

# Young women's part-time work: family formation, choice and context

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PAPER PREPARED FOR THE TIY MEETING 2006, MARSEILLE

*Economic and sociological theories propose different explanations for the relation between family responsibilities and labour market participation. Economists emphasize the choices made by the individual actor, whereas sociological perspectives focus on cultural and structural factors that constrain individual choice. In the debate the lower labour market participation of women is being linked with stronger family orientations and limited labour market attachment (particularly in Hakim's interpretation of human capital theory). In this paper we analyze the participation rate, part-time work and full-time work among young women over time. We first look at the labour market position of mothers before their transition to parenthood, in order to evaluate the causal effect of family formation. Indeed, young mothers work full-time less often than young women without children. This observation suggests that women reduce their labour market participation in response to the demands of childcare. However, our longitudinal analyses also reveal that mothers in part-time positions often already worked part-time before their first childbirth. This seems to support the alternative interpretation which connects the lower female participation with stronger family orientations and weaker labour market attachment. However, further qualitative analyses suggest that most of young women's part-time work is involuntary, not originating from active choice.*

## Introduction

Since the end of the Second World War, the gender gap in educational attainment has gradually disappeared. In most Western countries, the educational participation of girls is now equal to that of boys. Several studies (e.g. Boaler, 1998; Gallagher, 1997; Iacovou and Berthoud, 2001) demonstrated that women have caught up with men in educational participation and attainment. This is also the case in Belgium, where girls have gradually caught up with boys in educational participation and now outperform boys at school (Claes, Lambrecht & Schuttringer, 1984; Derks and Vermeersch, 2002; Belet et al., 2004). This trend coincides with an increasing female labour market participation. Values and norms no longer exclude women from careers not traditionally reserved for women. These changing role attitudes and higher employment rates of women however did not eradicate unequal labour market opportunities. Women's employment in higher level positions is only slowly increasing, they are still concentrated in typically female jobs, often in more precarious conditions, and earn less than men (Hardarson and Romans, 2005). Our own analyses confirm these findings for young adults in: at the age of 26 women in Flanders are employed with temporary contracts, work part-time more often and earn less than men (Duquet et al, 2005).

The intermediary role of education in the gender inequality at the labour market also shows at the individual level (Geurts, 2003). The labour market position of highly qualified (young) women approaches men's. Among the less educated however the differences between men and women are extremely articulated. Our own research demonstrates that also in younger cohorts women with poor educational qualifications are the most vulnerable group in the labour market (Duquet et al, 2005). In all of Europe the gender gap in employment is smaller when comparing men and women with higher educational attainment (Hardarson & Romans, 2005). Compared to other European countries, in Belgium, the gender gap in employment among lower educated is particularly high; but the rather low participation rates among women with poor educational qualifications are accompanied with particularly high female participation rates among university graduates (VDAB, 2003).

In this paper we analyse the employment participation of young women, in terms of both the number of working hours and the non-activity. While highly qualified young women seem to have caught up with men in the labour market, the labour market participation of men and women is still very different among the less educated. The different participation patterns among higher and lower educated women suggests an "emancipation in two speeds" (Cantillon, 2000). Extremely put, the highly qualified women might be the cavalry to firstly compete with men in the labour market on equal footing. Among the less educated however women can or do not keep up with men. Our analyses concentrate on the factors put forward by the literature that contribute to the larger gender gap in participation among lowly educated young people.

## **Family formation, attitudes, context**

Family-related responsibilities are prominent in explanations of gendered labour market positions. Research findings illustrate that female employment is affected by family composition (eg Tijdens & de Ru, 1988; Carrier, 1995; Dykstra & Fokkema, 2000; Mason & Goulden, 2004). Mothers are less frequently employed, work in part-time and lower-status positions more often, and have a lower average salary than other women. Especially the presence of young children is an important source of gender differences. These studies often refer to the negative effects of a 'career break.' Even in a country like the Netherlands where a (temporary) career break is standard for women, a retreat from the labour market proves to be very detrimental to the future development of their professional career (van der Lippe & van Doorne-Huiskes, 1995). After this interruption, women have a lower chance of finding a job. If they do find a job, they often have to work under worse working conditions, in lower positions or only part-time.

Most studies conclude that family formation hampers women's development of a successful professional career. According to Waldfogel (1997) the negative influence of family formation did not decline but became stronger. It is important to point out that this influence varies strongly by sex. While family formation negatively affects the labour market opportunities of women, it has little or no effect on these opportunities for men (see e.g. Dykstra & Fokkema, 2000; Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 2000; Mortelmans et al, 2002; Weymann, 1999). As mothers work less (full-time), the difference in employment rates between men and women is the largest when there are children in the family. Particularly among lower educated women having children lowers employment. Following childbirth, higher educated women retreat less often and for shorter durations. Highly educated women also seem to postpone family formation, in order to first establish their labour market careers. This pattern is also obvious among young people: particularly lower educated women start with family formation earlier, and have their first child at a younger age than higher educated women.

The most obvious explanation for the lower labour market participation of mothers points to the conflicting time demands resulting from the combination of a family and a career, mediated by financial and other resources considerations. But, as most of the research conclusions are inferred from cross-section analyses, the causal direction of the association is difficult to establish. An other often heard explanation for

different careers of men and women refers to the different “life goals” of boys and girls (eg Jonsson, 1999). Girls anticipate their future role of responsible for family life by choosing studies that lead to occupations with better prospects of combining their professional with their family activities. The stronger family orientation of girls and women presumably also manifests itself in earlier family formation and consequently affects the professional career.

Recent studies have illustrated that women start their family formation at an earlier age than men, also in Belgium (e.g., Belet et al., 2004; Cliquet & Callens, 1993; Duquet et al, 2005b; Iacovou & Berthoud, 2001). Women leave the parental home at an earlier age than men to cohabit with a partner and they have children more quickly. Some of these studies have also demonstrated that the connection between family formation and educational level is stronger for women than for men. Living with a partner and having children is more prevalent among young adults with relatively low educational qualifications, and is most prevalent among young women with poor qualifications. This earlier family formation might explain why women, who in general perform better than men during their educational career, are characterized by lower outcomes at labour market entry.

The question remains whether the family composition hinders de labour market participation because of difficulty to combine work and family, or that in the process different work orientations and normative expectations also interfere. First, several studies suggest that boys identify with a more unidimensional view of life: they go to school to get a good job, which is necessary to provide for a family. For girls adulthood is more a question of balancing: they see themselves as a wife and mother, but hope and expect also to get a graduation, and they consider a full-time job as an important part of their future (Thiessen & Looker, 1999). Girls at a young age not only have a “double and diffuse life perspective” centred around the combination of work and family, but are firm proponents of a more equal labour division within the family, with both partners active in the professional sphere (Dessens, J., van Doorne - Huiskes, J. & Mertens, E., 1991). Children however are still being socialised within families in which a gendered division of labour is observed and participated in by themselves (Leonard, Madeleine, 1999). A majority of the youngsters claims they don't fully support the gender roles and want to have things differently in their future lives. Nonetheless the division of labour from childhood often continues in adult life.

Secondly quite some debate exists about the free or constrained choice of part-time employment of married women. Some authors emphasize individual choice: Hakim (1995, 1996) focusses on the preferences and attitudes of women, but is reproached by feminist researchers of “blaming the victim” (Ginn et al, 1995). In her discussion of “preference theory” the lower labour market participation of women is associated with stronger family orientations and lower work commitment. The authors that emphasize the constrained character of part-time work refer to the practical and financial difficulties of childcare as an important obstacle for full-time participation of women, and sometimes family-unfriendly working environments. The reasons for part-time work and the more discontinuous careers of women then are not to be found in personal attitudes and orientations, but in the characteristics of women's jobs and the effects of family formation (Bruegel, 1996). The choice of part-time work thus is constrained by the context of domestic responsibilities. The working conditions in this “work versus family” perspective simply force women to choose between a career and a family. Thirdly some other authors focus on differences within the part-time labour force in terms of attitudes and activities (eg Walsh, 1999).

The most important conclusion from this discussion, is that labour market preferences cannot be deduced from outcomes without consideration of the conditions and context that frame individual's preferences (which is a typical sociological critique on neo-classical economists; Bruegel, 1996). The choice of de individual actor is constrained by cultural and structural factors. Focal point of disagreement concerns the causal role of work orientations or preferences. Do women work part-time because they value family life more and prioritize the domestic domain over their working career? Or do women work less because they have difficulty in combining the family duties with a full-time job, or maybe because the occupational position itself offers few perspectives, and consequently they adjust their ambitions and attitudes? Because of

these alternative interpretations of part-time work, more than once in the discussion has been pleaded for longitudinal research of orientations and labour market careers, in which attitudes and behaviour of women can be tested before and after having children. In this process both family formation as a contextual situation and family orientation as an attitude need to be set apart carefully. In our opinion it is possible to have both disconnected by looking at the labour market trajectories of women who have children at an early age, and particularly in the time period before they have children. Reduced labour market integration among mothers could be due to both combination pressure factors and preferences for family care, with both elements very much interrelated. The period preceding (early) family formation however can hint more accurately about family orientations independent of actual childcare responsibilities.

## **Research design and hypotheses**

With our analyses we set out to disentangle the possible impact of domestic responsibilities versus working time preferences in relation to family orientations on the labour market participation (LMP) of young women. For this we use a longitudinal design, with observations over time of the working situation. The group of women we focus on are the young mothers. This group most likely identifies women who in Hakim's scheme would be labelled as the home-centred or adaptive women, who are strongly committed to having a family. Our objective is to know whether the incompatibility of full-time work with childcare can be attributed to the expansion of the family, or rather is an indication of limited labour market attachment (H1). To test the causal impact of increasing household responsibilities, we compare mothers' labour market careers before and after they have children (H1-A). This enables us to state more clearly the impact of the transition to parenthood, controlled for general attitudes or preferences about working time (which we assume to be constant). To the extent that changing family compositions leads to the "choice" to reduce the labour market participation, we can hardly speak of "free choice"; this is why we further elaborate on the working patterns of young mothers but before they have children. If young motherhood is an indication of family orientations at the expense of labour market attachment, we expect to see less participation already before parenthood. To test this alternative hypothesis we compare the participation patterns of mothers before they have children, with the women who do not yet have children at the same early age (H1-B). This comparison we think allows for better conclusions about different labour market opportunities or choices, as it controls for family obligations. If the young mothers work less than their childless peers, even before they have children, we cannot exclude the possibility of lower work centrality in the lives of these young mothers. Part-time work for these women then would not merely be a matter of stepping back from a job in order to meet the demands for childcare.

The process of family formation and its effects, either induced by family expansion or resulting from initial differences, need some further elaboration. In comparing young women with and without children, and before and after childbirth, most likely the family composition also changes with regard to living with a partner or not. On average, mothers are much more likely to be living in a couple; women first cohabit with a partner, and only later on have children; and not all women start living with a partner at the same age. And, much in the same vein as with parenthood, it could be argued that women who are not cohabiting at a certain age are not that family-oriented as women who live with a partner at an early age. Women living with a partner at an early age then might show lower labour market participation rates (H2). If there is some kind of selection process, single women at 26 could be the group Hakim defines as career-oriented (H2-B). This will be tested by comparing the participation rates of single women who do and do not experience living in a couple by the age of 26. But again, the alternative could be that women with a partner lower their working time as a result from being in a couple-household (H2-A). Potentially because the additional wage in the household allows them to follow their preferences, either because a traditional role attitudes in the couple confront them with additional household work responsibilities, which could put stress on their working time.

Of course, interactions between parenting and cohabiting can't be ignored. This is why we next restrict the longitudinal test of parenthood (H1-A) to women living in a couple, and investigate selective parenthood (H1-B) separately for cohabiting and single women. The role of initial differences is further refined: to not confound selective cohabitation (H2-B) with early parenthood, we only compare women who at the age of 26 do not have children. If young mothers are less work oriented we would expect them to work less before they have children, but possibly this is only after they are living with a partner. This longitudinal effect of living in a couple (H2-A) is tested by comparing the labour market participation of future mothers before and after living in a couple. If young mothers have other orientations, the effect of living in a couple should be different among the future mothers and the women who do not reach motherhood at 26. Finally we also look at the group of single mothers separately, as these women may be more independent and needing / wanting to work, but also confronted with more obstacles in terms of finding and financing child-care. Therefore we compare the labour market position of single mothers with the mothers living with a partner (H3). These hypotheses are repeated in an overview in table 1.

*Table 1: Initial differences versus family formation process: overview alternative hypotheses and operational tests:*

- H1: lower LMP of mothers: impact childcare demands versus attitudes
  - H1-A : causal effect of parenthood: young mothers before and after transition to parenthood (refinement: restricted to cohabiting women)
  - H1-B: selective parenthood: non-mothers versus mothers before transition to parenthood (refinement: separately for cohabiting and not-cohabiting (but ever) women)
- H2: lower LMP of cohabiting women: impact of household work / financial support versus attitudes
  - H2-A: causal effect of cohabitation: women before and after cohabitation (refinement: among future mothers)
  - H2-B: selective cohabitation: LMP of single women (till 26) versus cohabiting women not cohabiting (refinement: restricted to non-mothers)
- H3: single mothers' situation versus partnered mothers

The results of these tests do not completely separate yet the role of preferences, choice and constraining conditions. This is why afterwards we evaluate both hypotheses further by focusing on the meaning and context in which inactivity and part-time work among young women occurs. For mothers more than likely child-caretaking constitutes an important aspect of the choice to reduce labour market participation. The parenthood situation also could be used to justify less labour market integration. More informative again, we think, is to focus at the women without children. What would be the reason that young women participate less, if this can't be attributed (yet) to childcare? And are the motivations of future mothers the same as those of women without children at 26? We examine for the motives for working part-time, the satisfaction with the number of working hours, the link with general job motivation, and with expectations about future work and family formation.

## **Data and methods**

We use the longitudinal SONAR dataset of Flemish youth. These data are part of a publicly funded research to monitor the transition from school to work. Face-to-face interviews were conducted at the age of 23

among young people from three birth cohorts (1976, 1978, 1980; each time a random samples of around 3000 respondents). With these surveys the full educational and working careers were registered in detail, and starting with the age of 18 (compulsary education age) we know the labour market positions on a monthly basis. Two of the original samples have also been reinterviewed at the age of 26 (cohorts 1976, 1978), to complete the career information after 23. We merged the monthly labour market participation data from these second wave interviews with the data from the first wave. To avoid the underrepresentation of higher educated women (who only start working at 22 or even later), we restrict the sample to those respondents for who we have complete work history data until the age of 26. For the analyses in this paper we retained just the women in the sample.

### *Monthly work histories*

In the first part of the paper we use the monthly data on working careers. The labour market position is defined as working full-time, part-time or not at work, for every month. We do not consider young people in school as (potentially) active on the labour market, so months which were registered as students were left out. Furthermore, as the initial period after school-leaving is more uncertain and differently approached (some start looking for a job immediatly, others wait for a while and first want to travel, ...) for the analyses we also left out the first six months after graduation. That the labour market participation of women is somewhat lower immediatly around the time of childbirth, is of little interest to our research questions. To avoid having our results biased, we also left out in the data for the analyses alle months up to three months before and after each childbirth. This effectively excludes the periodes in which pregnancy leave is to be taken up, or health considerations may interfere with labour market participation.

Table 2: Description of the sample (after selections)

### **Family status**

As we are interested in the effect of family formation on labour market participation, the family situation was ascertained for every month. Respondents can have children or not, and can be living in a couple (married or not). Both factors are looked at on a month to month basis (dynamic) and at an individual level (aggregated). The parenting status is composed of three categories:

- non-mothers: the women who have no children, up to the age of 26
- future mothers: the women who have children at 26, but not yet at the time of the observation in the analyses
- mothers: the women who have had their first child before the time of the observation in the analyses

These three categories separate the young mothers (cat 2 and 3) from women who do not make the transition to parenthood before 26 (cat 1). The young mothers' observations are split into the period before (cat 2) and after first childbirth (cat 3). This implies that observations without children at a specific time are further divided between the group who later on gets children (before 26) and those who do not, so we can verify whether mothers at 26 show the same labour market participation levels before childbirth as the reference group of women without children.

For partnering status we have three similarly composed categories according to current and aggregated cohabitation situation.

- never cohabitating: the women who have not cohabited, up to the age of 26

- not cohabitating, but cohabitating at some other time before 26
- cohabitating at the time of observation

Both parenting and cohabitation status are also used in combination, to allow the formulated hypotheses to be incorporated explicitly in the models. Comparisons between categories are made by using orthogonal contrasts to exactly test the differences between the specified groups. The contrasts were transformed in the computationally needed regression coding by using the `make.contrasts()` procedure in the `gls` library of R.

### *Work and non-work spells*

In the second part of the paper we do not use monthly data, but base our analyses on the periods of employment and non-employment for which we have further information about motivations and choices. Given the structure of the surveys we use the classification in jobs, with a job being defined as a period of work with the same employer in the same occupation. In the SONAR-data different “kinds” of jobs determine which questions are asked about the job:

- first job: the first job of at least one full month; respondents who worked before 23 were asked about their first job in the first wave, the others were questioned about this in the second wave at 26; for the analysis we have merged the data from both waves; normally the questions about the first job refer to the situation at the start of that job
- last or current job: concept used both at 23 and 26; this job can be the same as the first job, in which case the questions were not asked again, or, if relevant, were asked but explicitly with reference to the end situation of the job
- other jobs: only jobs with their properties were registered if respondents worked at least two hours per week in the job, for a duration of at least four weeks; the reference period mostly is the start of the job.

### **Labour market participation differences**

In this first part we analyse the labour market participation in two steps. First we differentiate working from non-working, second we analyse for workers the difference between full-time and part-time work. For both indicators we run a stepwise analysis explaining the difference according to parenting status. In this, we compare both a) different persons: non-mothers and future mothers and b) the same persons over time: mothers before and after first childbirth. To estimate the differences we use contrast coding: comparing the mean of non-mothers with the mean of future mothers (=cross-section); comparing the mean of mothers with that of future mothers (=longitudinal).

All models are estimated with logistic multilevel analyses, using the `glmmPQL` procedure from the `MASS` library of R (R Development Core Team, 2005). Random intercept models, with the person level as the higher level, and the monthly observations as the base level. As the data are longitudinal, observations that follow each other more strongly correlate. Therefore the analyses are corrected for serial autocorrelation (correlated errors within each individual, (inversely) proportional to the difference in time between two observations). Finally, in each analysis we control for birth cohort and time being out of education.

With these analyses we analyse if young mothers work less because they have children, or maybe because they do not want or are not able to work irrespective of the work-family combination issue.

## *Do young mothers work less and does this already show before childbirth?*

In table 3 the results of the stepwise analyses are summarized. The first model indicates parenting reduces the odds of being at work. Most of the difference in labour market participation is before and after first childbirth, which indicates a causal effect of parenting. This effect however adds to a smaller selection effect: the odds of working are lower among mothers than non-mothers, even before making the transition to parenthood. However, when controlled for educational level (model 2), this selection effect disappears. The lower participation rates of future mothers can be attributed to the fact they are overrepresented in lower educational categories, in which participation levels are generally lower. In fact, holding diplomas constant, future mothers appear to be working more than non-mothers, which in no way is consistent with our hypothesis of self-selection into early parenthood associated with lower labour market attachment. Finally, in model 3, we control for cohabitation status, because this most likely changes with parenting. The effects of cohabitation (both at observation and individual level) are positive, contradicting the hypothesized effects of individual heterogeneity regarding work orientations. Consequently, the cohabitation status does not explain the negative effect of parenting. It does reduce the unexpected positive selection effect for future mothers, which no longer is statistically significant.

Table 3: Multilevel analyses: Working versus not working

Table 4: Multilevel analyses: Full-time versus part-time work

Running the same models but now for the odds of working full-time against part-time, if working (table 4), shows other results. Working full-time not only diminishes after childbirth, but is already substantially lower before childbirth if compared to the full-time participation rates of non-mothers. This conclusion does not change in the following models in which is controlled for the effect of educational level or even cohabitation status. This time, no initial differences could be noticed between workers who do cohabit and don't cohabit before 26. But, again, some small causal effect of cohabiting is present, however not in line with the hypotheses regarding labour market attachment.

Comparing both levels of labour market participation, we conclude that we mainly find a causal effect of parenting, reducing the labour market participation, and for those staying at work increasing part-time participation. As already discussed, the parenting effect could be due to different factors, having to do with preferences regarding raising children or financial and time pressure conditions introduced by the need of childcare. If, as argued, different attitudes matter, we would expect to find a selection effect for motherhood, operationalized by the comparison of the labour market participation of mothers before having children, with non-mothers'. This does not show in the odds of being at work, but does in the odds of working full-time if at work. So, future mothers do not work less than their childless counterparts, but they are in part-time employment more often before they get children. The cohabitation status effects in no way support the hypothesis regarding labour market participation and family formation as indicators of labour market attachment.

The interpretation of the results may be flawed, as the family formation process is split up between parenting and cohabitating separately, without acknowledging the interrelationship between both. For instance, cohabiting might have different effects according to parenting status. Testing the full interaction between both variables is not possible, as their crosstabulation leaves some combinations nearly empty, eg almost all parents once lived in a couple, and the majority of them already before the transition to parenthood. In the next section we therefore use a combination variable with categories for the most common situations.

## *How does family formation impact the labour market participation: heterogeneity or work-family conflict?*

The family formation process generally follows three stages: 1) not living with a partner, 2) cohabitation (married or not) and 3) parenthood. For mothers at 26 we compare the labour market positions without and with a partner while not having children yet, and secondly we look at the parenting effect by comparing mothers with partners with future mothers with partners. Mothers not living in a couple, being a very select group, are compared with mothers living in a couple (almost all of them first lived with a partner, but then separated or divorced them). With these comparisons the effects of the family formation process can be analysed in more detail; by looking at very specific groups matching characteristics, instead of just controlling for these. On the other hand, we also wish to investigate how the young mothers' labour market participation might deviate from the non-mothers'. Therefore we carefully compare their participation levels before childbirth with the most comparable groups of non-mothers. Thus, future mothers living with a partner are compared with non-mothers living with a partner, the same comparison is made for both groups not living with a partner, but at some other time living with a partner. And finally, to test the selection effect of ever living with a partner, we compare non-mothers who never lived with a partner up to 26 with non-mothers not yet living in a couple.

All these comparisons are made by using a categorical variable which splits up all of the relevant groups (7 in total), and by using the appropriate contrast codings so as to compare the means of the intended groups. Again, the analyses controls for time at the labour market, cohort and educational level. The results are in table 5.

Table 5: Detailed family formation effects tested

The model for working versus not-working indicates the family formation process of parents is not negatively affected by cohabitation (rather the opposite), but with the transition to parenthood itself the labour market participation drops. This confirms the results of the previous analyses, and adds to it more formally that living in a couple does not have a negative effect on labour market participation. Substantively, this contradicts the hypothesis stating that future mothers are able to fulfill their preferences for not working after or if they are living with a partner. Furthermore, there are no indications of some initial differences in labour market participation between future mothers and non-mothers. The only selection effect that proves to be statistically significant, concerns living with a partner among non-mothers: those who never live with a partner participate less than those who are single but live in a couple at some other point in time. This selection effect however contradicts the hypothesis that the group of single women would be a group of ambitious career women.

Are there any differences left with regard to the working time regime if young women are working? With regard to the family formation process for young mothers, both stages on average lead to switching more to part-time. Most important is the parenting effect. The cohabitation effect is negative, but not quite statistically significant. These results corroborate the more simple analyses, but add that the generally positive effect of cohabitation does not show among future mothers. So, for future mothers, partnership does not reduce participation per se, but might allow for the switch from full-time to part-time work for some. Next, looking at initial differences, strong negative parenting selection effects show up. Future mothers without partners are working more part-time than single non-mothers, and cohabitating future mothers work parttime even more than cohabitating non-mothers. These results confirm the selection effect of future parenting regarding part-time work, and show that the higher odds of part-time employment for young mothers before they have children is evident not just when they are living in a couple, but already when they

have not run through any of the stages of family formation. These results then are the only ones consistent with Hakim's propositions. Apparently, with regard to the choice of full-time versus part-time work, some element of family orientations could be in play. Concerning the single mothers, they never differ very much from the mothers living in a couple.

## **Part-time work among childless young women: unconstrained choice?**

Why do young women in their early careers not work full-time, and particularly when they don't have children yet? Our findings do not exclude that some kind of family orientation (measured by future parenthood) contributes to the choice to work part-time. But to which extent could this part-time work among young women be considered as voluntary? Can we take the tendency among lower educated women and future mothers to work part-time more often as an indicator of lower labour market attachment? Does a particular group of women choose actively for reduced working hours because this accords with their preferences? Against this voluntaristic interpretation of explanations of mainly economic frameworks (Hakim, 1995, 1996), several sociological researchers stress we need to take account of the context, the conditions that offer opportunities but also constrain individual choice. Thus, the lower labour market participation of mothers can't be understood solely as a preference to look after the children. Structural arrangements and services affect how family and work can be combined, and also the more general gender inequality impacts family decisions. In particular, domestic responsibilities and norms regarding appropriate gender roles restrict women's occupational choice more than men's (Arber & Ginn, 1995). So, our analyses thus far lack clear interpretation, as they do not sufficiently discern context from attitude. Eg, the opposite explanation could be equally true: not self-selection into parenthood because of family orientations, but because of little professional career perspectives or other working conditions that stimulate family formation.

In this next part, we look at the motivations of part-time workers, and non-workers, and try to find indications for the choice versus constraining conditions explanations. Full information is presented for both mothers and childless women (family status at the particular time, so dynamic), but in the discussion we limit our attention specifically to women without children (with the same distinction we used before separating non-mothers at 26 from future mothers who do not have children at the observation time, but do later on).

### ***Working time preferences***

The SONAR-data are designed to document the transition from school to work. All respondents who searched for a job or ever had worked at the time of the research (be it in the first or second wave) were questioned about their original search strategies. Relevant for part-time workers in their first job is whether they were also looking for a part-time position. Only a small minority of these workers indeed had an initial preference for a part-time job, with this preference even being lower among future mothers working part-time (12%) than among non-mothers (19%). If young women without a distinct preference are counted among the voluntarily part-time workers, still the majority started their labour market career involuntarily part-time: 61% of the non-mothers, and 66% among the future mothers.

Table 6: Working time preferences

Respondents who were working at the time of the interviews were asked what they would choose if they were offered another job: full-time or part-time? When comparing these preferences with their working situation at the time, we get similar results: only a minority of part-time workers would (again) choose a part-time job. Most would rather switch to a full-time position: between 64 and 61% at the age of 23 and 57% at the age of 26.

### *Satisfaction with working hours*

Looking at the (dis)satisfaction with the number of working hours hints again at the (in)voluntary nature of working in a part-time job. With relation to the start of the first job and the end of the job at 23 and 26, the respondents were asked if they were satisfied with their working hours or rather would like to work more or less hours. About half of the non-mothers were satisfied with working part-time in their first job, but nearly all of the other half would rather have worked more hours. This problem of underemployment is as manifest among future mothers as non-mothers (49% and 44% percent respectively wanted to work more hours in the beginning of their first job). Remarkably, also one in three mothers who work part-time in their first job would have liked to have worked more hours.

Table 7: Satisfaction with working hours

For part-time workers at the age of 23 the results are quite similar, with about half being satisfied and half wanting to work more hours. Again, we do not find any indications for higher satisfaction with the part-time job among future mothers. At 26 the majority however is satisfied with the number of hours of the part-time job, with only 27% of the non-mothers who would like to work more. So over time, the number actively choosing to work in a part-time job increases slightly. An increasing match with the working time preference among part-timers could be due to the movement of involuntarily part-time workers to full-time jobs, or to the adaptation of preferences following the actual working situation. Furthermore, between 23 and 26, there are some new entrants at the labour market, mostly with high educational levels, though these work less often part-time. Anyway, this better “match” remains limited; part-time work at the age of 26 is not so common among non-mothers, but to a great extent involuntary.

### *Reasons for part-time work*

Why do young women work part-time? The motivations for working part-time were questioned in detail for the first and the last jobs held. For jobs in between a shorter question probed directly at the voluntary nature of part-time employment. For the first job a high proportion indicates to be working part-time because they couldn't find a full-time position: 62% of the non-mothers and even 70% of the future mothers. This share of involuntarily working part-time corroborates the previous findings. Next four reasons refer to conditions constraining the choice of working hours: because of studies, another part-time job, looking after children, or other personal or family reasons. Together these explain 19% among the non-mothers, and 14% among future mothers. Finally, the explicit statement that the respondent didn't wish to work full-time, is very unpopular (5 to 8%). To the extent we can exclude social desirability, this indicates very strong work motivation among part-time working women, and only very few freely choose to work part-time.

Table 8: Most important reason for part-time work

In the last job the share working part-time because they couldn't find a full-time position is about 10% lower than for the first job. The number stating explicitly not wanting to have a full-time job is somewhat higher around 10%. With time, again, we see some better “match” between preferences and status, but the majority of non-mothers works part-time involuntarily (54%, and some smaller share among future mothers, but small numbers). The reduction in involuntary part-time work is probably caused by both the adaptation of attitudes to the situation, and changing jobs to realise the preferences better.

Finally, among part-time workers in jobs in between the first and last job, the incidence of involuntary part-time work amounts to 31% for non-mothers, but 45% for future mothers.

## Labour market attachment and motivation

Until now we mainly discussed the motives and evaluations for working part-time. Implicit in the discussion the choice for part-time work is contrasted with full-time work. The results indeed indicate that quite a substantial number of childless women are working part-time involuntarily: they would prefer a full-time position or at least a job with more working hours, but couldn't find or get such a job. Alternatively, part-time workers might prefer not to be working at all. From this wider angle, also young women not working need to be considered, as these might show lower labour market attachment.

Both at the age of 23 and 26 all respondents were asked which situation they found more interesting: working or not working. A very high proportion thinks working is more advantageous than not working. Part-time working non-mothers consider working the best option as often as full-time workers (90%), and future mothers do not deviate from this pattern. Among non-workers there are some fewer proponents of being employed: a small group (3 to 10%) prefers not-working, and between 1 in 4 and 1 in 5 thinks both options are equally interesting. Nonetheless, still 70% considers the advantages of working more important than the disadvantages. Future mothers even think somewhat more highly of being employed. Among parents the proportion appreciating work more is lower, not among mothers working full-time, but among mothers working part-time, and most strongly among non-working parents. Parents in their evaluation probably take into account the difficulties to combine a job with childcare, although for full-timers these do not outweigh the benefits of work. Maybe here we can identify a group with strong work centrality? Or maybe these respondents have more satisfying jobs and more resources (both financially and in practice) to arrange for childcare?

Table 9: Advantages and disadvantages of working versus not working

At the age of 26 the picture has changed, and all differences according to labour market position have disappeared. About 9 in 10 young women think working is more advantageous than non-working, whether they are employed full-time, part-time or not. Only mothers are less convinced of the advantages of work, with differences following the extent of labour market participation: full-time working mothers see more advantages, followed by mothers working part-time and not at work (83, 79 and 68% respectively).

## Planning for the future?

Finally we look at the plans for the future of young women. These might hint at the priorities they hold and allow us to investigate whether women anticipate their (perception of their) future situation. Starting with the second survey respondents were asked what they thought their labour market position and family composition would be at the age of 30.

### *Expected labour market position at the age of 30*

Young women of 23 nearly all expect to be working when they will be 30. For women without children this is the future scenario of 98%. Future mothers show the same high working expectations, at least if they are working at 23. Non-working future mothers anticipate somewhat more to stay at home running the house, taking care of the children, ... (14%). Fulltime working mothers do not intend to give up their job by 30 to become a housewife. Among part-time working mothers 6% expects this to happen. Non-working mothers show a 14% expecting to be at home at 30, which also means the majority of them expects to be working (again) at that age. The expected labour market participation of young women is extremely high, also among part-time workers. If any group would be less work centred at all, it would be the non-working young mothers (at 23).

Table 10: Anticipated labour market situation at the age of 30

At the age of 26 the expectations are very similar. Almost all women think they will be at work at the age of 30. Both full-time workers and part-time workers, irrespective of having children already or not (98 to 100%). Non-working mothers only show some higher share (14 to 15%) expecting to be at home for the children at 30. In addition, we discern a small group of “least” work centred women: those who have not yet worked at 26 (mostly women from ethnic minorities).

### *Expected number of children at the age of 30*

Finally, we look at the expected number of children at the age of 30. This expectation at the age of 23 correlates with the working situation: non-mothers working full-time most often expect to have children at 30 (73%), more than part-timers (58%), with non-workers in between (65 to 69%). Future mothers (by 26) most clearly know they want to have children (about 94% thinks to have children at 30), independent of the current working situation.

Table 11: Expected number of children at the age of 30

The future number of children at the age of 26 for non-mothers now correlates even more with labour market integration: about 70% of full-time working women, 60% of part-time workers and 54% of non-workers without children expect to have made the transition to parenthood by the age of 30. This suggests a stimulating effect of labour market integration for future family formation, rather the opposite of higher family orientations explaining lower participation rates. Or perhaps those wanting to have children before 30 concentrate on career development first. For parents again there's no relationship with labour market position. If we compare the expectations at 26 with 23, we see that only women who already have children and the future mothers expect to have at least 2 children at the age of 30. Non-mothers (by 26) mainly expect to have 1 child when they will be 30; but at 26 this expectation tends to be loosened a bit. So, for women who do not start with children at an early age, it seems parenting aspirations are somewhat postponed.

## **Conclusions**

From the last part of the paper a substantial share of women do not appear to be working part-time out of free choice. The preference for full-time work is very dominant, for non-mothers as well as future mothers. And yet, future mothers work part-time more often? Also, it is not because they would rather be at home, or only have limited work motivation, as the idea that working is more advantageous than not-working is supported almost universally. A high level of involuntary part-time work among young Flemish women is also concluded from the Labour Force Survey (WAV, 2004), in which young women also indicate not being able to find a full-time position as main reason for being at work part-time. A recent OECD study furthermore concludes that in most countries the preferred labour market participation of even mothers with young children is substantially lower than their actual participation (Jaumotte, 2003). All these results support the feminist critics rather than voluntary interpretations of women's labour market participation.

The high labour market attachment of young women matches the image of higher labour market participation of young women. The very high expectations of being at work at the age of 23 probably characterises this young generation of women. A Dutch research looking into working expectations in 5 years (Dessens, van Doorne - Huisjes & Mertens, 1991) also found that these are higher among younger women. It will be interesting to see whether these expectations within a couple years will become reality. Also regarding expected family formation it remains to be seen to what extent those young women expecting to have children by 30 will reach parenthood at that age. The more ambitious family planning among working non-mothers in particular seems to contradict the finding of less labour market integration following and

predating family formation. Where we now conclude that (lower educated) future mothers mostly work part-time involuntarily, perhaps in a few years we will find that (higher educated) women still working full-time have postponed parenthood involuntarily? Or perhaps they are in positions with more negotiating power to have their job adapted to still achieve job-family compatibility (Tijdens, 1997).

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Table 2: Description of the sample (after selections)

	Level of respondents	Level of observations
Family formation characteristics (up to age 26)		
<i>cohabitation</i>		
- never cohabitated	24,4	20,9
- at some point	75,6	
- not cohabitating		28,6
- cohabitating		50,5
<i>parenthood</i>		
- no children at 26 (non-mothers)	71,9	66,6
- young mothers	28,1	
- before first childbirth (future mothers)		17,5
- after first childbirth (mothers)		15,9
<i>family status (combination variable)</i>		
- non-mothers		
- never cohabitated	24,3	20,7
- at some point	47,6	
- not cohabitating		21,1
- cohabitating		24,7
- young mothers	28,1	
- future mothers		
- not cohabitating		6,3
- cohabitating		11,2
- mothers		
- not cohabitating		1,4
- cohabitating		14,5
Background variables		
<i>cohort</i>		
- 1976	49,5	51,2
- 1978	50,5	48,8
<i>time at the labour market (in months, mean)</i>	60,6	38,7
<i>educational level</i>		
- no diploma	8,0	12,7
- secondary education	32,0	42,3
- non-academic higher education	38,5	33,3
- academic higher education	21,5	11,7
labour market participation		
- not working		16,1
- part-time		15,2
- full-time		68,7
Total N	1999	104511

*Table 3: Multilevel analyses: Working versus not working*

	model 1		model 2		model 3	
	Value	p-value	Value	p-value	Value	p-value
(Intercept)	1,005	,000	,765	,000	,683	,000
cohort 2	,041	,700	,103	,245	,084	,395
time on the labour market	,032	,000	,033	,000	,033	,000
Parenting						
- future mothers > no children at 26	-,376	,002	,366	,001	,114	,370
- parenthood > future mothers	-1,831	,000	-1,799	,000	-1,906	,000
Educational level						
- secondary level > no diploma			1,689	,000	1,761	,000
- HE non-academic > secondary level			1,645	,000	1,673	,000
- HE academic > HE non-academic			-,383	,003	-,421	,004
Cohabitation						
- before 26 > never at 26					,473	,000
- cohabiting > before 26					,273	,000
Number of Observations: 104436						
Number of Groups: 1999						
Source: SONAR c76(23-26), c78(23-26)						

*Table 4: Multilevel analyses: Full-time versus part-time work*

	model 1		model 2		model 3	
	Value	p-value	Value	p-value	Value	p-value
(Intercept)	1,253	,000	1,142	,000	1,112	,000
cohort 2	,000	,999	,029	,788	,024	,823
time on the labour market	,006	,000	,008	,000	,008	,000
Parenting						
- future mothers > no children at 26	-,800	,000	-,403	,001	-,463	,001
- parenthood > future mothers	-,603	,000	-,668	,000	-,669	,000
Educational level						
- secondary level > no diploma			,702	,000	,702	,000
- HE non-academic > secondary level			1,080	,000	1,076	,000
- HE academic > HE non-academic			-,165	,309	-,170	,292
Cohabitation						
- before 26 > never at 26					,146	,297
- cohabiting > before 26					,043	,033
Number of Observations: 87647						
Number of Groups: 1953						
Source: SONAR c76(23-26), c78(23-26)						

Table 5: Detailed family formation effects tested

	Working versus not working		Full-time versus part-time work	
	Value	p-value	Value	p-value
(Intercept)	,904	,000	1,215	,000
cohort 2	,084	,398	,026	,813
time on the labour market	,033	,000	,008	,000
Educational level				
- secondary level > no diploma	1,764	,000	,703	,000
- HE non-academic > secondary level	1,674	,000	1,088	,000
- HE academic > HE non-academic	-,425	,004	-,178	,272
Family formation tests				
<i>family formation process</i>				
- cohabitation effect for future mothers	,161	,028	-,059	,089
- parenting effect for cohabiting young mothers	-1,866	,000	-,646	,000
- effect of being a single mother	-,129	,278	-,104	,130
<i>initial differences</i>				
- selection of future mothers among cohabitators	-,016	,908	-,529	,000
- selection of future mothers among singles	,206	,128	-,375	,006
- selection of ever cohabitating among singles	,445	,001	,129	,362
Number of observations	104436		87647	
Number of groups	1999		1953	

Source: SONAR c76(23-26), c78(23-26)

Table 6: Working time preferences (at first job search, or at 23 and 26) among young women working part-time (at start of first job, or end of job at 23 and 26 = employed)

	First job			Job at 23 (a)			Job at 26 (a)(b)	
	No children	Future mothers	Mothers	No children	Future mothers	Mothers	No children	Mothers
full-time	,61	,66	,28	,64	,61	,44	,57	,26
part-time	,19	,12	,66	,25	,29	,48	,31	,61
no preference	,20	,22	,07	,11	,10	,08	,13	,13
<i>N</i>	298	117	29	80	31	25	104	101

(a) first job can be the same job as the job at 23 or 26, but with different reference period (start of first job versus end of the other jobs) and minimum duration of 1 year

(b) question was left out during the field work, leading to missings for about ¼ respondents

Source: SONAR c76(23-26), c78(23-26)

Table 7: Working hours satisfaction among young women working part-time

	First job			Job at 23 (a)			Job at 26 (a)(b)	
	No children	Future mothers	Mothers	No children	Future mothers	Mothers	No children	Mothers
satisfied	,54	,47	,60	,55	,45	,78	,68	,77
wanted to work more hours	,44	,49	,33	,45	,50	,22	,27	,17
wanted to work less hours	,03	,03	,08	,00	,05	,00	,05	,06
<i>N</i>	271	99	52	40	20	32	170	161

(a) first job can be the same job as the job at 23 or 26, but with different reference period (start of first job versus end of the other jobs) and minimum duration of 1 year

(b) 1 future mother working part-time in last job at 26: grouped with the non-mothers

Source: SONAR c76(23-26), c78(23-26)

Table 8: Most important reason for part-time work in (start of) first job, (end of) last job, and (start of) other jobs

first / last job	first job (a)			last job (b)		
	No children	Future mothers	Mothers	No children	Future mothers	Mothers
you couldn't/can't find full-time work immediatly	,62	,70	,18	,54	,47	,13
you had/have another (parttime) position	,04	,01	,00	,07	,21	,03
you followed/follow (parttime) education	,12	,06	,00	,06	,00	,01
you took/take care of your children	,00	,05	,66	,00	,00	,69
you had/have other personal or family reasons	,03	,02	,05	,06	,00	,07
u didn't/don't wish a full-time position	,08	,05	,05	,10	,11	,04
other reason	,12	,12	,05	,17	,21	,03
<i>N</i>	304	123	38	143	19	141
Other job (c)	No children	Future mothers	Mothers			
Preferred to have full-time work	,31	,45	,28			
Not necessarily preference for full-time work	,69	,55	,72			
<i>N</i>	140	49	36			

(a) No overlap in type of jobs; first job priority over last job, priority over other job

(b) Not questioned in c78(23)

(c) Includes last job in c78(23); not questioned in c76(23)

Source: SONAR c76(23-26), c78(23-26)

Table 9: Advantages and disadvantages of working versus not working

	Situation at 23			Situation at 26	
	No children	Future mothers	Mothers	No children	Mothers
<b>FULL-TIME workers</b>					
Working more advantageous	,90	,90	,95	,91	,83
Working more disadvantageous	,01	,01	,02	,00	,03
Advantages = disadvantages	,10	,09	,04	,09	,14
<i>N</i>	439	105	57	1089	280
<b>PART-TIME workers</b>					
Working more advantageous	,90	,92	,76	,91	,79
Working more disadvantageous	,02	,00	,00	,01	,01
Advantages = disadvantages	,09	,08	,24	,07	,20
<i>N</i>	58	25	17	140	137
<b>NOT WORKING</b>					
Working more advantageous	,70	,82	,54	,88	,68
Working more disadvantageous	,10	,12	,21	,03	,09
Advantages = disadvantages	,20	,06	,25	,09	,23
<i>N</i>	107	17	67	169	119
<b>NEVER WORKED</b>					
Working more advantageous	,70	,75	,54	,91	,53
Working more disadvantageous	,03	,13	,23	,00	,13
Advantages = disadvantages	,27	,13	,23	,09	,33
<i>N</i>	231	8	26	34	15

Source: SONAR c76(23-26), c78(23-26)

Table 10: Anticipated labour market situation at the age of 30

	Situation at 23 (a)			Situation at 26	
	No children	Future mothers	Mothers	No children	Mothers
<b>FULL-TIME workers</b>					
To be working	,98	,98	,98	1,00	1,00
To be unemployed	,00	,00	,00	,00	,00
Stay at home	,02	,02	,02	,00	,00
<i>N</i>	436	105	57	1085	279
<b>PARTTIME workers</b>					
To be working	,98	,96	,94	,98	,99
To be unemployed	,00	,00	,00	,00	,00
Stay at home	,02	,04	,06	,02	,01
<i>N</i>	59	25	17	139	135
<b>NOT WORKING</b>					
To be working	,99	,86	,91	,98	,85
To be unemployed	,01	,00	,00	,01	,01
Stay at home	,00	,14	,09	,01	,14
<i>N</i>	70	7	32	168	117
<b>NEVER WORKED</b>					
To be working	,97	,71	,55	,82	,85
To be unemployed	,01	,14	,00	,09	,00
Stay at home	,03	,14	,45	,09	,15
<i>N</i>	200	7	11	33	13

(a) Questioned only in c78(23)

Source: SONAR c76(23-26), c78(23-26)

Table 11: Anticipated number of children at the age of 30

	Situation at 23 (a)			Situation at 26	
	No children	Future mothers	Mothers	No children	Mothers
FULL-TIME workers					
0	,27	,06	,02	,32	,01
1	,36	,23	,33	,45	,21
2 and more	,37	,71	,65	,23	,78
<i>N</i>	434	104	57	1057	282
PART-TIME workers					
0	,42	,08	,00	,39	,00
1	,24	,42	,18	,42	,20
2 and more	,34	,50	,82	,18	,80
<i>N</i>	59	24	17	137	138
NOT WORKING					
0	,35	,00	,00	,46	,00
1	,32	,29	,16	,39	,18
2 and more	,33	,71	,84	,16	,82
<i>N</i>	69	7	32	160	119
NEVER WORKED					
0	,31	,13	,08	,51	,00
1	,42	,13	,00	,40	,13
2 and more	,27	,75	,92	,09	,87
<i>N</i>	196	8	12	35	15

(a) Questioned only in c78(23)

Source: SONAR c76(23-26), c78(23-26)