

Submission to PAA-2006 conference

Paper Title:

Disparities in Working Time:

A Cross-National Analysis of the Distribution of Work Hours.

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Panels:

First choice panel: 707 -- International Perspectives on Inequality (Smeeding)

Second choice panel: 208 -- Household Time Allocation (Sandberg)

Poster session: no, thank you

Abstract (150 words):

We investigate intra-country distributions of work hours, in cross-national perspective. Using data from the Luxembourg Income Study and from labor force surveys, we compare working time distributions, as of the year 2000, across a group of twelve industrialized countries -- Austria, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Clearly, work hours constitute a resource as they result in income for workers and their families. They also constitute a burden -- especially if the work is onerous -- and time spent in employment always has opportunity costs; long work hours crowd out caregiving, leisure, and/or personal care. In this paper, we assess disparities in working time, recognizing the importance of both "over-work" and "under-work". We assess patterns of variation, within and across countries -- especially with respect to gender, parenting status, and age, as well as educational attainment and household income.

Extended abstract (2-4 pages):

This PAA paper will be one of the first products from a larger cross-national collaborative research project on working time across the industrialized countries. The overarching goal of the larger project is to better understand all facets of working time in the U.S., as well as the institutional factors that shape and constrain American workers' decisions and options. The core aim of our project is to draw lessons relevant to the U.S. concerning mechanisms that increase work time flexibility. In particular, we hope to illuminate the effects of particular practices on working time outcomes, regardless of whether those practices are voluntarily adopted, bargained between workers and employers, or required by law. Furthermore, the U.S. does have a crucial regulatory framework -- the Fair Labor Standards Act -- and our findings will have implications for those interested in reforming it, whether they wish to tighten or loosen its requirements.

Our plan is to analyze the links between time spent in paid work and various indicators of individual and family well-being -- including time available for family caregiving, personal care, and leisure, as well as earnings and household income. We will also assess how these outcomes, and the links among them, are shaped by public policies. We will compare outcomes and policies in the U.S., as of about 2000, with those in a group of European countries -- tentatively, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Spain, and the United Kingdom. We chose these comparison countries because they have relatively similar standards of living, yet diverse time-related outcomes and varied policy environments.

The larger study will focus on two important demographic groups -- employed parents and older workers. We chose to study working parents because their work hours

-- as individuals and as couples -- have important consequences for time available to spend with children. When parents work long hours, time available for family caregiving may be inadequate, which can place children at risk, especially younger children. Furthermore, in part because employed parents strive to protect time with children, long work hours often reduce time for personal care (including sleep) and/or leisure -- sometimes to levels that are unhealthy for workers and their families. We chose to focus on older workers as well, because workers in their pre-retirement years constitute a second subgroup whose work hours raise compelling concerns about work/life balance. Survey data in the U.S., for example, establish that a substantial percentage of older workers would prefer to phase-out (i.e., to reduce their hours), as they shift from full-time employment to full-time retirement. Yet, in the U.S. and also in Europe, the evidence is scant as to whether older workers, and which older workers, actually do so.

In this proposed PAA paper, we aim to analyze the working time patterns of parents and older workers across our study countries. We will use data, for approximately 2000, from the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) and from the European labor force surveys (LFS). The LIS data are public access and the LFS are newly available in the form of anonymized microdata files; we have just purchased them. Our focus in this paper will be on weekly hours worked, due to data limitations, but we will complement that with an assessment of total annual hours (which vary even more within and across countries) in those cases where the data allow an annual analysis.

The goal of the proposed paper is to identify how work hours are distributed -- both within and across our study countries. Maintaining our focus on our two main demographic groups, we ask: How much variation, or dispersion, is there in employment

hours -- both including and excluding those with zero hours? How do work-hour distributions vary across countries? Are hours more evenly distributed in countries with long average work hours (such as the United States) or in those with much shorter work hours (as in the Netherlands). What are the patterns of disparities in working time? In particular, which subgroups work the longest hours? Which groups work the fewest hours? How are hours distributed between women and men? Between married and unmarried parents? Between prime age workers and older workers? Between those with more versus less education? Between the affluent and those on the lower portions of the income distribution? In summary, we hope to identify the micro-level factors that shape working time and, in a cross-national and multivariate context, to assess the interactions among those factors.