



POLICY BRIEFING SERIES

WORK-FAMILY INFORMATION FOR STATE LEGISLATORS

SUPPORTED BY: THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION

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CURRENT TRENDS IN PART-TIME WORK

When part-time work options are a good fit with employees' needs, they can offer flexibility and a better quality of life while allowing companies to quickly adapt to changing market conditions.

WHAT IS PART-TIME WORK?

Part-time work is defined as working less than 35 hours per week.¹ Despite the growing interest in part-time work options, surveys published in 2008 indicate that only 17% of the workforce works part time.²

WHAT ARE THE TRENDS IN PART-TIME WORK?

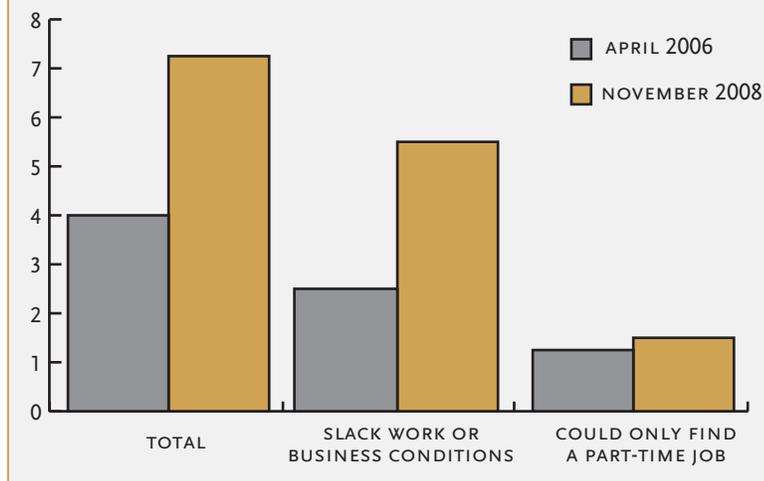
Most companies still adhere to the “ideal worker” norm in which working more than full-time is expected for advancement and in which there is a complete separation of work and family commitments.³ However, today, family members, early retirees and businesses can all reap the benefits of part-time work options, which may include financial resources, schedule flexibility, and the ability to retain skilled workers.

One current trend is that an increasing number of workers have regular dependent-care responsibilities, and thus, are seeking part-time work options to better juggle their work and family responsibilities. These family responsibilities may include tending to the needs of children and/or elderly or disabled family members during traditional work hours.⁴ For instance, six in ten working mothers (up from 48% in 1997) say that part-time work would be their ideal arrangement, and eight of ten mothers currently working part-time describe their arrangement as ideal.⁵

Another emerging trend is that some older workers approaching retirement are seeking opportunities to work part-time rather than retire “cold turkey.” There are a variety of reasons for this trend, including economic necessity and the need for continued benefits.⁶ In addition, many older workers continue to work for a general sense of well-being and productiveness.⁶

A third developing trend is that during the current economic times, part-time work is not always voluntary, as increasing numbers of jobs are downgraded to temporary, low-wage, and “flexible” schedules.⁷ While some employers are using part-time work to avoid layoffs until the business climate improves, many part-time employees are relying on their hours to survive when full-time work is unavailable.⁷

**Involuntary part-time employment by reason,
April 2006 and November 2008 (millions)**



"IN CHALLENGING ECONOMIC TIMES, PART-TIME WORK IS A CRITICAL (AND OFTEN THE ONLY) RESOURCE FOR MANY PEOPLE. THIS LEGISLATION PROMOTES PART-TIME WORK WHILE PRESERVING OTHER BENEFITS IMPORTANT TO WORKING FAMILIES. PEOPLE SHOULD NOT BE PENALIZED FOR WANTING TO DO BETTER FOR THEMSELVES OR THEIR FAMILIES. THEY SHOULD BE COMMENDED FOR DOING EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO KEEP THEIR FAMILIES FED AND HAVING A PLACE TO SLEEP."

REPRESENTATIVE JOHN G. "JACK" PAGE (D. ALABAMA)



WHY IS PART-TIME WORK A POLICY MATTER?

The current recession has created an enormous part-time labor force for which policy is underdeveloped. Policy makers can protect workers by creating sound policies that include the needs of this expanding workforce population.

- In November of 2008, 7.3 million people were employed part-time for economic reasons, a staggering increase of 87% from 3.9 million in April of 2006.⁷ As of May of 2009, that number had increased again to 9.1 million.⁸
- The percentage of total employment made up of involuntary part-time workers increased by 2.4 percentage points to 5.1% between April of 2006 and November of 2008, and the number continues to rise.⁷

State laws can protect employees who have a need (financial, physical, or other) for part-time work by providing certain benefits, such as health care and unemployment benefits.

State legislators can support bills that increase part-time work schedules for public-sector employees.

HOW DOES THE AVAILABILITY OF PART-TIME WORK AFFECT WORKING FAMILIES?

If it is a good fit for employees, having access to high-quality (i.e., equitable pay, prorated benefits, etc.) part-time work schedules can make a difference in the well-being of employees and their families. For those workers who are forced into part-time work, even though they need and want to work full-time, there may be negative consequences, including lower pay, reduced or no benefits, and little job security.³

- Part-time professionals reported less work-to-family conflict than full-time professionals did in terms of interference and strain on relationships (2.4 and 3.0 on a scale from 1–5).⁹
- However, there are significantly fewer benefits provided to part-time workers compared to full-time workers: “While some part-time employees are covered for the following: Vacation (44%), Sick Leave (18%), Pension (34%), Health Insurance (21%), Life Insurance (18%), and Dental Insurance (16%), more full-time employees are covered for the same benefits: Vacation (95%), Sick Leave (56%), Pension (79%), Health Insurance (76%), Life Insurance (87%), and Dental Insurance (59%).”¹⁰

While part-time work can be desirable for many constituents, when implemented without proper guidance, it can lead to career penalties, marginalization of the part-time worker, and harmful work inequities arising from management and organizational resistance.³

HOW DOES PART-TIME WORK AFFECT BUSINESSES?

Employers who offer part-time work schedules frequently discover that there are business benefits.

- Businesses can save office space and overhead costs by hiring multiple part-time employees who rotate hours in the office.¹¹
- Businesses often find that retaining quality employees in a part-time work arrangement is more beneficial than losing the employee (and hiring and retraining a replacement).¹¹
- Offering flexible work schedules can also enhance labor-related flexibility for employers by creating a labor force that can adapt to changes in market conditions.¹¹

Some concerns of businesses relate to difficulty obtaining quality workers, retaining key and trained personnel, additional administrative time and expense to coordinate part-time schedules, and reduced productivity.³

WHO HAS ACCESS TO PART-TIME WORK?

Only a minority of the workforce is using voluntary part-time work options:

- Among these part-time workers, 68% are women,² while only 24% are working mothers.⁵
- In local government, 1.6 million of the labor force of 10.4 million (15.4%) works part-time.¹²
- One study found that only 16% of employers provide any kind of flexible arrangement for older workers.¹³

Innovative state policies that encourage employers to offer part-time work might increase the percentage of employers offering part-time schedule options to their employees.

STATUTES

Twenty-one states (AR, CA, CO, DE, FL, HI, GA, IA, ID, KS, LA, MD, ME, MN, MT, NC, NH, NM, NY, OK, VT) provide unemployment benefits to workers engaged in part-time work.

Nine states (AR, CA, FL, ME, NC, NY, OR, RI, WI) link the availability of part-time schedules to workforce development, especially for women, low-wage and older workers.

Fourteen states (CA, FL, IA, KS, LA, MN, MT, MS, OK, PA, TN, TX, WV, UT) have statutes relating to phased retirement in a variety of public sector fields.

BILLS

Eight states (AL, HI, ID, IL, MI, NY, NC, OH) have recently introduced an array of bills relating to compensation, health care, and other benefits for part-time workers.

For additional bills related to part-time work or other bills concerning work-family issues, visit our website at http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/template.php?name=bill_clusters

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

- The Pew Research Center; part-time work research at: http://pewresearch.org/search/results.php?cx=005135597546655918890%3Ai5-ahdk_kcq&cof=FORID%3A11&q=part-time+work#941
The Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan “fact tank” that provides information on the issues, attitudes, and trends shaping America and the world. It does not take positions on policy issues.
- Families and Work Institute: <http://www.familiesandwork.org/>
Families and Work Institute is a nonprofit center dedicated to providing research for living in today’s changing workplace, changing family, and changing community.

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To view additional issues of the Policy Briefing Series, including Phased Retirement and Flexible Work Schedules, please visit: wfnetwork.bc.edu/policy.php

The Sloan Work and Family Research Network can provide you with additional research-based information about working families.

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