



Work Autonomy,  
Flexibility and  
Work-Life Balance

# Examining the impact of schedule flexibility on work-family conflict – gender and occupational variance

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# Work-family conflict

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- Conflict coming from the opposing pressures of work roles and family roles that are mutually incompatible (Greenhaus & Beutel 1985)
- **Work to home**, home to work



# The paradox

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- *Research shows that employees (and self-employed) working fixed starting and finishing times are more satisfied on their work–life balance than employees with variable working times and people with **the most discretion have the least satisfaction** with work life balance (Parent-Thirion et al. 2007; Plantenga & Rumery 2010).*



# Schedule flexibility reduces work-family conflict

Based on the jobs demands,  
control and resources literature

More control over  
schedules, more resources  
to tackle demands – allow  
better combination of the  
two spheres



Work-  
family  
conflict



# Flexi-time increases work-family conflict

Increase propensity to multi-task, spill over, blurring of boundaries & increased **working hours/work intensity**



Work-  
family  
conflict



# Causes of intensification (Kelliher & Anderson 2010)

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- **Imposed intensification** : imposed by employers/contract – same amount of work but fewer hours (task based work), increased workload through downsizing
- **Enabled intensification**: allow people to work harder easily – removal of distractions, increased optimization of hours
- **Exchange theory**: The ability to take advantage of flexible working options may engender a reaction in employees, which results in them expending greater effort, increase motivation, commitment → increase other characteristics of the “ideal worker”



# Variance across individuals

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- Clark (2000) – flexibility of borders can increase spill over to the other sphere of life when **one aspect takes precedence** (workers where work has a high significance in life)
  - increased work intensity and hours/impact of schedule control will depend largely on individuals
  - Individuals whose life focuses more on work, more likely to intensify/increase work efforts
  - Individuals who has other demands may be less likely to intensify/increase work efforts
- Gender, parental status, and occupational status



# Occupational/work culture variation

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- Higher status worker
  - Workers with higher occupations (Blair-Loy, 2009) with higher statuses (Schieman, Galvin & Milkie, 2009) are more likely to increase their work intensity – due to their devotion to work → lack of boundaries may increase work family conflict
  - On the other hand, lower occupational groups may not be given the possibility to use schedule flexibility but when they do they are less likely to experience spill overs → decrease work-family conflict
- Ideal worker culture
  - Workers in a more ideal worker culture may be more susceptible to increase their work intensity/hours through the use of schedule flexibility → increase wfc





# Gender/parental variations (1)

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- Men and non/parents
  - Due to the gender roles of men as breadwinners/main earners of the family, different occupations, schedule control increases spill over for men (Schieman & Galvin 2008) men work longer overtime when using schedule control (Lott & Chung, 2016)
  - Men/non-parents flexitime is likely to be a part of a high involvement strategy (not family friendly arrangement)  
→ used not for work life balance purposes
  - Men/non-parents when given schedule control likely to increase their work intensity and working hours which leads to increase work to family conflict



# Gender/parental variation (2)

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- Role of schedule flexibility for mothers/parents
  - Women more often pursue activities outside the workplace when given flexibility (Burchell et al., 2007; Gambles et al., 2006; Hofäcker & König, 2012)
  - Women/mothers tend to increase their household contribution/ caring roles more through schedule flexibility because of cultural assumption on the role of mothers (Radcliffe, 2014; Kelly & Moen 2007; Singley and Hynes, 2005; Maume 2008)
  - Thus may be used to relieve work family conflict



# Gender/parental variation (3)

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- Mother's employment patterns
  - women's labour supply is more sensitive to work-family obligations, even when both parents are full-time active on the labour market (Maume et al. 2009)
  - Schedule flexibility allow women to maintain their working hours when there is an increase in family demands (children) (Chung and van der Horst, in review)
  - Women's flexible schedules increase work family conflict through enabling women to maintain/extend working hours

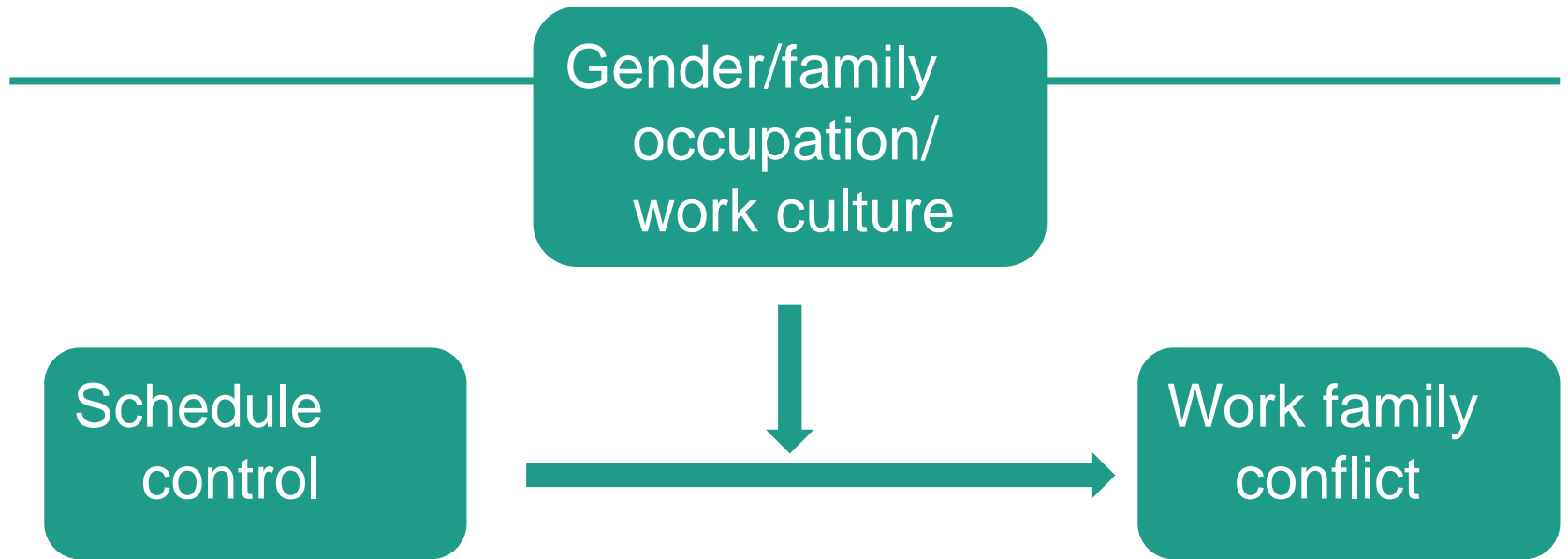


# Type of schedule flexibility

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- Flexitime – flexibility in the time boundaries
- Teleworking – flexibility in the physical boundaries  
→ can lead to more spill over?



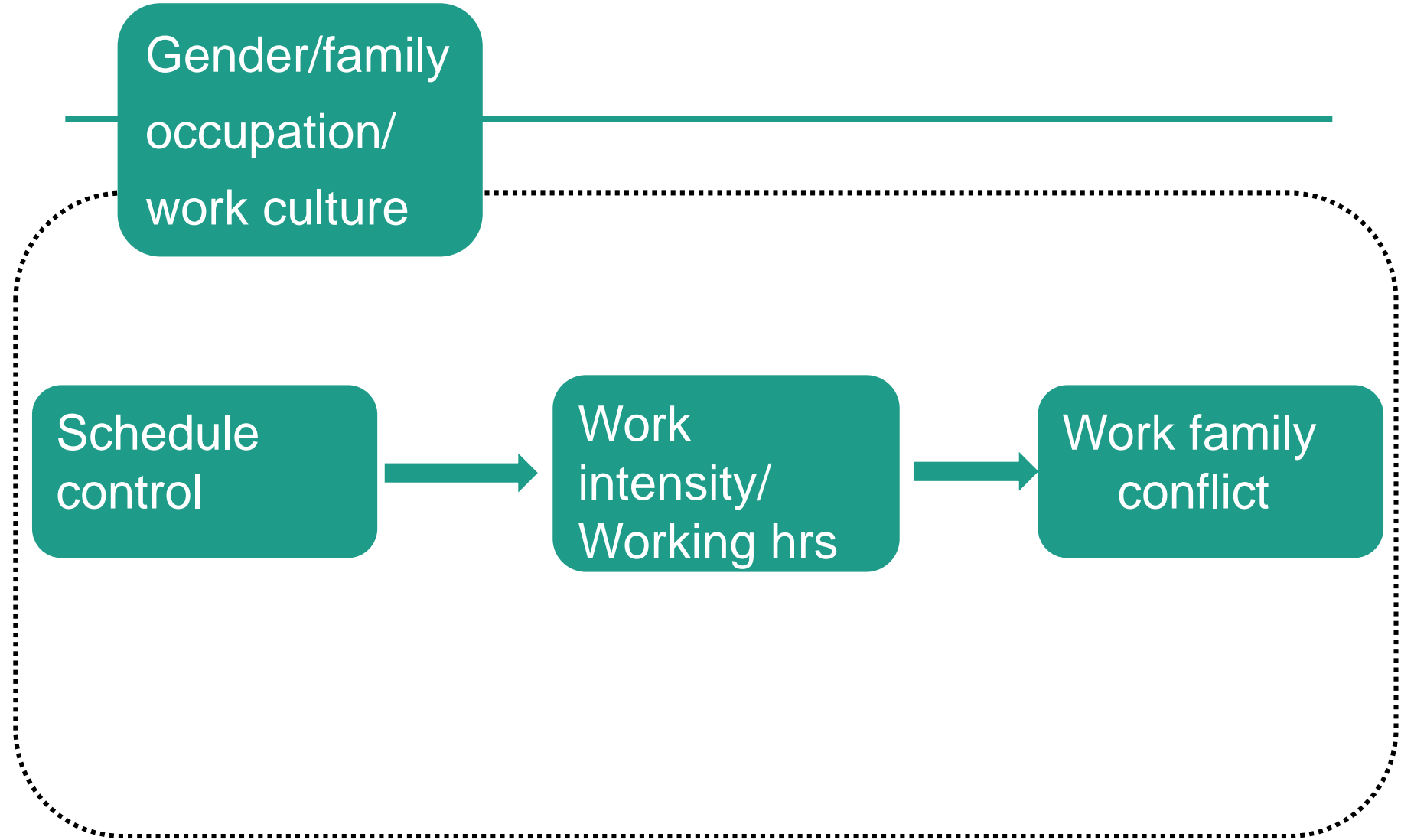


Gender/family  
occupation/  
work culture

Schedule  
control

Work  
intensity/  
Working hrs

Work family  
conflict



# Data/Method



# Workplace Employment Relations Study

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- UK based (funded by BIS)
- Conducted in 2004, **2011(-12)**
- Employer-employee match data set
- Over 21000 dependent employed workers, representative of all British workplaces with 5 or more employees.
- Right to request in the UK – introduced 2005, extended 2009 to all parents/carers, 2014 to all workers (very minimum right)





# Schedule flexibility

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- Schedule flexibility
  - In the past 12 months, have you made use of any of the following arrangements? (are they available to you)
  - **Flexitime(27%)**, job sharing, reduced hours, condensed hours, **working from home(16%)**, term time only, emergency paid leave
- Other control over work
  - In general how much influence do you have over...
  - ... *the time you start of finish your working day(58%)*
  - Task, pace, method, order – summative control over work



# Work family conflict

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- Work family conflict
  - “I often find it difficult to fulfil my commitments outside of work because of the time I spend on my job”
  - Strongly disagree (1) – strongly agree(5)
  - 27% of total sample agree
  - (on the other hand very little agreement on family to work conflict)



# Worker characteristics

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- Working hours
  - Actual working hours (capped at 70)/ overtime hours (actual hours – contracted hours capped at 40)
- Work intensity
  - “My job requires that I work very hard”(strongly agree 34%)
- Long hours culture
  - Do you agree that people in this workplace who want to progress usually have to put in long hours? (agree 40%; strongly agree 12%)
- Occupational levels/higher status
  - Standardised occupational classification – 9 levels
  - Supervisory role - dichotomous



# Household characteristics

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- Household characteristics
  - Children: number of children (1,2, 3+), age of youngest child (preschool; -11; 12+)
  - Cohabiting with partner
- Care responsibilities
  - Look after a family/friend weekly basis



# Work characteristics cont.

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- High involvement system
  - How good would you say managers at this workplace are at ... seeking views, responding to suggestions, allowing influence over decisions of employees and employee representatives
  - Combined sum index (Cronbach's alpha 0.93)
  - Performance related pay
  
- Other
  - Manager's support – summative index( $\alpha=0.93$ )
  - Employee representative/union on site
  - Member of the trade union, permanent contract
  - Satisfaction in the job summative ( $\alpha=0.86$ )



# Method

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- Varying impact – use of interaction terms ; i.e., schedule flex\*gender, \*parental status/ care status, \*occupational status, \*long work hours culture
- Mediation models via SEM (working hours/overtime/work intensity)



# Results



# WFC – family demands context

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- Initial model
  - Use of flexitime linked to *lower* WFC
  - Use of teleworking linked to *higher* WFC
- Interaction terms
  - No gender difference, parental status insignificant interx
  - Flexitime ... *not* when you have primary school age child
  - Telework...*not* when you have preschool *or* primary school age child





# WFC – work demands context

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- Working hours/demands
  - Those **working longer hours** benefit more from flexitime (working longer linked to *higher* WFC)
  - Teleworking only bad for those whose **jobs are demanding** (subjectively) (demanding jobs linked to *higher* WFC)
- Working culture
  - Those working in **long hours culture** also benefit more from flexitime (long hours culture linked to *higher* WFC)



# Indirect effects

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- Effects of Flexitime/telework use to WFC
  - Flexitime linked to **shorter** working hours & **lower** tendencies of working harder thus linked to **lower** WFC
  - Teleworking **longer** working hours, and thus **higher** WFC (but not through working harder)
- Dependent on family demands?
  - For **women**, flexitime **not** linked to shorter working hours but otherwise no clear gender difference
  - For **parents**, there is **no direct effect** of teleworking only indirectly via working hours increase, **weaker direct effect** of flexiworking
  - For workers without family care responsibility, **no direct effect** of flexiwork or telework only via working hours



# Indirect effects

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- Dependent on occupational level?
  - The direct and indirect impact mostly driven by professionals
  - Flexitime direct association with WFC only found for professionals and skill workers/teleuse 1-4<sup>th</sup>
  - Care, sales, plant, elementary (somewhat skill workers) almost no impact of schedule flexibility
- Dependent on ideal worker culture?
  - Long working hours culture, workers work longer hours and likely to feel work intensity
  - However, use of flexitime in these environments are much more effective in reducing working hours and reducing subjective work intensity



# Summary

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- Schedule flexibility impacts WFC but depends on the type or arrangement and who uses it
- Parental status matters, work cultures matter
- There is a mediating role of work intensity – both quantity and subjective/quality
- But again depending on who and where
  
- In long hours culture/ideal worker culture, flexitime seems to be especially beneficial in relieving some of the conflict
- Teleworking better used by parents to combine W+F



# Thank you!

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For comments & questions  
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