

Institution: University of East Anglia
Unit of Assessment: 19 Business and Management Studies
Title of case study: The impact of part-time employment on women's careers.
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The number of women in part-time employment is now 5.9 million, accounting for around 40% of all female employment. The hourly rates of pay for women in part-time employment are 35% lower than those for women in full-time employment and just under 12% of part-time jobs were paid at or below the National Minimum Wage (NMW) compared with 3% of full-time jobs. Research at the University of East Anglia (UEA) into part-time employment, led by Sara Connolly (Norwich Business School), has had a direct impact on policy debate and provision in this area. Among other impacts, the Low Pay Commission (LPC) uses the research in evidence every time it debates likely impacts of an increase in the National Minimum Wage, and this has benefited part-time workers. The research has also influenced wider thinking about part-time work, and the UK government's consideration of flexible working.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Connolly and Gregory have undertaken extensive empirical research into the impact of part-time work on women's careers. They argue that the growth in part-time work should be cautiously welcomed. Although part-time employment offers opportunities for women to combine work and motherhood, prolonged spells of part-time employment frequently has a detrimental effect on women's long-term finances and careers. Rather than closing the gender pay gap, the extensive use of part-time employment has actually contributed to a full/part-time pay gap, is associated with a hidden 'brain-drain' where skills are underemployed and may trap women in low skilled sectors of the economy. This raises important policy implications about how best to utilise the increasingly skilled female workforce whilst also supporting working families.</p> <p>The key question motivating the research is what accounts for the full/part-time wage gap. Previous research had argued that much of the gap is due to self-selection of those with lower productive characteristics into part-time work and the heavy concentration of part-time jobs in low paying sectors. However, the growing importance of part-time employment – over six million women work part-time with around two-thirds of women working part-time at some stage of their adult careers – means that self-selection and a skills gap can no longer plausibly account for the wage differential.</p> <p>Recognizing the fact that the majority of women switch into part-time work after having worked full-time, Connolly and Gregory created a skill- and qualification-based index for jobs, comparing the skillset and grades associated with the jobs women were doing when they worked full-time and the jobs of the same women when they switched into part-time work and estimated the extent of the underutilisation of skills (R2). They discovered that for most women switching into part-time work involves a downgrading of occupation and a change of employer, they find that there is a significant wage penalty to each in addition to that associated with industry and other job characteristics. Furthermore, they find that the returns to years of experience in part-time employment are significantly lower than those in full-time experience (R3). Finally, they traced the role of part-time work in women's careers, and found that the longer the spell of part-time employment the less likely women were to move back into full-time, so they never manage to recover their previous career trajectory (R4). Overall, the research shows that following a switch into part-time employment, the characteristics of the individual do play a role in determining pay and career progression, but it is the nature and availability of the opportunities to work part-time which are central to the difference in outcomes. Connolly and Gregory conclude that key to curbing occupational down-grading is the greater availability of opportunities for part-time work within women's existing jobs and that implies extending policies such as the 'right to request flexible working'.</p>

Connolly, who has been employed at UEA since September 1993, is part of the Employment Systems and Institutions research group within the Norwich Business School (NBS) at UEA.

3. References to the research

- R1. Connolly, S. and Gregory, M., (2002) "The National Minimum Wage and Hours of Work Implications for Low Paid Women," *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics*, 64, pp. 607-631 (ABS 3*).
- R2. Connolly, S. and Gregory, M., (2008), "Moving down: Women's part-time work and occupational change in Britain 1991-2001," *Economic Journal*, 118, pp. F52-F76 (ABS 4*).
- R3. Connolly, S. and Gregory, M., (2009) "The part-time pay penalty: earnings trajectories of British Women," *Oxford Economic Papers*, 61, pp. i76-i97 (ABS 3*).
- R4. Connolly, S. and Gregory, M. (2010) "Dual tracks: part-time work in life cycle employment for British women", *Journal of Population Economics*, 23, pp. 907-931 (ABS 3*).

4. Details of the impact

The impact has been in influencing the policy debate, improving the quality of argument and decision; and through this in improving the lives of working women.

Connolly's work on part-time employment has formed part of the evidence base for research and policy documents for a range of government departments (including the Low Pay Commission (LPC), Government Equalities Office, Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, and the Department for Work and Pensions) and the Equalities and Human Rights Commission. It has been particularly influential when determining the impact on part-timers of raising the National Minimum Wage and in encouraging the Government to improve opportunities for flexible working. Both have had a positive impact on the lives of working women.

In setting the initial National Minimum Wage (NMW), the Low Pay Commission anticipated that women would be the single greatest beneficiaries of the NMW, the evidence suggests that women accounted for two-thirds of the 1.9 million beneficiaries of the NMW and of these two-thirds - 0.84 million women – were working part-time (S1 and S2). Therefore, there was concern that any increases in the NMW would result in either a loss of employment or reduction in hours. Connolly and Gregory (R1) found that hours amongst this group were not adversely affected. This work was first cited in the NMW LPC report in 2007 and has formed part of the evidence base in 2009 that increases in the rate would not harm employment of this group of workers. Their research and conclusions have been influential in setting the original rate (S1) and decisions to raise the minimum wage in subsequent years (S2).

Much of the growth in employment since 1980 results from women in part-time employment; two-thirds of working women have worked part-time at some point in their career. Whilst the relatively low rates of pay and high levels of concentration in low-skilled occupations are well documented, relatively little was known on the impact of part-time work on women's career paths and more broadly on gender equality. Connolly and Gregory (R2, R3 and R4) have been widely cited and informed policy research documents (S3 and S4) for government departments and the Equalities Commission in assessing the impact of the growth in flexible working. (*It should be noted that the author entry on some of these reports is incorrectly attributed to M Connolly, a BIS researcher working in a different area entirely and the date for R3 is incorrectly given as 2008 rather than 2009.*)

Connolly and Gregory (R2 and R3) show that a significant proportion (25%) of women experience occupational downgrading when switching directly from full-time into part-time employment and the

incidence of downgrading is double this when women take a break from full-time employment and later return to part-time employment. A number of Connolly and Gregory's findings (R2 and R3) are quoted in Evidence box 3 on page 21 of "Flexible working: working for families, working for business" by the Family Friendly Working Hours Taskforce to the DWP (S3). Downgrading when moving to part-time work affects as many as 29% of women from professional and corporate management jobs, and up to 40% in intermediate-level jobs. The findings relating to the wage penalty associated with occupational downgrading associated with part-time employment (R3) is cited three times (including in the Executive Summary) of the report "Quality part-time work" for the Government Equalities Office (S4), for example on page 13: "There is further UK evidence that women become stuck in these lower-level jobs, in spite of the fact that many would prefer to return to full-time work at a later stage, and that both career and earnings are negatively affected (e.g. Connolly and Gregory, 2008). In response to this accumulating evidence, the Government made a commitment to supporting employers to create more high-quality part-time and flexible posts." This was achieved by the Labour Government's agreeing to establish and run a Quality Part-Time Work Fund. This enabled pilot schemes to be carried out in a range of workplaces, from large international companies to local authorities (S4). They enjoyed some success in providing high quality part-time posts, despite the fund not being continued following the change of government.

As a result of her research expertise, Connolly has presented her work to policy makers in the UK, submitted written evidence to the "Women and Work Commission" (S5) and was invited to be an expert member of the European Commission Women in Science and Technology working group (S7). Connolly's ESRC-funded (RES-000-22-1724) work on women in science resulted in invitations to give presentations to the British Medical Association (BMA) and her co-authorship of a subsequent report on medical salaries for the BMA (S8), which had direct impact upon the focus of negotiations for the BMA not only in relation to gender differentials but also those identified between academic and clinical salaries. This work has been cited in a recent influential OECD report on the gender gap (S6).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- S1. "The National Minimum Wage: the First Report of the Low Pay Commission", 2007, evidence from Connolly and Gregory, 2002, cited on page 52, reference in bibliography on page 342. http://www.lowpay.gov.uk/lowpay/report/pdf/6828-DTi-Low_Pay_Complete.pdf
- S2. "The National Minimum Wage: Making a Difference. The Third Report of the Low Pay Commission Report", 2009, evidence from Connolly and Gregory, 2002, cited on pages 45 and 255, reference in bibliography on page 328. Subsequently cited in reports in 2011, 2012 and 2013. <http://www.lowpay.gov.uk/lowpay/report/pdf/report3.pdf>
- S3. "Flexible working: working for families, working for business", evidence from Connolly and Gregory 2008 and 2009, cited on page 21, reference in footnotes 40, 41 and 42, <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/family-friendly-task-force-report.pdf>
- S4. "Quality part-time work", evidence from Connolly and Gregory 2009, cited on pages 5 and 7, reference in bibliography on page 56, <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/equalities/research/part-time-work-evaluation?view=Binary>
- S5. "Shaping a Fairer Future", Women and Work Commission, 2006, noted on page 117, <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090805175549/http://www.ukces.org.uk/tags/women/women-and-work-shaping-a-fairer-future>
- S6. "Closing the Gender Gap: Act Now", OECD, 2012, evidence from Connolly and Holdcroft cited on page 196, reference in bibliography on page 263, http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/close-the-gender-gap-now_9789264179370-en

Impact case study (REF3b)

Reports for professional bodies:

S7. Connolly, S and Fuchs, S. (2009). Analysing the Leaky Pipeline in Academia in *Women in science and technology. Creating sustainable careers*, Brussels: European Commission, Directorate-General for Research.

S8. Connolly, S. and Holdcroft, A. (2009). *The Pay Gap for Women in Medicine and Academic Medicine*, London: British Medical Association.

User statements have been obtained from:

- Research Officer, Equality and Human Rights Commission: use of Connolly's research in EHRC/EOC research reports and contribution to the evidence base
- Medical and Academic Staff Committee, BMA: input to the BMA's major report on the gender pay gap in medicine.
- Chief Economist and Deputy Secretary, Low Pay Commission: ongoing use of the research in LPC lobbying of Commissioners.