

Long Work Hours for Some, Short Work Hours for Others: Working Time in the United States

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1. Introduction

The United States economy has been in recession since December 2007. Workers are facing a rapidly deteriorating labor market. The unemployment rate has sharply increased from 4.7% in November 2007 to 7.2% in December 2008, a 14 year high. Since the start of the recession, close to 3 million jobs have been lost. Two-thirds of these job losses have occurred in the past four months (September-December 2008). The average workweek for production and nonsupervisory workers on private nonfarm payrolls equaled 33.3 hours, in December 2008, the lowest recorded in this series which began in 1964 (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009).

With the job losses that have already occurred and the predictions of more to follow, the working time issue of the day is job retention and job creation. However, the single-minded focus on jobs, quite understandable in the current economic context, should not deflect attention away from other significant working time matters.

First, many full-time workers work long and, perhaps, excessive work hours. Second, the working hours of other employees, particularly in nonstandard and contingent employment, are short (or less than desired) and precarious. Third, the growth of contingent and non-standard employment raises concerns of gender inequality and the possible inability of some families to work enough hours, given pay levels, to achieve an adequate standard of living. Fourth, long work hours raise issues of work-family balance.

This paper is divided into five main sections. The first explains how working time is regulated in the United States with special reference to the minimal legal regulations in this area. The second investigates the length of working time. The third focuses on trends in contingent and non-standard employment. The fourth discusses gender inequality in working time. The fifth looks at work-life balance including the impact on families of long work schedules.

2. The institutional framework

There are minimal federal governmental regulations of working time for those 16 years of age and older. The existing laws do not specify the number of hours to be worked daily, weekly or annually, the hours in the day when work can occur, the number of days per week to be worked, the specific days on which work can occur or the amount of vacation time that must be provided.

The major piece of federal legislation regulating working time is the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (FLSA). As of 1940, its overtime provision stated that covered employees, mainly non-supervisory personnel in the private sector, be paid a minimum of one and a half times the regular hourly rate for all hours worked above 40 hours per week. In

1985, as a result of a U.S. Supreme Court ruling (*Garcia vs. San Antonio Metropolitan Transit Authority*), coverage under the FLSA was extended to state and local government employees. The FLSA still excludes many employees. They are mainly some professional, executive and administrative personnel, those earning over set limits, and those working in small retail and service sector establishments. Currently, approximately 27% of full-time workers are exempt from the provisions of the FLSA (Gornick, Heron and Eisenbrey, 2007).

State laws complement the FLSA. In situations where federal and state laws both apply, the law that is most favorable to the worker takes precedence. And states often take the lead in implementing worker friendly policies well in advance of the federal government.

The United States has relatively weak federal laws for illness and child rearing. The Pregnancy Discrimination Amendment (1978) to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 made it illegal for employers to discriminate against workers on the basis of pregnancy, childbirth or related medical condition. Employers are required to treat pregnancy leave the same as leave for any other disability.

The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) requires employers (of firms with more than 50 employees) to provide up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave and continuation of health insurance during the leave as well as reinstatement in the same or equivalent job. Given this employer standard, somewhat less than 50% of workers are covered by the FMLA (Hartmann, Hegewisch and Lovell, 2007). Workers eligible for such leave include those who have one year of job tenure at 60% time or greater. The leave can be taken for an individual's own medical condition, or to take care of a newly born or adopted child, a severely ill child or spouse, or a parent needing assistance.

Government policymakers have typically not viewed working time policy as a tool for influencing employment levels. For example, government policymakers have rarely viewed the shortening of the standard working week to be an effective tool for lowering unemployment. Within the past decade or so, there has been minimal debate in the political arena over working time. The most controversial issue has been payments for overtime. In 1997, the "Family-Friendly Workplace Act", supported by employers and opposed by labor, was introduced in the U.S. Congress to amend the FLSA. It would have eliminated the requirement of premium pay for work over 40 hours in a week. Instead, workers would have only received premium pay for hours worked in excess of 80 within a two-week period. Furthermore, workers would have been able to take compensatory time off instead of overtime pay. This legislation was not approved by the U.S. Congress. The classification of workers exempt from the overtime provisions of the FLSA is often at issue. The Bush (George W.) administration broadened the categories of workers exempt from the overtime provisions of the FLSA.

Since governmental regulations minimally influence working time patterns, the industrial relations system is the primary arena wherein working hours are determined. In non-union settings, the terms and conditions of employment are determined largely by management decision. The only constraint on management's free hand is the need to create a pay and hours package enabling it to attract the requisite workforce. In unionized settings, pay and working time are regulated through collective bargaining arrangements. However, the share of the workforce unionized has declined steadily since the mid-1950s when more than one-third of employees were unionized. In 2007, the overall unionization rate equaled 12.1% and the unionization rate in the private sector was 7.5% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). The share of employees covered by collective bargaining contracts is only slightly higher than the share of employees unionized.

Thus, for the most part, the non-union setting is the primary venue for determining the terms and conditions of employment, including working time. In the simple competitive labor market model where the labor market clears and there is no involuntary unemployment, the distribution of working time arrangements reflects the preferences of workers and employers.

Compensating differentials would be paid workers where the working time arrangements were not consistent with worker preferences. However, labor markets do not function as represented by the simple competitive model. Rather than being competitive, they are segmented. They do not clear and involuntary unemployment exists. There are working hours constraints and the distribution of working time arrangements reflect more employer preference than worker preference.

3. Recent trends in working time

3.1. Labor force participation

Working time encompasses many elements including the likelihood of being in the labor force and, if employed, the amount of hours of work. The labor force participation rate steadily increased from 1980-2000. It rose from 63.8% in 1980 to 67.1% in 1997-2000, the highest it had been in the post World War II period. However, it then declined to 66.0% in 2007.

Table 1. Civilian labor force participation rates, 1980-2007

Gender and Age	Participation Rate (percent)			
	1980	1990	2000	2007
TOTAL	63.8	66.5	67.1	66.0
Male	77.4	76.4	74.8	73.2
16 to 19 years	60.5	55.7	52.8	41.4
20 to 24 years	85.9	84.4	82.6	78.7
25 to 34 years	95.2	94.1	93.4	92.2
35 to 44 years	95.5	94.3	92.7	92.3
45 to 54 years	91.2	90.7	88.6	88.2
55 to 64 years	72.1	67.8	67.3	69.6
65 years and over	19.0	16.3	17.7	20.5
Female	51.5	57.5	59.9	59.3
16 to 19 years	52.9	51.6	51.2	41.5
20 to 24 years	68.9	71.3	73.1	70.1
25 to 34 years	65.5	73.5	76.1	74.5
35 to 44 years	65.5	76.4	77.2	75.5
45 to 54 years	59.9	71.2	76.8	76.0
55 to 64 years	41.3	45.2	51.9	58.3
65 years and over	8.1	8.6	9.4	12.6

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2009), p. 369.

Trends in labor force participation vary by gender with men being less likely to participate in the labor force and women being more likely to be in the labor force. The male labor force participation rate fell from 77.4% in 1980 to 73.2% in 2007. The participation rate of women rose from 51.5% to 59.3% in the same time period. However, the female participation rate did not rise steadily over the time period. The female labor force participation rate in 2007 was slightly below its level in 2000 (59.9%). While it is too soon to reach a firm conclusion, the recent decline in the labor force participation rate of women raises the possibility that the ever growing likelihood of women participating in the labor force, the trend since the 1950s, may be coming to an end (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009, p. 369).

The reversal of the trend of increased labor force participation of women does not seem to be due only to women with children being more likely to stay at home. The participation rate of women without children has fallen along with the participation rate of women with

children (Battan, 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

Of particular interest is the pattern of labor force participation of single women with children. Their labor force participation rate sharply jumped from 57.5% in 1995 to 73.9% in 2000. It has since declined to 71.4% in 2007 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009, p. 376). The sharp jump in participation in the labor force coincided with the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in 1996. This legislation reformed the welfare system by imposing strong work requirements on welfare recipients and setting lifetime time limits for receiving welfare benefits.

Not only was there a reversal of the trend of female labor force participation, there was also a reversal of the pattern of labor force participation of older workers. These workers are increasing their participation in the labor force and their hours of work. While the likelihood of men aged 55 years of age and above participating in the labor force declined from 1980 to 2000, it rose thereafter. The labor force participation rate of men aged 55-64 increased from 67.3% in 2000 to 69.6% in 2007 and for men aged 65 and over it increased from 17.7% in 2000 to 20.5% in 2007. With the exception of teenagers, women of all age categories were more likely to be in the labor force in 2000 than in 1980. However, since 2000, only women aged 55-64 and those aged 65 and over were more likely to be in the labor force. For women aged 55-64, the labor force participation rate rose from 51.9% to 58.3% and for women aged 65 and over it increased from 9.4% to 12.6% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009, p. 369).

In addition to being more likely to be in the labor force, older workers are increasingly likely to be working full-time and full-year. While full-time employment declined among older workers from 1970-93, this trend reversed itself thereafter. Several factors are likely responsible for the rise in the working time of older workers. First, federal legislation eliminated mandatory retirement for virtually all workers as of 1986. Second, the 1983 Social Security Amendments raised the eligibility age for full Social Security retirement benefits from 65 to 67, to be gradually phased in between the years 2002 and 2027. In addition, the early retirement reduction in Social Security benefits claimed at age 62 was raised and the Social Security benefits for those working beyond the normal retirement age for collecting full benefits has increased. Third, the shift from defined benefit to defined contribution pension plans provided an incentive for workers to delay retirement. The longer they waited to begin withdrawing assets from defined contribution retirement plans the greater the likelihood that their retirement assets would grow. (This, of course, depends on the fluctuations in value of their retirement plan assets.) Fourth, workers have found it difficult to accumulate sufficient financial resources to maintain their desired standard of living in retirement thereby providing them with an incentive to postpone their retirement from the labor force (Gendell, 2008). Fifth, older men may be working longer since their spouses are also remaining in the workforce longer (Schirle, 2008).

3.2. Length of working time

Workers in the United States work long hours. According to the OECD, the annual average working hours of dependent employees in the United States was virtually the same in 2006—1809—as it was in 1979—1838. On the other hand, the annual working time of dependent employees fell sharply in Japan from 2126 hours in 1979 to 1784 hours in 2006 (OECD, 2007). Annual average working hours in the United States exceeds the annual average working hours in such European countries as France, Sweden, Germany and the United Kingdom.

Data on average annual working time of dependent employees include full-time and part-time workers. Full-time workers in the United States work long work weeks and there has been no trend toward shortening weekly working hours of full-time workers. The years 1979, 1989, 2000 and 2007 represent business cycle peaks. The average full-time working week was 42.7 hours in 1979 (Rosenberg, 1993). It rose to 43.7 hours in 1989 and remained above

43 hours in 2000 (43.4 hours). The average full-time working week declined to 42.7 hours in 2007, the same that it was in 1979.¹ Data on the length of the average work week as a whole shows a similar stability. In 1980, the average workweek in nonagricultural industries equaled 38.1 hours. The average work week increased to 39.2 hours in 1990 and 39.6 hours in 2000. It declined slightly to 39.1 hours in 2007.² (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009, p. 377).

Overtime hours mirror the trend in the full-time working week. While overtime is paid in all industries where workers qualify for it, the data on overtime hours is only for manufacturing industries. Average overtime is calculated by dividing the total number of overtime hours in a given industry by the number of production workers in that industry, including those that work no overtime at all. Overtime hours increased in the 1980s from their level at the end of the 1970s. Average weekly overtime hours of production workers in manufacturing were 3.3 in 1979 and 3.8 in 1989. Paid overtime hours surged in the 1990s. They reached their highest level—4.8 hours in 1997—since the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics began publishing the survey in 1956. Rather than hire new workers, employers relied more heavily on overtime during the economic expansion of the 1990s (Hetrick, 2000). And some workers even went on strike to force their employers to hire additional workers and reduce forced overtime.³ Overtime hours equaled 4.6 hours in 2000 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2001, p. 123). Overtime was not as prevalent in the most recent economic expansion. In 2007, there were slightly more than 4 hours of paid overtime per week.

Long working weeks exist outside of manufacturing as well. The proportion of all employed workers working 49 hours a week or more rose in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1979, 16.5% of all workers were doing so (*Employment and Earnings*, January 1980, p. 183). In

Table 2. Average weekly hours of full time workers by occupation by gender, 2007

Occupation	Average Weekly Hours of Full Time Workers		
	Total	Men	Women
Management, Business and Financial	45.3	47.0	42.9
Professional	42.6	44.3	41.0
Service	41.7	43.0	40.6
Sales	43.7	45.4	41.3
Office and Administrative Support	40.6	42.2	39.9
Construction and Extraction	41.5	41.5	41.4
Installation, Maintenance and Repair	43.2	43.2	41.4
Production	42.5	43.2	40.8
Transportation and Material Moving	44.0	44.5	40.6

Source: *Employment and Earnings*, January 2008, p. 238.

¹ The data on the average full-time working week are derived from the household survey (Current Population Survey) which measures hours actually worked by individuals on all of their jobs in a week. Persons on full-time schedules include those working 35 hours or more during the survey week, and those who worked from one to 34 hours for non-economic reasons, and usually work full-time. The remaining people who worked one to 34 hours are considered to be on part-time schedules.

² Data from the establishment survey paint a somewhat different picture. These data count nonsupervisory workers on a firm's payroll and measure hours paid rather than actual hours worked. If a worker holds jobs at two different firms, the worker will be counted twice with the result being that the employee's weekly work hours will be divided between the two firms based on the number of hours worked at each. The establishment survey shows a decline in the length of the average private sector workweek from 35.6 hours in 1979 to 34.5 hours in 1989 to 34.3 hours in 2000 to 33.8 hours in 2007. Kirkland (2000) attributes the decline in the average private sector workweek, as measured by the establishment survey, to disproportionate employment growth and low and declining average weekly hours in retail trade and services.

³ In September, 1994, workers at General Motors Buick City plant in Flint, Michigan, tired of working six days per week and up to 12 hours per day went on strike. The company had not hired any long-term hourly workers since 1986. The strike ended with the company agreeing to hire new long-term employees and to stop using nonunion temporary workers.

1989, the share of employees working such long work weeks rose to 19.4% (*Employment and Earnings*, January 1990, p. 198). By 2000, 20.6% of the workforce were working 49 hours a week or more. This figure dropped to 17.5% in 2007 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009, p. 378).

Executives, managers, sales workers and workers in transportation and material moving occupations are most likely to work long hours. In each occupation, men working full-time average longer working hours than women working full time.

Not only do many workers in the United States work long work weeks, they work long work years. The United States is the only advanced industrialized society that does not legally guarantee workers paid holidays and paid vacation. While many employers do offer paid vacation and paid holidays, these benefits are distributed unequally and the amount of paid vacation and paid holidays is far less than in many European societies and Japan (Ray and Schmitt, 2007). In 2007, 77% of private sector workers were in jobs where employers offered paid vacations and/or paid holidays. Full-time workers are more likely to have paid holidays (88%) than are part-time workers (39%). The same holds for paid vacations with 90% of full-time workers having access to paid vacations and only 38% of part-time workers. Higher paid workers are more likely to have paid holidays (88%) than are lower-paid workers (67%). The same holds for paid vacations. Unionized workers are somewhat more likely to have paid vacations and paid holidays than are nonunion workers. On average, private-sector workers in the United States have 9 days of paid vacation per year and 6 days of paid holidays per year.

While many workers work long workweeks and workyears, others work short workweeks and workyears. There was a growing dispersion in working time from 1970 to 2000 with the 40 hour workweek, while still the modal workweek, becoming less typical. An increasing share of workers were found at both the lower and higher ends of the working time spectrum (Jacobs and Gerson, 2004; Rones, Ilg and Gardner, 1997; Rones, Gardner and Ilg, 2001). Since 2000, there appears to be a reversal in this trend with the 40 hour workweek growing somewhat in importance. In 2007, 43.0% of workers in non-agricultural industries worked a 40 hour workweek. Those working 1 to 34 hours accounted for 23.1% of the workforce while 27.3% of the workforce worked 41 hours or more.

Table 3. Access to paid holidays and paid vacations, private sector workers, United States, 2007

	Percent Share of Workers Whose Employer Provides		Average Number of Days All Workers with Benefits		All Workers	
	Paid Vacation	Paid Holiday	Paid Vacation	Paid Holiday	Paid Vacation	Paid Holiday
All	77	77	12	8	9	6
Full-time	90	88	13	8	12	7
Part-time	38	39	9	7	3	3
Hourly Wage						
Less than \$15	69	67	10	7	7	5
\$15 per hour or higher	88	88	14	9	13	8

Note: The figures for all workers adjusts the average number of days of paid vacation and paid holidays by the likelihood that a worker works for an employer who provides such benefits.

Sources: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Employee Benefits in Private Industry in the United States, March 2007", Summary 07-05, August 2007, pp. 28-29. The information on days of paid vacation is for 2006 and is found in Ray and Schmitt, 2007, p. 4.

Those working short hours are more likely to be found in contingent and non-standard employment.

Table 4. Persons at work by hours worked, nonagricultural industries, 2007

Hours of Work	Percent Distribution
TOTAL	100.0
1 to 34 hours	23.1
1 to 4 hours	1.0
5 to 14 hours	3.6
15 to 29 hours	11.5
30 to 34 hours	7.0
35 hours and over	76.9
35 to 39 hours	6.7
40 hours	43.0
41 hours and over	27.3
41 to 48 hours	9.7
49 to 59 hours	10.3
60 hours and over	7.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2009), p. 378.

4. Contingent and non-standard employment arrangements

There are no official definitions of contingent and non-standard employment just as there is no official definition of what constitutes standard employment. Employees do not have a legal right to be able to retain their jobs once hired. Generally, a private employer, unless limited by statute, contract or collective bargaining agreement, is free to hire and fire any employee at will.

In the absence of a clear legal definition, a standard employment arrangement is the commonly perceived notion of a full-time wage and salary job. For many, that norm also includes a long-term relationship between workers and employers. While half of all new jobs end in the first year, (Farber, 2005), long-term employment relationships do exist though they are undergoing some change. In 2006, 30.0% of workers 25 years of age and older had job tenure of more than 10 years, just slightly below the comparable figure of 31.9% in 1983. However, the share of men with such lengthy job tenure declined from 37.7% to 31.1% while the share of women rose from 24.9% to 28.8%. In fact, older men who would have been more likely to be protected by internal labor markets in the 1960s and 1970s and earlier experienced sharp declines in median job tenure. From 1983 to 2006, median job tenure fell for men ages 45-54, from 12.8 years to 8.1 years and for men ages 55-64 from 15.3 years to 9.5 years (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000, 2006).

Long job tenure aside, workers felt increasingly insecure in the 1990s. Workers were being exposed more, though not necessarily fully exposed, to the vicissitudes of the market. Rates of involuntary job loss were higher in the 1990s than in the 1980s, and earnings declines following involuntary job loss were more severe during most of the 1990s than they had been in the 1980s (Schmidt, 2000). Rates of job loss continued to increase during the 2001-03 period despite the onset of the economic expansion in late 2001 (Farber, 2005).

The prevalence of contingent and non-standard employment relationships and the growing propensity of firms to outsource work helped to foster worker insecurity. While contingent and non-standard employment relationships exist, there is no agreed upon definition of contingent and non-standard work. Not surprisingly, given the varying definitions, the estimates of the share of the workforce employed in contingent positions ranges from a low of 1.8% of total employed (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005) to a high of more than 40% of the labor force (Belman and Golden, 2000).⁴

⁴ See Rosenberg and Lapidus (1999) for a discussion of various definitions of contingent and non-standard work.

While the concept of contingent or non-standard work is somewhat ambiguous, the phenomenon exists and is intimately related to the employers' search for flexibility. In the 1980s, facing increased competition and pressure on profits, employers sought increased "flexibility" to lower labor costs, improve labor productivity and have workers bear more of the costs of economic uncertainty. Many, though not all companies, profitable and unprofitable alike, took the "low road" to improving profitability. They were aided by an enabling environment of anti-labor government policy, weak and soon to be weaker unions and a general excess supply of labor. Company working time policy was one of the strategies used to lower labor costs. Companies pushed for longer and more flexible hours from their full-time workers.⁵ While there are no consistent longitudinal data sources making it difficult to measure trends in contingent and non-standard work over time, it does appear that growth in contingent and non-standard work occurred during the 1980s (Rosenberg and Lapidus, 1999). A Bureau of National Affairs survey of more than 400 firms reported marked increases, in the period 1980 to 1985 in the number of enterprises making use of agency temporaries, short-term hires, on-call workers, administrative/business support contracts and production subcontracting (Abraham, 1990).⁶ Temporary jobs were growing more rapidly than overall employment. Employment growth in the temporary help supply industry was directly related to the decreasing ability of unions to block the increasing usage of temporary workers (Golden and Appelbaum, 1992). While the proportion of employed persons working part-time grew slowly in the 1980s, the increase was accounted for totally by those working part-time involuntarily (Mishel, Bernstein and Schmitt, 2001, p. 251). While part-time jobs are not necessarily bad, expanding part-time employment was concentrated in "bad" secondary labor market type part-time jobs (Tilly, 1992).

From 1995 through 2005, the share of contingent workers in the workforce has remained relatively constant. The U.S. Government Accountability Office (2006) considers the following categories of workers to be contingent workers: (1)agency temporary workers; (2) contract company workers; (3)day laborers; (4)direct-hire temporary workers; (5)independent contractors; (6)on-call workers; (7)self-employed workers; and (8)standard part-time workers, those who regularly work less than 35 hours a week for a particular employer and are wage and salary workers. They constituted 32.2% of the workforce in 1995 and 30.6 percent of the workforce in 2005.

Contingent jobs are very heterogeneous and contingent workers are a diverse group. The typical independent contractor was a white male, middle-aged or older with a college degree. Women were underrepresented among independent contractors. Only one-third of independent contractors were women. Independent contractors were most likely to be working in professional, managerial, sales and construction occupations. Women were overrepresented among standard part-time workers, with approximately two-thirds of standard part-time workers being women. Temporary help agency workers were disproportionately young and female. More than half (53%) were women compared with 48% of workers in standard employment relationships. Workers provided by temporary help supply firms were heavily concentrated in three broad occupational categories—production transportation and material moving occupations, office and administrative support occupations, and managerial and professional occupations (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2006, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005).

⁵ See Rosenberg (1994) and Rosenberg (2003) for a discussion of the 1980s political-economic context and labor-management disputes over working time issues.

⁶ Abraham and Taylor (1996) and Clinton (1997) provide additional evidence on the increased propensity of firms to contract out some operations rather than directly hiring labor. While not all employees of firms providing services to firms work under contingent arrangements, the likelihood of contingent work is much higher among workers with alternative employment arrangements than workers with traditional arrangements (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1997).

Individuals in contingent employment relationships are less likely to receive health insurance or pension coverage from their employer than those in traditional employment relationships. Overall, 13% of contingent workers received health insurance through their employer in 2005, compared to 72 percent of full-time workers in standard employment relationships. The share of contingent workers who received employer provided health insurance varied by the type of contingent work, ranging from a low of 9% for agency temps to a high of 50% for contract company workers.

Contingent workers were also less likely to receive employer provided pension benefits. In 2005, 64% of standard full-time workers were included in their employers' pension plans in contrast to 17% of contingent workers. As with employer provided health insurance, the likelihood of contingent workers being included in their employers' pension plans varied by the type of contingent work. It ranged from 4% for agency temps to 37% for contract company workers (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2006).

The relative lack of access to employer-provided health insurance and pension benefits points to a broader issue. Contingent workers are less likely to be covered by important workforce protection laws. These laws include the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 and the Fair Labor Standards Act among others. Employers may misclassify workers as independent contractors rather than employees. Workforce protection laws typically cover employees, not independent contractors. Some laws require workers to have worked for a particular employer for a period of time before being covered by the legislation. Some contingent workers do not work for a particular employer long enough to be covered.

The growth of contingent and non-standard jobs may have lead to a shrinkage of more long-term secure positions, thereby increasing worker insecurity.⁷ However, the evidence is mixed as to whether contingent "peripheral" workers serve to buffer the remaining more permanent "core" workers from economic fluctuations thereby helping to maintain their job security. Wenger and Kalleberg (2006) study the U.S. personnel supply agencies (which provide temporary workers to client firms) from 1972 to 2000. They find that temporary workers are more likely to be hired in expansions and let go in recessions, thereby buffering full-time workers from the economic downturn. On the other hand, Capelli and Neumark (2004) find that contingent work and involuntary turnover of the more permanent workforce are positively related contradicting the core-periphery hypothesis. Thus, the hiring of contingent labor and the reduction of more permanent workers are part of a strategy to seek flexibility across all dimensions of the employment relationship.

The long-term consequences for workers of working in a contingent employment relationship have not been extensively researched. The share of workers employed one year or more in their current job assignment increased for most nonstandard work categories from 1995-2005. For example, the share of temporary agency workers on the job for at least one year rose from 24.4% in 1995 to 33.7% in 2005. For contract company employees, this share increased from 50.9% to 65.2% (Mishel, Bernstein and Allegretto, 2007, p. 241). As people become more stable in non-standard work, particularly those with pay and benefits below their counterparts in more standard arrangements, there is a risk of the workforce becoming more segmented along core-periphery lines.⁸

Factors driving the use of contingent and non-standard arrangements can be found on both the demand and supply sides of the labor market. On the supply side, employees may desire flexibility to meet personal and family needs or to remain independent and not beholden to any particular employer. For supply side factors to be the dominant force behind the creation of contingent positions, workers would need to prefer such jobs. However, in

⁷ This paragraph and the one to follow are taken from Rosenberg (2007).

⁸ Ferber and Waldfogel (2000) find that part-time employment has negative effects on wages and benefits in the long run and in the current period for both women and men.

February 2005, the majority of contingent workers in the United States (55.3%) would have preferred noncontingent employment.⁹ Only slightly more than one-third (35.5%) desired their arrangement. The remainder did not have a clear preference one way or the other. Preferences vary depending on the type of non-standard employment arrangement. Independent contractors have a stronger preference for their situation than workers in other non-standard arrangements, with 82.3 percent favoring this arrangement over a traditional job. Agency temporaries are much less satisfied with their work arrangement. Somewhat more than 56% would have preferred a traditional job. Only 32.1% were satisfied with this arrangement. Only 46.1% of on-call workers were satisfied with this employment arrangement. Nearly 45% of on-call workers wanted a job where they worked regularly scheduled hours. (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005).

Dissatisfaction with contingent employment may reflect low earnings due to low hourly wages or low number of hours worked. Contingent workers are twice as likely as standard full-time workers to be from low-income families. In 2005, 8% of standard full-time workers were in families with family incomes below \$20,000 while 16% of contingent workers were in low-income families. The incidence of low family income varies by type of non-standard employment relationship. Agency temps were most likely to come from low-income families (28%). More than 20% of on-call workers/day laborers (21%) and slightly less than 20% of standard part-time workers (19%) were from low-income families. Independent contractors were much less likely (11%) to live in low-income families. Independent contractors are predominantly male. Standard part-time workers and agency temps are predominantly female. This points to the likelihood of gender inequality in working time.

Table 5. Workers with annual family incomes below \$20,000 (February 2005)

Category of Worker	Percentage of Workers with Family Incomes Below \$20,000
Self-Employed Workers	8
Contract Company Workers	11
Independent Contractors	11
Direct-hire Temps	18
Standard Part-Time Workers	19
On-Call Workers/Day Laborers	21
Agency Temps	28
Subtotal: Contingent Workers	16
Standard Full-Time Workers	8
Total Workforce	11

Source: U.S. Government Accountability Office (2006), p. 14.

5. Gender inequality in working time

Gender inequality in working time has certainly diminished over the past thirty years. While men are still more likely to be in the labor force than women, the gender gap in labor force participation rates has narrowed substantially since 1980. In 1980, the labor force participation rate of men exceeded that of women by approximately 26 percentage points. By 2007, this gap had narrowed to approximately 14 percentage points (Table 1). As women have become more likely to participate in the labor market, they have become more likely to work full-time, full-year (Jacobs and Gerson, 2004, p. 25). For example, annual hours worked by women rose substantially from 1976 to 1993. The annual hours worked by women in 1993

⁹ In this instance, the definition of contingent worker is a very restrictive one used by the U.S. Department of Labor.

were 1,526, an 18% increase over its level of 1293 in 1976. In contrast, the annual hours worked by men rose at a much slower rate. On average men worked 1,905 hours in 1993, a 6% increase over the level in 1976—1805 (Rones, Ilg and Gardner, 1997, p.11). The gender gap in earnings appears to be narrowing as well. In 2007, the median weekly wage of women working full-time year-round equaled 80% of the median weekly wage of men working full-time, year-round.

Nevertheless, a gender gap in working time still remains. Women are less likely to be full-time workers than are men. In 2007, 68.3% of part-time workers were women (*Employment and Earnings*, January 2008, p. 253). Women work fewer hours than do men. Women who usually work full time worked, on average, 41.0 hours per week in 2007. Male full-time workers averaged 44.1 hours per week, a difference of 3.1 hours. In each broad occupational grouping, male full-time workers worked longer weekly hours than did women full-time workers (Table 2). Including full and part-time workers, the average work week of women was 36.1 hours, 5.6 hours shorter than the average work week of men which equaled 41.7 hours (*Employment and Earnings*, January 2008, p. 238). And women are still less likely to participate in the labor force than are men.

The data presented to demonstrate the extent of the gender gap in working time are measures taken at a point in time. Longitudinal data can more clearly demonstrate the extent of gender inequality in working time since the issue is less one of inequality at a moment in time and more of inequality over a working life. Rose and Hartmann (2004) utilize the Panel Study on Income Dynamics, a longitudinal data set, and follow men and women workers aged 26 to 59 over a 15 year time period (1983-1998). Compared with men, women are more likely to be out of the labor force for entire years. Fewer than half of all women work every year. Approximately, 6 out of 7 men report earnings every year. Almost 3 in 10 women are out of the workforce for 4 or more years. The same is true for less than 5% of the men. When women work, they are more likely to work part-time and less likely to work full-year. Those women and men who report the most years without earnings report the fewest hours of work in years with work. There is a strong earnings penalty for being out of the labor force for even one year. The annual earnings loss grows as the number of years out of the labor force increases. Fewer hours of work combined with lower hour earnings results in a very large gender gap. Over the entire 15 year period, the average woman earned 38% of what the average man earned. This results in a 62% gender gap, far greater than what is found by merely comparing median weekly wages in a given year of men and women working full-time, full-year.

The gender gap is still a serious problem in the United States. It can be attributed to the gendered division of labor in the family resulting in women being the primary care givers and gender segregation in the labor market resulting in lower pay for women. Given the lack of family friendly social policies and family friendly workplaces, the increasing propensity of women to participate in the labor market, albeit still to a lesser degree than men, and the long working hours of men, may leave many families feeling under increased stress and finding it increasingly difficult to maintain an appropriate work-family balance.

6. Work-family balance

The family with a married couple, children under the age of 18 and one breadwinner, typically a man, while not disappearing entirely has become rarer in the United States. The labor force participation rate of married women with children under the age of 17 has increased sharply since 1980 when it was 54.1% to 2007 when it was 69.3%. The same holds for single women with children whose labor force participation rate went from 52.0% in 1980 to 71.4% in 2007. Widowed, divorced and separated women with children were also more likely to be in the labor force. Their labor force participation rate rose from 69.4% in 1980 to

80.0% in 2007 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009, p. 376). Dual earner couples with children, especially when both are full-time workers, and single parents, who are predominantly women, are likely to feel a time squeeze as they try to reconcile the hours and demands of their paid work and the needs of family life. For example, in 2000, the typical dual earner household where the husband and wife both worked and there were children under the age of 18 averaged 80.2 hours of paid work per week. For the family itself, this is equivalent to two full-time jobs per week. The husband averaged 45.2 hours and the wife averaged 34.9 hours of paid work per week. For dual earner families without children, average weekly working hours were even higher—83.5 hours—with the difference being accounted for by increased weekly working hours of the wife (Jacobs and Gerson, 2004, p. 44).

Given that the United States has not seriously debated policies designed to reduce working time or improve the compensation on part-time jobs thereby making such jobs more attractive, working parents are left to themselves to determine how to manage the time squeeze and maintain a work-family balance. And many are finding it increasingly difficult to do so. One approach pushed by work-family advocates is for firms to offer workers more flexible work schedules so that workers have more freedom in determining which hours they will work. Firms were more likely to introduce flexible work schedules in the 1990s. The share of the full-time workforce with flexible schedules rose from 15.1% in 1991 to 27.6% in 1997, more than double the rate seen in 1985 (Appelbaum and Golden, 2003, p. 82). However, since that time there has not been any increase in flexible schedules. In 2004, 27.5% of full-time workers had flexible schedules (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009, p. 380).

However, flexible work hours do not speak to the issue of long work hours. And workers may sometimes need to make tradeoffs to gain flexible hours which may negate somewhat the potential for flexible hours to ameliorate the time squeeze faced by working families. Some workers are working longer hours of work in order to gain flexible schedules. The likelihood of flexible schedules increases dramatically as workers work more than 40 hours per week. Other workers are working part-time with the reduced compensation that comes along with such positions in order to gain flexible schedules. The likelihood of flexible work hours is much higher for those working 20 hours or less than it is for people working a 40 hour work week.

Table 6. Percentage of workers with flexible schedules by average usual weekly work hours, May 1997

Hours	Percent with Flexible Schedule
1-20	62.2
21-34	45.0
35-39	33.2
40	22.7
41-49	33.3
50 or more	52.2

Source: U.S. Government Accountability Office (2006), p. 14.

Flexibility in work scheduling is not aimed at meeting the needs of mothers with young children. Women with children in the household do not have more access to flexible schedules than women without children. Overall, women are somewhat less likely than men to have access to flexible schedules. Flexible scheduling is highly concentrated by occupation and is more likely to be found in certain managerial, professional and sales occupations.

Lying behind the difficulties facing many families in balancing the demands of work and family life are long work hours. These long work hours are demanded by employers and seem to be preferred (or accepted or required) by many workers for both reasons of financial need

and income preferences. Where there is a mismatch between hours worked and hours preferred, it is often the case that workers prefer more hours. In 2001, 27% of worker preferred more hours than they were working while 7% preferred fewer hours. Women working full-time were somewhat more likely than men working full-time to want shorter hours. However, women facing hours constraints were twice as likely to want more hours than less hours. While the desire for fewer hours rose as the work week lengthened from 40 hours to 60 hours or more, even among workers working 60 or more hours, there was a strong desire for more hours. Somewhat more than 20% of these workers wanted more hours while only 13% of them wanted fewer hours. While the economy was in recession in 2001, that does not seem to be the reason for the desire for more work hours. The preference of workers for either more or fewer hours of work has been virtually unchanged since 1985.

Table 7. Hours preferences by number of hours worked, 2001

Actual Hours Worked Weekly	Hours Preferences (Percent)		
	Same Hours	Fewer Hours	More Hours
Total	67.0	7.4	25.6
1 to 14	62.1	5.1	32.9
15 to 29	60.3	6.0	33.7
30 to 34	58.9	8.1	33.1
35 to 39	64.0	7.7	28.3
40	69.8	5.6	24.5
41 to 48	66.6	8.1	25.3
49 to 59	69.7	9.6	20.6
60 and more	66.1	13.3	20.7

Source: Golden and Gebreselassie (2007), p. 24.

7. Conclusion

Relative to many European governments, the United States government plays a minimal role in regulating working time. As a result, the industrial relations system is the primary arena wherein working hours are determined. Given the decline in union density and union strength over the past 30 years, the distribution of working time arrangements reflects more employer preferences than worker preferences.

Working hours are long in the United States. Annual average working hours in the United States exceed annual average working hours in Europe and Japan. Workers in the United States average long working weeks. As there is no legal requirement to provide paid vacations, vacations are short and many workers are not provided paid vacations.

There is a polarization of working hours. While many full-time workers work long hours, the weekly working hours of other workers, particularly those in nonstandard and contingent employment arrangements, are short and precarious. There is a significant gender gap in working time reflected in fewer weekly hours of work for women than men and a lower probability of women working continuously throughout their working life than men.

Working hours constraints exist. Workers facing such constraints are much more likely to want more working hours than fewer. Not surprisingly, those working less than a standard full-time 40 hour work week are much more likely to want longer hours than fewer hours. Even those facing working hours constraints who are working long hours already—more than 40 hours per week—are more likely to want additional working hours than to see their working time reduced. Financial need, income preferences and a generalized sense of job insecurity likely explain the desire for additional hours of work.

The growth of dual earner families, together with long work hours, points to a potential

for conflict between the demands of work and family life. Families are forced to find their own solutions to this problem given the lack of serious debate in the policy arena over family friendly government policy.

Government policy is needed for the situation to change. Such policy would include a shortening of the standard working week, a legal right to a substantial number of paid days off per year, pay and benefit parity for part-time workers and a legal right to request flexible hours subject to employer agreement. It remains to be seen whether any of these issues will make it to the policy agenda in the next few years.

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