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Title: Mothers' non-standard working schedules and family time : enhancing regularity and togetherness

Year: 2016

Version:

Please cite the original version:

Murtorinne-Lahtinen, M., Moilanen, S., Tammelin, M., Rönkä, A., & Laakso, M.-L. (2016). Mothers' non-standard working schedules and family time : enhancing regularity and togetherness. International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy, 36(1/2), 119-135. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSSP-02-2015-0022

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Introduction

Working hours have important implications for the daily life of working families. This is especially the case when one or both parents work evenings, weekends and nights, as families may then lose the possibility to participate in hobbies, spend family time and have family meals. Although children whose parents work non-standard working schedules (NSWS) need non-parental childcare, day-care centres and schools do not usually operate outside office hours. Hence, the fit experienced by parents between working time patterns and family life is crucial from the perspective of family wellbeing. This study addresses working mothers' experiences of the effects of NSWS on family time in two family forms, viz. coupled and lone parent. Furthermore our aim is to find out what meanings mothers with NSWS attach to family time paying particular attention to the circumstances in which mothers experience NSWS positively.

Non-standard working schedules and maternal employment in Finland

A non-standard working schedule (NSWS) refers to working time that falls outside standard office hours [8am to 5pm, Monday to Friday]. It also refers to long periods of work requiring parental absence from home (see Strazdins *et al.*, 2006). Despite the lively media debate on the spread of the 24/7 economy in Europe, researchers disagree over whether or not individual European countries can be characterized as 24/7 economies. Yet it is undisputable that a considerable proportion of employees work outside standard office hours. (e.g., Parent-Thirion *et al.*, 2007.)

In Finland, 25.5 percent of female and 19.0 percent of male employees do shift work, which is slightly more than the EU average (Eurostat, 2013; Table I). In addition, many workers do evening, night and weekend work. A great number of workers are affected by NSWS. In

Finland in some sectors, such as health service, NSWS are more common than standard day work (Lehto and Sutela, 2008, p. 131–132). Although, in the US, Presser (2003) has reported non-standard working hours to be particularly typical in families with children, low income families and lone-parent families, it would seem that in Europe NSWS are not attached to any particular family form but are equally common among families with and without children (Presser *et al.*, 2008). Also in Finland, NSWS have been shown to be linked to economic sector and profession rather than particular family form (Lehto and Sutela 2008, p. 132).

>> Table I about here <<

Finland is a Nordic welfare regime (Huijts & Eikemo, 2009). As such, it is characterized by high rates of female employment and an active role of the state in caring for children (see also Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 28). In Finland, almost all (92%) dual-earner couples comprise two full-time workers, while the majority of lone mothers (72.9%) also work, mostly full-time (Eurostat, 2013). Parental work is supported by the provision of state-subsidized comprehensive childcare services, ensuring non-parental childcare for all children and facilitating the combination of work and family life (Craig and Powell, 2012). Furthermore, Finland is distinct from other European countries in providing publicly organized and affordable around-the-clock childcare. Yet in Finland, as elsewhere, families also often use a combination of informal childcare (e.g., grandparent or [ex-]partner) and publicly provided formal care (Kröger, 2004). In fact the majority of Finnish children under three are cared for at home by their mothers (Kuronen *et al.*, 2011). Against this background it is of considerable interest to explore the meanings that

Finnish mothers attach to NSWS and family time. To our knowledge no previous studies have addressed this issue.

Practical and symbolic dimensions of family time

Time is one of the core dimensions around which families organize their life. Time and temporality in family life comprises several aspects, such as coordinating and sequencing the timetables and rhythms of the individual family members (Rönkä and Korvela, 2009). Parents can choose to de-synchronize their schedules, or be forced to do so (Lesnard, 2005). De-synchronization means that the partners' schedules diverge from each other. But even then, routines and practices, such as family meals and bedtime rituals, offer a cornerstone for the functioning of daily life (Strazdins *et al.*, 2006). Family time is also affected by the timetables of the various societal institutions with which different family members interact daily (Rönkä and Korvela, 2009).

In family life, the practical, symbolic and idealistic dimensions are intertwined. The symbolic and idealistic dimensions include notions pertaining to the centrality of the family and what constitutes a 'proper family'. (Morgan, 2011, pp. 75-76.) Expectations of family time, i.e. perceptions of how much time one should spend with the family and when, during a day or a week, affect the meanings and interpretations mothers give to family time. Meeting these possibly conflicting ideas about work and family may sometimes be difficult, particularly for mothers with NSWS. Time is also a family resource that is shaped by working time patterns defining, for example, when parents are available for their children (Strazdins *et al.*, 2004).

The earlier research on the relationship between NSWS and family life has largely been quantitative, focusing mostly on negative aspects of NSWS: work-to-family conflict (Liu *et al.*,

2011), poor family functioning (Strazdins *et al.*, 2004, 2006), partnership problems (Presser, 2000; Jekielek, 2003) and ineffective parenting (Strazdins *et al.*, 2006). Additional challenges include problems in arranging childcare and lowered child wellbeing (Presser, 2000; Strazdins *et al.*, 2004; Li *et al.*, 2014). Lone mothers working NSWS are particularly prone to suffer from lack of family time, mismatch between work and family time schedules (Baxter and Alexander, 2008), and problems in organizing childcare (Kröger, 2010).

Positive associations between NSWS and family life have also been reported. Among dual-earner families, for example, fathers have been found to participate more (e.g., Wight *et al.*, 2008) in childcare and household work when the mother works NSWS. Couples use nonstandard schedules to desynchronize schedules to reduce formalized childcare and engage in "tag-team parenting" i.e., working opposite shifts (e.g., Presser, 2003; Liu *et al.*, 2011). Some choose to work NSWS because these schedules are better paid (Han, 2004; Täht, 2011). The qualitative study by Mills and Täht (2010) showed that shift work allows household work to be done, parental involvement with children's hobbies during the daytime, and spending time at home with the children. Lleras (2008) also found that for shift-worker lone mothers' compensatory days off may increase their time with children.

There are also factors that can protect families from the possible negative effects of NSWS. Partnership support is a key determinant in maintaining good relationships between family members in dual-earner families with NSWS (Mills and Täht, 2010). Strong social networks are also crucial for the successful combination of work and childcare, especially in lone-parent families (see Kröger, 2010). In addition, work-related factors, for instance, autonomy over working time (i.e., flexibility of working hours) and regularity of working hours may compensate for the negative effects of work on family and enhance the positive impacts that work can have

on family life (Allen *et al.*, 2000; Kinnunen and Mauno, 2008). However, the absence of these positive features can also mediate the negative effects of NSWS on family life.

Aims of the study

In this study, we do not focus solely on time use, as the previous quantitative studies have done, but instead consider it crucial to address the ways family members construct meanings and actively create and recreate family practices in the NSWS context (Daly, 2001; Morgan, 2011). We focus on the experiences of working mothers since, in addition to paid work, women carry the main responsibility for household tasks and 'time management', that is, for the organization of daily family life (Daly, 2002; Bianchi *et al.*, 2000). This not only affects mothers' use of time but also their experiences of time. For example, multiple time-related responsibilities at work and home may cause feelings of time pressure.

While coupled mothers might not share time-related responsibilities equally with their partner, lone mothers – often the sole breadwinners and caretakers – are particularly vulnerable to experiences of time pressure and time spent away from the family (Bianchi *et al.*, 2006), which makes their experiences of combining NSWS and family life particularly interesting. Specifically, this research is guided by two questions:

(1) What effects of NSWS on family time are experienced by coupled and lone mothers, respectively?

(2) What meanings do coupled and lone mothers attach to family time in the context of maternal NSWS?

Methods

Data collection and participants

This study utilised interviews with 10 Finnish coupled and 10 Finnish lone mothers collected as a part of the 'Families 24/7' research project carried out in Finland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The one-to-one interviews were conducted in spring 2013 with working Finnish parents with at least one child aged 0-12 years. Most of the 55 interviewed parents had originally participated in the project's web survey of work and family life in a 24/7 economy and expressed their willingness to participate in qualitative interviews. The survey participants were originally recruited through childcare organizations, labour unions, and workplaces in all three countries. Some interviewees were recruited through the Finnish research team's social networks.

The selection criteria were based on the mothers' family form and work outside standard office hours. The coupled mothers were either married or cohabiting, whereas the lone mothers were either divorced or separated, and taking primary responsibility for their dependent child(ren). The coupled mothers were somewhat more educated and worked in managerial and professional occupations more often than the lone mothers (see Table AI). There was great variety in the individual NSWS of the participants, with many reporting irregularity in their working times. Furthermore, the partners of six of the coupled mothers also worked NSWS.

All names of participants or their family members used in this paper are pseudonyms. This paper focuses on the following themes discussed during the interviews: the mother's work and working times, childcare arrangements, everyday family life, parenting and parental wellbeing, and child wellbeing. The interviews were recorded and fully transcribed.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews was used to identify and understand mothers' experiences of the impacts of NSWS on family time. The two first-named authors conducted the analysis by adapting, rather than pedantically following, Braun and Clarke's (2006) steps for the thematic analytical process. Each coder had conducted some of the interviews.

After carefully reading the transcripts, initial code generation from the data extracts was done inductively and systematically to capture relevant phenomena, collect examples of these and analyse them for commonalities and differences. Both coders then sorted the initial codes into potential themes for comparison with each other. Discussion and review of the relationships between the codes, themes and different levels of themes (e.g., main overarching themes and sub-themes; see Figure 1) enabled us to establish similarities, differences, and overlaps between the generated themes that led to their subsequent refinement.

>> Figure 1 about here <<

The final themes were organized separately for positive and negative experiences. In each thematic map, the main themes and sub-themes relating to family time and individual time were identified for both the coupled and lone mothers. The sub-themes were organized according to how the mothers prioritized them. This enabled explicit comparison between the two groups of mothers.

Once the themes had been established through inductive analysis, the final deductive analysis was performed. The inductively-generated themes, which reflected the frame of

reference of the respondents, were compared to previous findings. The extracts pertaining to each theme were then arranged to form a consistent account.

Results

In answer to the first research question on the effects of maternal NSWS on family time three positive and three negative themes emerged. The themes relating to positive experiences were (1) satisfaction with family time, (2) favourable work conditions, and (3) successful childcare arrangements, and those relating to negative experiences were (1) dissatisfaction with family time (coupled mothers), concern over child wellbeing (lone mothers), (2) unfavourable work conditions, and (3) childcare-related concerns.

Positive aspects related to coupled and lone mothers' experiences

Satisfaction with family time. The most positive impact of non-standard working schedules on family life in general identified by both lone and coupled mothers was satisfaction with family time (see Figure 2). This referred to the amount of time that mothers had with their children and mothers' ways to create 'satisfactory' family time in terms of regular daily routines and responsiveness to the children. When reporting the effects of NSWS on family time, the mothers also reflected on the meanings they attributed to the family and children. Hence, the findings on both research questions are reported here side by side.

>> Figure 2 about here <<

Tessa, a lone mother working weekly rotating evening and morning shifts, talked about the increase in family time resulting from shift work:

> "[When you work shifts] somehow you seem to have more time for the child compared to working eight to five hours, after which the evening left is short. Now there is also time in the mornings before going off to the evening shift, and when you return earlier [from the morning shift] you have time in the evening." (Tessa, a lone mother, packer in a factory)

Family time, when shaped by cyclical patterns of action, such as routines and family activities, was seen as a resource for family wellbeing. Building a predictable structure for everyday life was regarded as a means of promoting children's wellbeing, and thereby also maternal wellbeing, by some mothers. Yet the temporal structure of the day and family composition varied from day to day or on a weekly basis. For example, lone mothers were not always at home at meal times, which is why older siblings cared for younger ones. Nevertheless, most parents found ways to maintain routines and interaction with their children. For instance, in Valerie's family bedtime rituals were replaced by morning routines. Daily interaction, emotions and closeness were essential components of these routines (Morgan, 2011, p. 111):

> "In the evening I pick the children up from night care at 9.30pm and take them straight to bed. We do not have any bedtime routines. But in the mornings we don't have to rush but can spend leisure time together as my work often starts at 10am, sometimes earlier. I sit on the kitchen floor, hold the children in my arms, hug them and read them a book. In our family we do things differently." (Valerie, a coupled mother, freelance actress/director)

Having more family time was reported to be the most important aspect of NSWS. This is not surprising since family and children were often seen as a source of meaningfulness and happiness instead of a demand. Nearly all the coupled and lone mothers reported that their children were the joy of their everyday lives. The wellbeing and health of the children were also important sources of satisfaction for the interviewees. The mothers' commitment to their children and home seemed to reflect their experiences of the time they spent in the family arena. Some lone mothers, for example, described the enjoyment of having intensive and exclusive mother-child time and the joy of being a self-contained unit without the father.

Having personal time and having time for the family were not necessarily exclusive. Visiting grandparents and friends, together with the family and doing housework, for example, were considered by some as both individual and family time. Family time was generally not considered a self-sacrifice, meaning that the mothers typically did not feel they had to give something up for the sake of family time and the wellbeing of their children:

> "Maybe when I was younger I thought I was having to give up my life outside the family. But, I don't know if I have grown up or what, but now I don't think I have to give up anything. My everything is right here [at home]." (Terry, a lone mother, practical nurse)

Similar phrases used by other mothers, such as "home is my life", "family comes first" and "home-oriented", described well the mothers' family-orientation. Coupled mothers prioritized having time with the children when time and energy were in short supply (see Daly, 2001). Several of these mothers thought that their preferences would change in the course of the family

life cycle (Morgan, 2011, p. 150). They assumed they would have more spousal time and more time for themselves when the children grew up.

Favourable work conditions. According to some mothers, work offered them resources that benefitted their family life. The positive features of work identified by these mothers included the importance of work, work enjoyment, being good and innovative at one's work, agreeable workmates, adult contacts and workplace support. For example, Ann, a lone mother, reported that positive experiences at work were associated with the quality of parental time. She explained that work gave her the energy when at home to devote herself wholly to her child.

Not all NSWS are the same or do not necessarily have the same impact. In addition to the timing of working hours (e.g., working only evenings, regular or irregular rotating shifts) the length of work shifts had a considerable impact on the perceived quantity and quality of family time. Those who worked fixed schedules and flexible hours reported satisfaction with their family time. However, some positive aspects of work were also mentioned by those who worked rapidly changing shifts as these were associated with having weekdays off.

High work autonomy, or the ability to control when and where one worked, was one of the work-related characteristics some mothers saw as a precondition of independence and freedom. Work autonomy was typical among white collar workers, such as managers and self-employed coupled mothers, who, overall, reported more positive experiences of family time in the NSWS context than lone mothers. The working days of mothers with high working time autonomy gave them flexibility in meeting the time demands of work and family time (also Tammelin, 2009). Such family time demands included ferrying the children to and from their hobbies, going shopping, and preparing lunch.

One-third of the interviewed mothers, mainly lone mothers working three shifts, described having weekdays off as a family time-related resource. During weekdays, they enjoyed doing things together with the child, such as going swimming or shopping without the burden of weekend crowds. Moreover, working an evening shift meant not having to get under-school aged children out of bed early in the morning. These children could stay home till noon, have a leisurely breakfast, and do household chores with their mother.

A fixed-shift schedule (e.g., weekly rotating morning and evening shifts, permanent night shifts) was seen as a family time resource by two lone and three coupled mothers. Being out of sync with the rest of the family for a few days or a whole week when working fixed night shifts often, for example, had the compensation of a week off. This is how Helen, a coupled mother, who worked 3 to 4 consecutive 12.5-hour night shifts talked about the benefits of such work schedules:

> "How do your and Mike's working hours affect your everyday life?" (Interviewer)

> "Well, they don't. I'm alone with the girls and then Mike's with them. And then we spend long periods of time together which compensates for it [lost family time] – this is an excellent arrangement for us." (Helen, a coupled mother, control room duty officer)

Hettie, a lone mother who worked permanent night shifts, reported that she was always there when the children were awake and she was also "actively present" in their lives. She was thus able to meet the expectations of ´good` mothering (Wight *et al.*, 2008). According to some mothers then, fixed shifts had a positive impact on both the quantity and quality of family time.

Successful childcare arrangements. Positive aspects of work, such as regular shifts and flexible work schedules, combined with the availability of both informal and formal childcare assisted in managing NSWS and family life. Care by fathers and relatives were considered the best for child wellbeing (also Han, 2004).

A childcare-related strategy, positively associated with family time in many two-parent families, was 'tag-team parenting', where the parents worked opposite shifts and so took turns in caring for the children. Half of the coupled mothers said that NSWS increased fathers' involvement with the children. Even in families with a traditional division of household chores, time-bound child-related care work, such as preparing children's meals, was done by the father while the mother was working. Tag-team parenting ensured that at least one parent was present for the children (Han, 2004).

> "When one of us is away, the other one has to take over, has to be in charge of the family and home. It is very easy for me; I just leave for work and come back home to sleep. When my husband is at home, he cooks and takes care of the children." (Helen)

It is noteworthy that half of the lone mothers also reported using childcare by non-resident father giving lone mothers the possibility for rest and recreation. Help received from the ex- or current partner seemed to make a difference.

Negative aspects relating to coupled and lone mothers' experiences

Dissatisfaction with family time. Mothers in both family forms expressed feelings of guilt and inadequacy for not spending enough time with their children and for not being present in their children's lives in ways they felt they should be (see Figure 3). Such feelings of guilt could reflect prevailing cultural expectations and norms according to which 'women's time is more bound to family time'. For lone mothers, particularly, dissatisfaction with family time aroused concern over the child's wellbeing. These feelings impaired maternal wellbeing and presumably negatively affected mother-child interaction. Not only was time spent at work felt to be at the cost of time spent with the child but having a strong work orientation and dedication also sometimes aroused feelings of guilt.

>> Figure 3 about here <<

Maternal NSWS illuminated the moral dimensions of gender and family time. The mothers experienced meeting conflicting work and family responsibilities as a burden, which was further amplified by the judgmental attitudes of others. One coupled mother reported criticism of her motherhood by friends over her timing of their family time. It was an issue that she didn't start preparing the family dinner after four o'clock every day. The combination of lone motherhood and NSWS also raised moral concern.

Lone mothers in particular felt that rapidly rotating shifts with quick changeovers (i.e., short rest periods between shifts) and long days had a negative effect on parent-child interaction, especially at times of putting children to sleep, eating meals, waking children up and sending them to school, or ferrying them to and from their hobbies. Mothers were also concerned about

their under school-aged children, who spent long periods at night in public childcare away from parents. One coupled mother, Sandy, of young children referred to separation anxiety:

> "Well at this moment with two small children in the family the night shifts are starting to feel challenging. For the children [rotating] morning-evening-morning shifts [are the most challenging]. What it means is that first you take them to childcare for the evening shift and they spend almost the whole time they are awake in childcare. You see, children tend to have a rhythm which they need to keep. And when they sleep the night at home, you have to take them back to the childcare centre for the morning shift again after they have woken up. For children that is the worst part. (…) In these situations you can see the separation anxiety in them. There is not enough time for them to be at home." (Sandy, a coupled mother, practical nurse)

In some mothers, consecutive evening-morning shifts (i.e., morning shift that followed an evening shift) aroused particular concern. This "counter-clockwise rotation" of shifts was experienced as challenging, since work was often finished late and started early or very early in the morning, causing irregularity in the child's daily rhythm. Therefore, mothers were concerned about the health consequences of NSWS in terms of children not having enough of sleep. In the evening, there was not enough time to catch up on daily events and enable the child to relax. The child was overtired, and thus had difficulties falling asleep. If the child had fallen asleep in the around-the-clock childcare centre, it was difficult to keep her/him asleep or get her/him back to sleep. In the mornings, mothers used different strategies to maximize children's sleeping time, such as dressing children while they slept.

Evening and weekend work and long days were also seen as especially inconvenient in families with school-age children. One lone mother talked about her children's "adult hunger", referring to the children's urge to "cling to their mother" when she was at home. Both lone and coupled mothers of school-age children reported time pressures such as having to miss a child's school event because of work.

Unfavourable work conditions. Many mothers had to live with the fact that they had only limited autonomy over their working time and sometimes had to work in conditions unfavourable to family time. Thus, long days, irregularity of working hours, overtime, and a lot of work assignments, leading to stress and tiredness, occasionally overshadowed the positive effects of work autonomy on family time for some coupled mothers. Unfavourable working conditions were identified from the mothers' interviews as another negative association with the quantity and quality of family time.

The majority of coupled and lone mothers also felt that work load and work stress negatively affected their own health and wellbeing. Rapidly rotating night shifts and long working days disrupted their circadian rhythms, causing sleep deprivation, which altered their mood and energy, leading to more irritable interaction with their children and further interfering with parent-child activities (see also Roeters *et al.*, 2010). Work disrupted family time, which some mothers saw as affecting child wellbeing. Solo parenting was subjected to additional stress during times of fatigue following intensive bouts of work. The need for another adult to meet the children's needs became apparent. "Two is more than one", as Ann, a lone mother and freelance dance artist, put it. "I feel this kind of life situation in which you are the only parent is not fair for the child because it imposes too much pressure on the parent-child relationship."

Furthermore, children were said to notice the limitations of their mothers' time resources. One lone mother expressed concern about her child worrying about her wellbeing (see also Nixon *et al.*, 2012, p. 152). As previously shown, children are sensitive to parental work-related emotions. Children pay special attention to negative emotions, such as fatigue and bad mood, as mediators of parental work that affect them (Galinsky, 1999). It seems likely that children in lone-parent families are more vulnerable to the stress-related emotions of parental work than those in two-parent families, as the former are dependent on the mood of only one parent.

Childcare-related concerns. Lone mothers' feelings of inadequacy and lack of time were related to bringing up the children alone and running everyday life without another adult. For lone mothers, only half of the parental time resource was available if the non-resident father was not present in the child's life. Unfavourable working hours, such as rapidly rotating shifts with quick changeovers (i.e., short rest periods between shifts) combined with multiple and overlapping time-related demands (e.g., walking the dog and letting the child sleep one more hour) were associated with feelings of guilt and childcare-related concerns in lone-parent households:

> "Anna [daughter] knows that before the morning shift I quickly walk the dog before she wakes up. I close the gate upstairs so that she can't fall down the stairs. It would feel horrible to wake her up when she can still sleep one more hour. (…) One morning she woke up at five o'clock. It was minus 22 (º C) outside and I dressed her warmly (…). When we came out she said mom I am freezing -- she was shivering all over -- I felt so bad

for her suffering because mom has to walk the dog before work starts." (Maya, a lone mother, paramedic and nurse)

All the young children of lone mothers were in around-the-clock childcare. However, lone mothers had problems organizing night care for their school-aged children who were home alone without parental surveillance while the mother was at work. In addition, non-residential father care was sometimes vulnerable to disruptions; for example, if the father broke a promise to provide childcare, which was typical after a bitter divorce. Furthermore, the quality of paternal care was sometimes a concern of lone mothers, which is why additional non-parental childcare was sometimes needed.

Women often take care of the time coordination of family life, and also of organizing and coordinating childcare. Time with children was characterised differently for mothers than fathers, who were more lax. Mothers' explained that children could "get away with anything with their father" and "all sorts of things happened at home" while the mother was working. This fuelled childcare-related concerns when physically away from home.

Discussion and conclusions

This study focused on working mothers' experiences of the effects of non-standard work schedules (NSWS) on family time in two family forms, coupled and lone-parent families. The results showed that whether mothers experience NSWS positively or negatively is highly dependent on how successful they and their families are in creating and promoting regularity and togetherness. One way to cope with the temporal demands of NSWS is to actively maintain

routines as flexible a way as possible in order to protect family time. Finally, the results also highlight the more problematic situation of lone-parent families.

The types and timings of NSWS reported by the mothers varied considerably, as also did the experiences attached to these, underlining the need for qualitative interviews. Specific features of work, such as autonomy and regularity, along with successful childcare arrangements helped the mothers to achieve a more satisfactory daily life. Apart from the timing of working hours, the length of working days strongly affected how family time was experienced. Quick changeovers (i.e., short rest periods between shifts) were experienced as harmful. These findings mainly accord with those of previous studies.

Furthermore idealistic and symbolist aspects, such as attitudes and values, were reflected in the meanings that mothers attributed to family time. The mothers regarded family time as an important source for child wellbeing and preferred parental care. These meanings can be seen as indications of child-centeredness and traditional family values typical of the new familialism or family time nostalgia (see also Daly, 2001; Kuronen *et al.*, 2011; Morgan, 2011.) On the positive side, the mothers reported strong feelings of 'we-ness', but also, on the negative side, feelings of guilt and concern over their NSWS. In a social cultural setting which favours gender equality on one hand, and traditional family values on the other hand, mothers appear to face challenges in meeting the conflicting ideals of work and family. Qualitative methods were needed in order to capture the meanings, and especially ambivalent feelings, of mothers with respect to NSWS and family time.

Family status emerged as a central moderating factor. Lone mothers more frequently voiced concern over the wellbeing of their children owing to having insufficient time for them. This can be explained by the lack of the other parent to share daily tasks with, as well as by

differences in education and work-related characteristics across the sample: overall, lone mothers were less educated and more frequently shift workers whereas the more highly educated coupled mothers commonly worked in managerial and professional positions with more working time autonomy. Furthermore, compared to their lone counterparts, coupled mothers more often characterized their work as meaningful, challenging and independent. The findings show that an intersectional approach, analysing class, gender and family structure, is important when analysing the meanings work has for individuals.

The main limitation of this study was the small sample size. However, the aim was not to undertake a representative analysis but to gain an understanding of the effects of NSWS on family time. Also, the findings need to be considered in relation to the socio-cultural setting, which may limit their generalizability to other countries (also Täht, 2011).

This study raises interesting topics for future studies. For example, although couples used 'tag-team' parenting, housework was divided in traditional ways in most of the two-parent families. Whether NSWS unsettles or further cements gender imbalance in care and work remains an open question (also Strazdins *et al.*, 2006). It would also be interesting to analyse the daily routines and schedules of dual NSWS families and to learn how families experience de-synchronized schedules. The findings on the effects of regular and irregular shifts on family time could also be further investigated with larger samples and with mixed methods.

This study has some policy implications. First, it shows how the parents of small children benefit from the regularity and flexibility in their working hours. Second, it shows that a non-resident parent can also be an important source of childcare. Therefore policymakers should take into account family type, including consideration of the rights to childcare of non-resident parents. Third, owing to irregular and varying working times, flexible around-the-clock childcare

is needed. This is scarce in Europe, and knowledge on the topic is lacking. In Finland, an important question is how to organize the care of small school-aged children. Lone mothers, especially, may need services to help with domestic chores and childcare. It is likely that the service sector, and NSWS, will continue to expand, meaning that this will be even more important policy area in the future. Overall, this study adds to the literature by explaining more in depth, through the richness of qualitative data, the circumstances in which mothers experience NSWS positively.

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