for work, household management, and child care - often resulting in a tight time bind and conflicting pressures from work and home. Flextime can help these women loosen that time bind, meeting family demands without having to sacrifice time on the job and employment income.

Results of this study suggest that there are significant differences between those who do and do not use flextime among employed, married women. Higher levels of education, income, and certain types of occupations are significant factors associated with greater odds of flextime use. These findings inform the public policy debate surrounding amendment of the FLSA and highlight the need for additional research. For example, findings of this study indicate employed, married women with higher levels of education have greater odds of using flextime. But, does that mean those women with lower levels of education do not prefer a flextime schedule or that their access to such an option is limited? If the reasons for not using a flextime schedule are based in personal preference, no change in the FLSA is warranted. However, if structural barriers to flextime usage exist in the occupations that are most often filled by women with relatively low education, changing the FLSA could be beneficial. Results of this study suggest there are occupational differences in the odds of using flextime, lending support to the notion that some occupations may currently be more amenable to flexible work schedules than others. Results also indicate that the presence of a preschool age child and household before tax income level impact flextime usage. The highly educated and those with higher household income levels may have greater work autonomy hence more opportunity to use flexible work schedules. Working mothers may use flextime to balance childcare needs and work schedules.

Table 1

t-test of means of independent variables for those
who do and do not use flextime (Unweighted)

	Use Flextime (N = 2784)	Do not use Flextime (N = 6420)
Age	40.84	40.85
Education		
< high school	.04[a]	.08
High school	.32	.35
Some college	.30	.28
College	.22	.19
MS or Ph.D. degree	.12	.09
Race		
White	.90	.87
Black	.05	.08
Indian	.01	.01
Asian	.04	.04
Number of children	.85	.82
Number HH members	3.27	3.35
Youngest child < 6	.15	.15
Youngest child 6-11	.28	.29
Youngest child 12-17	.13	.14
Income level		
Less than 10,000	.01	.02
10,000 - 19,999	.04	.05
20,000 - 29,000	.08	.12
30,000 - 39,000	.12	.15
40,000 - 49,000	.13	.14
50,000 - 59,000	.14	.15
60,000 - 74,999	.15	.15
75,000 and above	.32	.22
Homeownership	.84	.81
Region		
Northeast	.18	.19
West	.26	.23
Midwest	.29	.24
South	.27	.34
Occupation		
Mgmt/Prof/Sales	.83	.76
Service	.10	.11
Production/Mfg.	.04	.12
Farm/Forestry/Fishing	.03	.01
Government worker	.15	.25

[a] Statistically significant differences at the .001 level
are indicated by bold print.

Table 2

Logistic regression coefficients for the
logged-odds of an employed married woman
using flextime (N=9204 Weighted)

Variables	B
Age	0.005
Education	
< high school	-0.361*
Some college	0.081
College	0.167
Master's or Ph.D.	0.334**
Race	
Black	-0.203
Indian	-0.025
Asian	-0.006
Number of HH members	-0.044
Youngest child <6	0.215*
Youngest child 6-11	0.177
Youngest child 12-17	-0.000
Income	
< 10,000	-0.547*
10,000-19,999	-0.504**
20,000-29,999	-0.535**
30,000-39,999	-0.508**
40,000-49,999	-0.407**
50,000-59,999	-0.294**
60,000-74,999	-0.252**
Homeownership	0.041
Region	
Northeast	-0.104
West	0.224**
Midwest	0.280**
Occupation	
Service	0.051
Production/Mfg.	-1.134**
Farm/Forestry/Fishing	1.016**
Government Worker	-0.906**
Constant	-0.638**
-2 log likelihood	10692.98

**$p < .001$
*$p < .01$

The Current Population Survey did not collect data on satisfaction with flextime. We do not know if employees and employers are pleased with the flextime arrangement or whether the employers were able to realize

benefits of increased morale, increased productivity, or decreased absenteeism found in company specific research. Also, we do not know the specific household or family related tasks that an employee was either able to complete or able to complete in a more efficient manner because of using flextime. In future research, it would be informative to gather such information along with data on characteristics of those who do and do not use flextime. This study focused on the use of flextime by employed married women. Future research could examine flextime use by employed single parents or compare flextime use of employed fathers and mothers.

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Endnotes
[1] Master's candidate, Consumer and Family Economics Department
[2] Assistant Professor, Consumer and Family Economics Department
[3] Calculation of the odds requires taking the antilog of equation 2. The sign of the logged odds or the odds are the same.