

Work Hour Mismatches Between Preferred and Actual Work Hours: A Comparative Analysis of Women and Men in Same-Sex and Different-Sex Couples in Germany

Tabea Naujoks (Universität Rostock)

Parenthood has been identified as one of the main drivers of gender inequities in the labor market. Traditionally, mothers often step back from their careers temporarily by reducing their work hours, while fathers follow the role of primary breadwinners. However, the question emerges if this arrangement aligns with individual preferences or if people desire to engage more or less in paid work. Previous research shows that women are generally more often in involuntary part-time employment (Pech et al., 2021) and that generous public childcare is associated with a smaller gap in the preferred working hours between mothers and childless women (Pollmann-Schult 2016). When becoming parents, fathers in younger cohorts prefer a slight reduction in work hours indicating a slow shift towards more equitable gender arrangements in the German context (Pollmann-Schult & Reynolds, 2017). While previous research predominantly focused on work hours preferences of partners in different-sex unions, this paper takes on a new perspective by including the gender composition in couples as an explanatory factor. Specifically, I ask: How do individuals in same-sex relationships differ from those in different-sex relationships regarding their preferred work hours and mismatches with the actual work hours? And how does this differ by parenthood status among female respondents?

Theoretical explanations for gender differences in work hours highlight different drivers of the extent of the labor market participation. On the one hand, the neoclassical economic approaches underscore market efficiency and individual preferences as the primary drivers of work hours (see also Hakim 2000). They argue that employers grant employees their ideal work hours as it reduces recruitment and retention costs, attributing differences in work hours to varying personal preferences (Blundell et al. 2008). On the other hand, sociological theories emphasize the influence of constraints in achieving desired work hours. These constraints could stem from the limited availability of public childcare, which would stereotypically limit women's abilities to increase their work hours (Fagan 2001). Another constraint would be the financial situation of the household restricting the possibility for a reduction in working hours.

How does the gender composition within a couple impact preferred work hours? One factor that could be attributed to the gender composition in couples is that same-sex couples often share paid and unpaid work more equally, diminishing the traditional gender role polarization present in different-sex couples. A second factor could result from gender inequalities in the labor market. Women in same-sex couples might, in the first place, not be able to afford a specialized model where one partner works full-time and the other one part-time or not at all, as they also face gender pay gaps or work in female-

dominated occupations with lower wages compared to male-dominated occupations. Overall, I expect that women in different-sex couples express a stronger desire to increase their work hours compared to women in same-sex unions. For men's work hour preferences, I expect a strong association with the "ideal worker" or full-time work norm, reflecting their extensive labor market attachment. Also, men in same-sex couples are surrounded by this normative context. However, scholars also show that men in same-sex couples are more likely to deviate from that norm compared to men in different-sex couples (González & Sönmez 2022). Therefore, I expect that men in same-sex couples are more inclined to express a desire for reduced working hours, resulting in lower average preferred working hours compared to their counterparts in different-sex unions.

This study analyzes the variations in preferred work hours and the mismatches between these preferences and the actual work hours, focusing on the gender composition within couples. Second, a more detailed subsample analysis is carried out, concentrating specifically on parents. Unfortunately, due to the limited number of cases involving male same-sex couples with children in the household, the analysis is primarily restricted to comparing women in female same-sex couples with their counterparts in different-sex couples.

Data, variables and methods

This study uses the German Microcensus, which is a survey annually collecting information from 1% of all households in Germany. Combining data from the 2010 to 2019 Microcensus offers a unique opportunity to study work hours preferences and their mismatches for men and women in same-sex and different-sex couples. The primary dependent variable is the *preferred work hours*, which is obtained by asking whether respondents want to increase or decrease their working hours. This information is derived from respondents' answers to whether they wish to increase or decrease their current working hours. If they desire to change their working hours, they are then asked to specify their preferred working hours. The question text adds that these hypothetical working-hour adjustments also consider corresponding wage changes. The preferred working hours were capped at 60 hours. While the variable *preferred work hours* only include the working hours of those respondents who want to change the number of work hours, the variable *ideal work hours* consist of the preferred working hours and the actual work hours when respondents do not indicate the wish to change their work hours. The *actual work hours* are measured by the amount of regular work hours per week, including regular overtime. The actual work hours were also top-coded at 60 hours. The discrepancy between preferred and actual work hours is calculated by subtracting the actual work hours from the preferred work hours. Parenthood has been recognized as a significant determinant of individuals' work hour and their preferences. To account for this, I consider the number of children, and in a subsample analysis for parents, I also include the age of the youngest child. Since the overall household

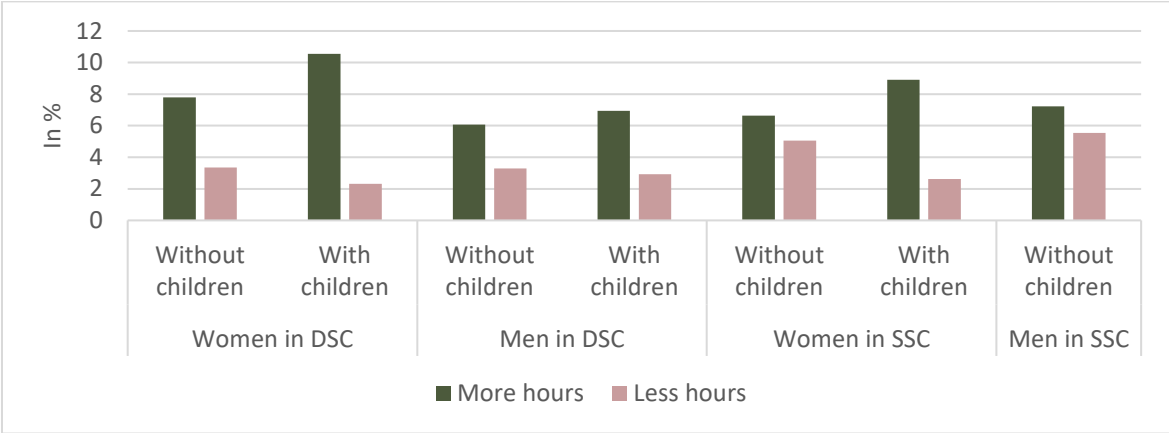
income can either constrain or enable adjustments in working hours, I incorporate household income into the models. Another critical aspect that may explain work hour preferences is partner characteristics. To address this, I include the partner's actual work hours in the analysis, recognizing that this can impact the time availability. Furthermore, I account for the partner's educational level. In addition to these factors, the analysis includes control variables such as the respondent's educational level, marital status (married or cohabiting), the region (East or West Germany), and the survey year.

First, I provide a descriptive overview of the preferred work hours and their discrepancies by gender composition in the couple and whether children under the age of 18 are present in the household. In the next step, OLS regression models are used to examine the determinants of the preferred work hours and their discrepancies with the actual work hours.

Preliminary descriptive results

Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of men and women who desire to adjust their work hours, along with an accompanying wage adjustment. In general, approximately 88% of the respondents have work hours that align with their preferences, and they do not wish to increase or decrease their work hours. The proportion of respondents seeking an increase in work hours exceeds those wanting to reduce their work hours. As expected, women in different-sex couples with children in the household hold the highest percentage, with 11% expressing a desire to work more hours. Mothers in same-sex couples constitute the second-highest share at around 9%. Men in same-sex couples exhibit the highest proportion wishing to decrease their work hours, with 6% expressing this preference.

Figure 1: Share of workers that want to change their working hours by gender composition in the couple and parenthood

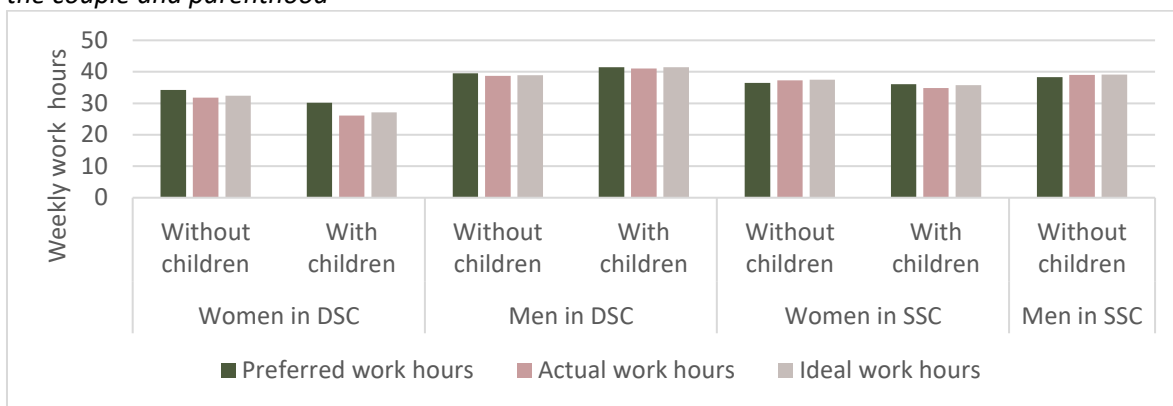


Note: Microcensus, 2010-2019, own estimations. Parenthood is constructed by having children under the age of 18 in the household. The abbreviation SSC stands for same-sex couples, and DSC for different-sex couples.

Figure 2 depicts the average preferred work hours, actual work hours, and ideal work hours, which comprise preferred work hours and when no change is desired, the actual work hours. For men in

different-sex couples, whether with or without children, the alignment between work hour preferences and actual work hours is almost perfect, averaging around 40 hours per week. This alignment is indicative of a strong adherence to the ideal worker norm. In contrast, men in same-sex couples express a desire to work approximately one hour less than their actual work hours, potentially indicating a slight deviation from the full-time worker norm. The most significant discrepancy between preferred and actual work hours is observed among women in different-sex couples. When no children are present in the household, these women express a preference for working an average of 34 hours per week but achieve 32 hours, resulting in a 2-hour gap per week. For women with children in the household, the gap widens to an average of 4 hours per week. Women in same-sex couples, on average, have higher preferred and actual work hours compared to women in different-sex couples. When children are present, women in same-sex couples express a preference for 36 hours of work, and they realize 35 hours, resulting in a smaller gap than their different-sex counterparts, as expected. As a next step, I plan to conduct OLS regressions to gain a deeper understanding of these initial descriptive findings. I intend to analyze how those differences are related to parenthood, gender composition in the couple, education, household income, and partner characteristics such as work hours and educational level.

Figure 2: Work hours preferences, actual work hours, and ideal work hours by gender composition of the couple and parenthood



Note: Microcensus, 2010-2019, own estimations. Parenthood is constructed by having children under the age of 18 in the household. The abbreviation SSC stands for same-sex couples, and DSC for different-sex couples.

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