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## Transitional Phase or a New Balance? Working and Caring by Mothers With Young Children in the Netherlands

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*Published in:*  
Journal of Family Issues

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*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*  
2006

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Wel, F. V., & Knijn, T. (2006). Transitional Phase or a New Balance? Working and Caring by Mothers With Young Children in the Netherlands. *Journal of Family Issues*, 27(5), 633.

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*Journal of Family Issues* 2006; 27; 633  
DOI: 10.1177/0192513X05284858

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## Transitional Phase or a New Balance?

### Working and Caring by Mothers With Young Children in the Netherlands

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In recent years in the Netherlands, mothers' labor participation has increased sharply. This article examines which factors influence mothers' employment rates and the division of household and caring responsibilities between parents. From research among 1,285 women with young children, it appears that cultural factors rather than economic motives or institutional obstacles offer the most important explanation for whether they work or not. A culture of care dominates more among women with lower than higher education levels, which clarifies the more limited labor participation of lower educated mothers. A comparison is also drawn between the various earner types of family. It appears that the one-and-a-half earner type of family with the man working full-time and the woman part-time is particularly popular among women with lesser education levels. However, for women with higher educations, the ideal is for both parents to work part-time, but for the time being, they have not yet been able to realize this.

**Keywords:** *working mothers; labor participation; care; the Netherlands*

In the 1980s and 1990s, women's employment rates increased steadily in the Netherlands. In the period of 1986 to 1998, for example, the proportion of dual earner households among couples with or without children rose from 30% to more than half (56%; Keuzenkamp, 2000). In this period, it was primarily mothers with very young children (younger than 6) whose labor market participation increased, more than doubling. In 1998, 59% of mothers

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**Authors' Note:** This research was supported by the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and by the Ministry of Public Health, Welfare and Sport. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Frits van Wel, Utrecht University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Heidelberglaan 2, 3584 CS Utrecht, the Netherlands; e-mail: [F.vanWel@fss.uu.nl](mailto:F.vanWel@fss.uu.nl).

with children younger than 12 worked 1 hour or more per week. In the past decade, the traditional breadwinner family has evidently been on the way out.

Dutch women's employment rates have indeed been above the European average, but far more women work part-time in the Netherlands than they do elsewhere. No fewer than 60% of working women between the ages of 15 and 64 years worked part-time in 1998; for mothers with a partner and a youngest child younger than 12, this figure was 86% (Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek [CBS], 2000a; Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau [SCP], 2000). Among dual earner couples with young and school-aged children, a one-and-a-half earner family (the man works full-time, the woman part-time) is the most dominant type.

As is the case in many other countries (Rubery, Smith, & Fagan, 1999), for Dutch mothers with young children, the higher their level of education, the more they are employed (Ministerie van SZW, 1999). In 1997, approximately 7 out of 10 women with higher education and with a partner and children younger than 12 years worked, in contrast to approximately half of mothers with a secondary education and a quarter of mothers with lower education levels.

Many international and cross-national studies of women's employment have signaled the extraordinary pattern of part-time employment among Dutch employees and particular by women and mothers of young and school-aged children (Hakim, 1999; Plantenga, 1996; Rubery et al., 1999; Sainsbury, 1996). Dutch scholars have pointed at several explanations for this phenomenon that, outside of Britain and Germany, is exceptional in the Western world. Plantenga, Schippers, and Siegers (1999) point to the lack of child care facilities that forces mothers to find a part-time job, whereas Den Dulk, van Doorne-Huiskes, and Peper (2003) stress the combination of opportunity costs, lack of child care facilities, and cultural factors such as the care ethic of Dutch mothers. Other authors (Visser & Hemerijck, 1997) accentuate the specific combination of regulations starting in the 1980s for part-time work with the lack of adequate child care provisions.

In this article, we present new data that indicate how Dutch mothers envision their combination of work and care and why they are not employed or instead have a part-time or a full-time job. We first address the factors that may determine mothers' employment and the division of care and housework between Dutch parents. In this effort, particular attention is paid to differences between the employment rates of mothers with young children according to their level of education. Second, we consider the ways in which one-and-a-half earner families differ from families with other types of income combinations. Third, we investigate whether mothers with young children

prefer the current or an alternative division of paid labor with their partner. Since the mid-1990s, the Dutch government has stimulated the so-called combination scenario, in which both parents work part-time and the care of the children is partially contracted out (Commissie Toekomstscenario's Herverdeling Onbetaalde Arbeid, 1995; Ministerie van SZW, 1997). Do mothers also favor this ideal, and can the current development of the one-and-a-half wage earner family be considered to constitute a transitional phase to achieving this ideal?

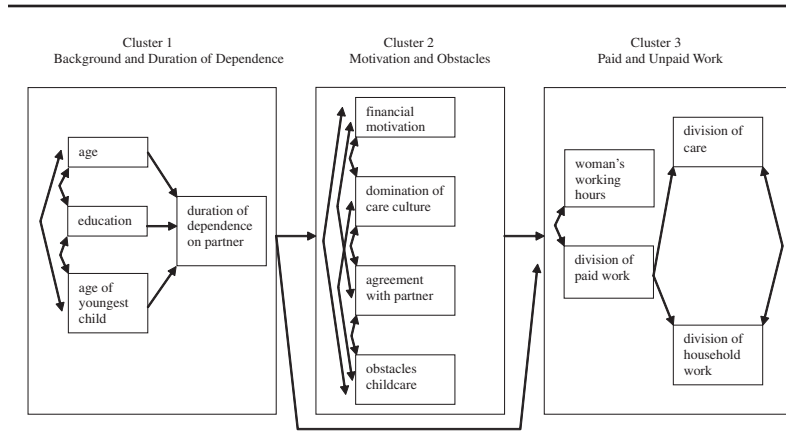
In critical studies about working and caring (Knijn & van Wel, 2001), two clusters of explanations can be distinguished for the level of mothers' employment: (a) family internal factors that discourage or stimulate mothers to assume a position in the labor market that is comparable to that of fathers and (b) family external factors that hinder or encourage mothers' employment, given their position in the family.

Much large-scale Dutch research is restricted to describing the relationship between mothers' paid work and their individual characteristics (age, level of education) and family situations (e.g., the age of the youngest child; Ministerie van SZW/CBS, 1999). Family internal factors offer an insufficient explanation for the differences between mothers' participation in the workforce, unless it is clear why one category of mothers feel more inclined to withdraw on a long-term basis from paid work than do mothers in another category. For instance, a mother's care ethos may be stronger and her work ethos weaker the younger a child is, with the consequence that she prefers not to work. Moreover, opting for not working by mothers with lower education levels can perhaps be understood by the care culture and traditional beliefs about the division of family tasks (De Jong & Steenhof, 2000; Hooghiemstra, 2000; Knijn & Verheijen, 1988). It is frequently and implicitly assumed that such attitudinal factors are important for understanding mothers' employment, although these factors are not explicitly included in the analysis.

In qualitative research, attitudes to motherhood in relation to paid work are usually considered (Groenendijk, 1998), but because of the often small-scale character of such research, a state of uncertainty remains about the general validity of the results. In large-scale research, a number of relevant attitudes are usually measured (e.g., about placing children at a *crèche*, the division of work in the home between the parents; SCP, 2000), but in many cases these are isolated views that are not or are rarely related to other factors that could be important for understanding women's employment, such as financial considerations or the relative earning capacity of the parents.

In addition to family internal factors, family external factors may also have a positive effect on the employment rates of women in the 1990s; for example, there might have been a growing supply of jobs, particularly part-

**Figure 1**  
**Conceptual Model Caring and**  
**Working Women With Partners and Young Children**



time jobs in sectors in which women have traditionally been represented, such as the service sector (Niphuis-Nell & de Beer, 1997). In contrast with full-time work, part-time work enables mothers to balance working hours with child care. In the 1990s in the Netherlands, companies and, to a greater extent, the government have implemented equal opportunity policies directed toward stimulating women's labor market participation by developing facilities for combining work and care. A number of tax measures and changes in the social security system have also benefited dual earner families (Ministerie van SZW, 1999). The growth of child care facilities has been greatly stimulated by various measures undertaken by the government. Even though there is still a shortage of such facilities, this does not seem to be a decisive factor for women to stop working once they become mothers (Merens, 2000).

In the conceptual model that we use to gain insight into the motivations of and obstacles faced by mothers in combining work and care, we distinguish three clusters of variables (see Figure 1). We assume that the variables in Cluster 1 (background and duration of dependence) may affect those in Cluster 2 (motivation and obstacles) and 3 (paid and unpaid work), whereas the variables in Cluster 2 will only influence those in Cluster 3. In Cluster 1, three background characteristics (age, education, and age of youngest child) that may influence the duration of dependence of mothers on their partner have been included. We expect older women, women with a lower education, and women with a somewhat older youngest child to be or to have been

(completely) financially dependent on their partner for longer than their opposites. We assume that the duration of this “culture of dependence” is partly the consequence of women’s motives and obstacles concerning work and care in the preceding period, intermediary factors that could not be determined because of the cross-sectional character of our research. In the absence of longitudinal data, we also do not know whether the women have changed their opinion about work and care in the course of time as a result of successful or frustrating experiences in this field.

Nevertheless, we assume that the whole of experiences from the past (for which the duration of dependence on the partner is the standard for comparison) may in their turn offer an explanation for the women’s current motives and obstacles (Cluster 2), which may throw light on the number of women who are employed and the division of paid and unpaid work between them and their partner (Cluster 3). We distinguish two motives for working: having to (financial pressure) and wanting to (domination of the care culture; whether or not caring is preferred to working). In addition to these economic and cultural factors, two other possible obstacles to working have been included in Cluster 2: a social (relational) factor (difficulties in agreeing with the partner about the division of work in and outside the home as an indicator for being allowed to work) and an institutional factor (being able to work), a complex of more family external obstacles that women experience concerning child care and balancing working hours with caring. In the model, no causal relations are expected among the four variables in Cluster 2.

In Cluster 3 (paid and unpaid work), we investigate which factors in Clusters 1 and 2 directly or indirectly carry the most weight in explaining the differences in mothers’ labor market participation and the division of paid work between them and their partner (these factors may be evidently correlated). We expect, for example, the culture of care to dominate more among women with a lower education than among women with a higher education and, in turn, that this intermediary factor would affect the former’s more limited participation in paid work. In this last cluster, we also investigate the equal or unequal division of unpaid work in the home between parents, with no causal relation expected between the division of household and caring responsibilities. We expect the balance of paid work between parents to be the most determining factor in the division of other work in the home: If one parent does more paid work, then we assume the other will carry more responsibility for caring or housekeeping.

In this article, we concentrate on families with young children (younger than 12 years), because the greatest changes occurred in this category in the Netherlands in the 1990s. On the basis of the conceptual model, we first answer our central question regarding this category: Which family external

and family internal factors—viewed in relation to each other—influence mothers' employment and the division of paid and unpaid work between them and their partner?

## Method

### Sample

In 2000, we sent a questionnaire to mothers with a partner and one or more children younger than 12 in five cities in the Netherlands (Utrecht, The Hague, Zaanstad, Tilburg, and Apeldoorn). The respondents were acquired by means of a random sample from local authority records. A total of 1,285 women returned a completed questionnaire, which yields a response rate of 36%. Although this response rate is low compared to other large surveys among Dutch families (Rispen, Hermanns, & Meeus, 1996), this figure is not unsatisfactory. When we compare the number of children, educational level, and employment rate of the women in this research with national statistics (see below), the respondents seem to be pretty representative for all Dutch mothers with a partner and a youngest child younger than 12. Their educational level is rather high, because one of the five cities in this research, Utrecht, is a university city that houses many people with a higher education who on the whole work more.

The average age of the respondents was 35.8 years. On average, two children lived at home; 28% of the families had one child, nearly half (49%) had two children, and the others (24%) had three or more. The number of children corresponds with national statistics (CBS, 2000b). Most of the families still had very young children; 59% of them had a youngest child between the age of 0 and 4 years.

### Measures

The respondents received a questionnaire with a fixed set of possible answers. The following questions and variables were relevant for the analysis of the conceptual model.

*Cluster 1: Background characteristics and economic dependency.* Four variables were important in this respect: the age of the woman, the age of the youngest child, the level of education (1 = lower—maximal lower general secondary education, 2 = middle—secondary education, 3 = higher—higher professional and university education), and financial dependence on the partner (from 1 = *never* to 7 = *more than 20 years*).



*Cluster 2: Restrictions and motives.* This cluster involves four variables (mostly based on statements with possible answers varying from 1 = *totally disagree* to 5 = *totally agree*). All of the scales in this cluster were constructed by the authors.

The Financial Motivation Scale captures the degree to which someone is willing to work or is working to gain at least a moderate income (three statements, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .70$ ). Examples of scale items include "I have to work, otherwise we cannot cope financially" and "I wish to work in order not to have to count the pennies."

The Domination of a Care Culture Scale is a combination of four subscales indicating the centrality of the mother's care orientation in comparison with her work orientation ( $\alpha = .73$ ). There are four subscales. First, Dominance of Care Ethos Over Work Ethos comprises the difference score of the mean scores of the care ethic and work ethic scales. Care ethos measures the degree to which caring for partner and children is an aim in life (three statements,  $\alpha = .80$ ; examples: "You live for your partner and child(ren)," "Being completely devoted to your partner and child(ren) is the greatest fulfillment ever"), and work ethos measures the extent to which someone's orientation in life is to have a paid job (seven statements,  $\alpha = .81$ ; examples: "Paid employment, that is what it is all about," "A job: I would like to work hard!"). Second, the Traditional Attitude Toward the Division of Work in and Outside the Home scale includes 12 statements about the division of paid and unpaid work (caring, housekeeping) between parents ( $\alpha = .85$ ; examples: "My partner simply prefers to provide for the family more than I do," "Caring for children: That is something which is more for me than for my partner," "I feel more responsible for the household than my partner"). Third, the Attitude Towards Childcare subscale concerns the degree to which someone has a positive attitude toward (paid) child care or out-of-school child care (three statements,  $\alpha = .89$ ; examples: "I do not like the idea of child day care or extracurricular care," "I would rather stay at home than make use of child day care or extracurricular care"). Last, the Problems in Combining Caring and Working scale is for the degree to which people anticipate or experience problems in combining care and work (four statements,  $\alpha = .86$ ; examples: "I cannot or can barely see how I could possibly combine a job with raising a (the) child(ren)," "If I work, I feel that I am not properly fulfilling my duties at home").

The Agreement With Partner Regarding the Division of Work in and Outside the Home scale measures the extent that women indicated they could agree with their partner about who would provide the income and who would take care of the children and the housekeeping (four statements,  $\alpha = .75$ ; examples: "I can easily reach agreement with my partner about who does

what in the household," "I can easily reach agreement with my partner about who earns the money").

The scale items for Obstacles Regarding Childcare asked about possible obstacles related to taking care of the children that hindered employment, such as "the high costs of child care," "the absence of good and suitable child care," and "combining working hours with caring for the children" and included five statements with possible answers "no problem or not applicable," "rather problematic," or "major problem" ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

*Cluster 3: Paid and unpaid labor.* This cluster involves four variables: women's working hours or the number of hours per week people are employed, division of paid labor or the difference in working hours between the woman and the man, the division of care and household work (possible answers varying from 1 = *woman does less than her partner* to 4 = *woman does much more*), and how many hours of paid work the women would like to do per week and how many hours they wanted their partner to do paid work per week.

## Results

### Influences on the Participation of Mothers in the Workforce and the Division of Work in the Home

The model in Figure 1 was analyzed using Lisrel 8 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993). A suitable model could be found ( $\chi^2 = 22.07$ ,  $df = 20$ ,  $p = .34$ ; standardized root mean square residual = 0.014; adjusted goodness of fit index = 0.99; critical  $N = 2186.14$ ; the analysis is based on the covariance matrix of 12 variables for 1,285 women). The results are presented in Table 1. We do not describe all the causal and correlational relations but concentrate on the most important explanations for women's level of participation in the workforce and the division of paid labor and unpaid work in the home between parents.

In view of the influence of the factors in Cluster 2 (motivation and obstacles) on mothers' employment, it appears that the care culture is particularly important: The more dominant this is in the mother's life, the less likely she is to have a paid job and the more likely she is to work significantly fewer hours when employed. However, the more that a job is considered necessary for financial reasons, the more respondents actually work. Nevertheless, this factor is less important than the factor care culture; whether mothers work or not has more the character of a preference than of financial obligation. Obstacles regarding child care among the women in the study constitute a modest

**Table 1**  
**Path Analysis Caring and Working Women With Partners and Young Children**

Influence	Cluster 1: Background and Dependence						Cluster 2: Motivations and Obstacles						Cluster 3: Paid and Unpaid Work								
	Education		Age of Youngest Child		Duration of Dependence		Financial Motivation		Domination Care Culture		Agreement With Partner		Obstacles Child Care		Paid Working Hours		Division of Paid Work		Division of Household Work		
	C	T	C	T	D	T	D	T	D/C	T	D/C	T	D	T	D/C	T	D	T	D/C	T	
Cluster 1																					
Education	—	.13	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Age	—	—	.63	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Age youngest child	—	—	—	.26	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Duration of dependence	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cluster 2																					
Financial motivation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dominance of care culture	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Agreement with partner	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Obstacles child care	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cluster 3																					
Paid working hours	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Division of paid work	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Division of care	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Division of household work	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
R <sup>2</sup>	—	—	—	.15	—	—	.09	—	.36	—	.01	—	.42	—	.28	—	.32	—	—	—	.27

Note: N = 1,285; C = correlation; D = direct effect; T = total effect. Figures in italics are Pearson's *r* correlations, *p* < .05. Figures not in italics are standardized  $\beta$  coefficients. Significant effect is *t*-value > 1.96, *p* < .05, resp.  $\beta \geq .05$ .

external hindrance should they want to work. Possible dissension with partners about the division of responsibilities does not have a negative influence on women's participation in the workforce.

It is primarily women who have been completely dependent on the income of their partner for a short amount of time and who are also accustomed to being financially independent in their relationship with their partner who appears to work more. The importance of the duration of dependence is further supported by the influence that this variable exercises on intermediary factors: The less time women are dependent on their partner, the less the care culture clearly dominates, the more financially motivated they are, and the fewer obstacles with child care they experience, with the consequence that they work more. The level of education is also important. Women with a lower education work less than women with a higher education. The relation between education and participation in the workforce is primarily twofold, which to a great extent clarifies this relation: Women with a lower education have lived from the income of their partner for longer, and the care culture dominates more in these circles, with the consequence that these women are working less than women with a higher education. The total direct and indirect influence of the level of education on their participation in the workforce can thus be regarded to be considerable. Finally, it appears that younger women work more than older women and that women return to work the older their children are, although this direct relation is weakened by an indirect relation: When the youngest child grows up, there are also women who remain financially dependent on their partner and do not return to work. All in all, the model offers a reasonable explanation for the difference in the participation in the workforce by mothers with young children ( $R^2 = .42$ ). In explaining the division of paid labor between the parents, generally the same factors play a role, although certain relations are somewhat less pronounced or disappear.

The division of child care between parents appears primarily to be a consequence of the division of paid work: If the balance of paid working hours leans toward the man, the balance of caring tasks leans toward the woman. But this is only part of the story. Mothers who identify more with a traditional care culture continue to take responsibility for caring. The division of child care is thus the result of rational considerations and conventional beliefs. Moreover, the resistance of the partner appears to perpetuate the unequal division of care: The more that women are unable to agree with their partner about the division of work inside and outside the home, the more responsibility they take for caring. These three factors carry the most weight in explaining the division of care.

The division of household work is likewise—almost completely—the result of three influences: a rational setup in that whoever works less does more in the household, a traditional attitude wherein the household and the children are the domain of housewives or mothers, and the resistance of the partner to performing child care and household tasks. Other factors in the model are not important or affect the division of housekeeping via these three channels. So women with a lower education do more in the household because they undertake less paid work and the care culture is more important to them.

### **Characteristics of Income Types**

In all, 70% of the women who participated in our research in 2000 worked 12 hours or more, and 8% worked 1 to 11 hours. According to another recent national estimate, in 2001 56% of mothers with a partner and a youngest child younger than 12 worked 12 hours or more (Portegijs, Boelens, & Keuzenkamp, 2002). The high employment rate for women in our research can be explained for the most part by the fact that the research focused on cities where employment is higher than the national average. For example, the university city of Utrecht houses many people with higher education who on the whole work more. Nevertheless, we can assume that generalization of the results of this study will not suffer from this overrepresentation. Our objective is not to explain the exact percentage of working mothers but to explain the motives of those who are employed and of those who are not employed. From that perspective, it does not seem to be a problem that this study contains higher than average educated and employed mothers.

The families who took part in the research reflect the trend in recent decades in which the number of traditional breadwinner families—the man works while the women cares for the children and the household—is decreasing at great speed. In 2000, only 19% of the respondents who had young children were single earner families (see Table 2). Nationally, this figure was 47% in 1993 to 1994 and 29% in 1998. Families with one and a half incomes appear to overshadow all the other income types at 53%. In such a family, the man works full-time (more than 32 hours), and the woman has a substantial part-time job of 12 to 32 hours. At 9%, half-and-half income types (where both parents work part-time) are for the time being a marginal phenomenon among families with young children. Finally, there were a small number of one-and-a-quarter income (7%; the man worked full-time, the woman 1-11 hours) and double income families (6%; both partners worked full-time). Nearly all (94%) of the families belonged to one of these five income types.

**Table 2**  
**Characteristics of Types of Earner Families**

Characteristics	Single Earner Family (Man) (19%)	One-and-a-Quarter Earner Families (7%)	One-and-a-Half Earner Families (53%)	Half-and-Half Earner Families (9%)	Double Earner Families (6%)
1. Background and dependence					
Age of woman (years)	35.0	36.2	35.8	36.8	35.1
Woman's level of education	1,8 <sup>L</sup>	2,0 <sup>L/M</sup>	2,2 <sup>M</sup>	2,7 <sup>H</sup>	2,1 <sup>L/M</sup>
Level of education (%)					
Low	40	33	22	5	31
Middle	37	34	36	19	29
High	23	32	42	76	40
Age of youngest child (years)	3,8 <sup>L/H</sup>	5,0 <sup>H</sup>	4,1 <sup>L/H</sup>	3,3 <sup>L</sup>	5,1 <sup>H</sup>
Duration of dependence on partner	2,3 <sup>HH</sup>	1,5 <sup>H</sup>	0,6 <sup>L/M</sup>	0,3 <sup>L</sup>	0,7 <sup>M</sup>
2. Motivation and obstacles					
Financial motivation	2,5 <sup>L</sup>	2,5 <sup>L</sup>	3,1 <sup>H</sup>	3,2 <sup>H</sup>	3,3 <sup>H</sup>
Dominance of care culture	2,8 <sup>H</sup>	2,6 <sup>H</sup>	1,9 <sup>M</sup>	1,4 <sup>L</sup>	2,0 <sup>M</sup>
Agreement regarding division of work	3,9 <sup>L</sup>	3,9 <sup>L/H</sup>	3,9 <sup>L</sup>	4,2 <sup>H</sup>	3,8 <sup>L</sup>
Obstacles regarding child care	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4
3. Paid and unpaid work					
Working hours woman	0 <sup>LL</sup>	7,6 <sup>L</sup>	21,8 <sup>M</sup>	26,4 <sup>H</sup>	38 <sup>HH</sup>
Working hours man	40,9 <sup>M/H</sup>	42,7 <sup>H</sup>	40 <sup>M</sup>	28,3 <sup>L</sup>	39,3 <sup>M</sup>
Working hours woman + man	40,9 <sup>LL</sup>	50,2 <sup>L</sup>	61,7 <sup>M</sup>	54,6 <sup>H</sup>	77,3 <sup>HH</sup>
Division of labor (hours woman – man)	-40,1 <sup>LL</sup>	-35,1 <sup>L</sup>	-18,2 <sup>M</sup>	-1,8 <sup>H</sup>	-1,3 <sup>H</sup>
Family earnings (net per month; in Euros)	1,837 <sup>L</sup>	2,072 <sup>L</sup>	2,564 <sup>M</sup>	2,513 <sup>M</sup>	3,120 <sup>H</sup>
Woman's portion of family earnings (%)	4 <sup>LL</sup>	13 <sup>L</sup>	33 <sup>M</sup>	48 <sup>H</sup>	45 <sup>H</sup>
Division of care for the children	3,6 <sup>HH</sup>	3,5 <sup>H/HH</sup>	3,3 <sup>H</sup>	2,5 <sup>L</sup>	2,9 <sup>M</sup>
Division of household work	3,8 <sup>H</sup>	3,8 <sup>H</sup>	3,4 <sup>M</sup>	2,8 <sup>L</sup>	3,2 <sup>M</sup>

Note: Comparisons have only been drawn among the five most important types of income (which 94% of the 1,285 women had). Significant differences (Scheffé tests,  $p < .05$ ) are indicated using superscripts: LL (very low), L (low), M (middle), H (high), and HH (very high). Single earner family (man): only man works. One-and-a-quarter earner family: man works more than 32 hours, woman works less than 12 hours. One-and-a-half earner family: man works more than 32 hours, woman works 12 to 32 hours. Half-and-half earner family: both the man and the woman work 32 hours or less. Double earner family: both the man and the woman work more than 32 hours.

In the previous section, the influence of the variables on paid and unpaid labor was ascertained. The extent to which these factors are characteristic for the five most common income types will now be examined (see Table 2).

This cross-section of income types is arranged according to the amount of the women's absolute and relative labor market participation, both of which increase according to the following logic: single income → one-and-a-quarter income → one-and-a-half income → half-and-half income → double income. It is true that the causal, logical coherence between the variables disappears under this categorization, but certain correlated differences come clearly to the fore.

Single earner and half-and-half earner families are the most divergent. The level of education of women in families with a single male wage earner is the lowest (77% have lower or middle education) and that of women of the half-and-half earner type have by far the highest (76% have a university or higher professional education background). The period of dependence on the partner is the shortest for women from half-and-half earner families, and that of single earner families is the longest. Half-and-half earner families often appear to still have young children, more than, for example, double income families. There is very little difference in the ages of the women in these earner types of families.

Women from single and one-and-a-quarter earner families are the least financially motivated to work, even if their total income is relatively low. Among them the care culture dominates the most and among half-and-half earner families the least, whereas one-and-a-half and double earner families take a middle position. A dominant care culture means that for the mothers, caring occupies a more central place in their lives than working does, that they are more reluctant to let their children go into child care, and that they are not interested in an equal division of tasks with their partner and have more problems combining their roles as housewife, mother, and paid worker. The division of unpaid work is the least disproportionate for half-and-half earner families. The division is more balanced for women in half-and-half earner families than for double income families, even though the parents in these family types work approximately the same amount. Women in half-and-half earner families appear to be better at agreeing with their partner about the division of work between them than women from double income families. All mothers indicate approximately the same obstacles with their children's child care in finding a job.

Family income of the various types of wage earner families differs greatly and is primarily dependent on the number of hours that both parents work: For single earner families, average income is €1,837, and for double income families, the family income averages €3,120. Together with their partner, a great number of women with higher education from half-and-half earner families earn nearly as much (€2,513) as do the one-and-a-half earner families (€2,564), although they work far fewer hours (55 vs. 62).

### Preferences for Change Among the Various Income Types

The traditional breadwinner family occurs the most in families with a lower education (29%), but it is no longer the most dominant type in these circles (see Table 3). The one-and-a-half earner type is now prevalent in this group (44%), though the pattern is most popular for people with a secondary (57%) and higher (55%) education. The half-and-half earner type—which is central to the combination scenario supported by the government—only occurs frequently among those with a higher education (17%).

Most women (60%) do not want to work more or fewer hours per week than they actually do; one in five would like to work fewer hours per week, and one in five would like to work more. Especially women from double income families want to work less, whereas the majority of women from single earner families want to enter the labor market. On average, people wish to work more, nearly 19 hours instead of the current amount of nearly 18 hours. In particular, women with a lower education would like to work more. Most women (65%) do not want their partner to work more or less than they actually do, and 30% would appreciate their working fewer hours, women with a higher education the most and women with a lower education the least. Although three fourths of the women would prefer a large part-time job for themselves (those with a lower education, 62%; secondary education, 75%; higher education, 87%), two of three would rather prefer their partner worked full-time. Above all, lower educated women (81%) and women with secondary education (75%) prefer that their husband work full-time, whereas the majority (52%) of the higher educated women would rather prefer a part-time job for their partner. On average, women would prefer that they and their partner worked 1 hour less, 54 hours instead of the current amount of nearly 55 hours. Women with a lower education would prefer that they and their partner work the least amount of hours. All in all, women would like a somewhat more equal division of paid working hours. Nevertheless, their partner would still account for 66% of the paid working hours, whereas they would contribute for 34%. This division is the least disproportionate among women with higher education levels.

Two thirds (64%) of the women already have their preferred family type; 71% of women with a lower education are satisfied with the family earner type they belong to, which is true for 67% of those with a secondary education and for only 56% of those with a higher education. Table 3 demonstrates that respondents tend to desire the half-and-half earner type; 31% prefer this type, whereas only 9% currently have this. In both actual practice and as an ideal, the traditional breadwinner family belongs to the past for most. Fewer than half of the current single wage earners regard this family type as something for which they should strive. The one-and-a-half earner type currently



**Table 3**  
**Current and Desired Type of Earner Family According to Level of Education (percentages)**

Types of Earnings	Current Type of Earner Family According to Level of Education			Desired Type of Earner Family According to Level of Education		
	Lower 27%	Middle 34%	Higher 40%	Lower 27%	Middle 34%	Higher 40%
Single earner family						
Man breadwinner	29	21	11	19	10	4
Woman breadwinner	1	2	2	2	1	1
Double earner family						
One-and-a-quarter earner family (man main breadwinner: man works > 32 hours, woman works < 12 hours)	9	7	6	7	8	5
One-and-a-half earner family (man main breadwinner: man works > 32 hours, woman works 12-32 hours)	44	57	55	53	52	38
Woman main breadwinner (woman works > 32 hours, man works ≤ 32 hours)	0	1	3	2	1	2
Half-and-half earner family (both work ≤ 32 hours)	2	5	17	9	24	50
Double earner family (both work > 32 hours)	7	5	6	6	3	2
No earnings (benefit; both do not work or work < 12 hours)	8	1	1	3	1	0
Total						

Note: N = 1,285.

characterizes 53% of the families participating in the research and is considered by nearly half (46%) of them all as the ideal. This type of family is the favorite for women with a lower and secondary education, whereas for women with a higher education, the half-and-half earner family enjoys the greatest preference.

## Conclusion

In this research, we did not directly investigate the influence of family external factors that hinder or stimulate women's labor market participation, such as governmental measures, social programs, or the supply of part-time jobs that facilitate the combination of working and caring. Only by historical analyses can the presumable varying influence of such factors on the labor market behavior of mothers be determined. For instance, in the near past there was a huge shortage of child care facilities in the Netherlands, a situation that has frustrated many mothers willing to work (Merens, 2000). In our study, we looked at such external factors only insofar as women do perceive them nowadays as obstacles for their labor market participation.

From our research, it appears that the most important explanatory factor for Dutch mothers participating in the workforce is not determined currently by external obstacles but by a cultural factor: the care culture. This factor also appears to be the central intervening link for explaining the relation between their level of education and employment: The care culture dominates more among mothers with lower education levels, with the consequence that they work less than mothers with higher education. Women who currently work more are also more accustomed to being financially independent in their relationship with their partner. In the conceptual model as presented here, it appears that economic factors such as financial necessity are of less significance in explaining mothers' employment, whereas institutional or external obstacles, such as the absence of child care, play a modest role. Whether mothers undertake paid work or not can nowadays be understood in terms of family internal factors, preferences, striking balances, and choices.

From other Dutch research (Niphuis-Nell & de Beer, 1997; Van der Lippe, 1997), it is clear that mothers spend less time looking after the household and on child care the more paid work they do (and vice versa). Our research demonstrates that their increased employment does not automatically result in a balanced division of unpaid work in the home with their partner. Three factors appear to determine the division of caring and housekeeping. The first factor is a rational setup, meaning that the more equal the division of paid work is, the more equal the division of unpaid work. The second factor is the care culture; the more this factor dominates, the more the

women take responsibility for caring and housekeeping. The third factor is a social or relational factor; the failure to agree with the partner about the division of work in the home means that women continue to do more unpaid work.

The current employment pattern of Dutch women is no longer characterized by a two-phase model, that is, a model in which women work up until marriage or the birth of the first child. Their employment pattern follows also increasingly less a three-phase model that consists of the two-phase model and then returning to work (Turkenburg, 1995). A combination model (i.e., working full-time until the birth of the first child and afterward continuing to work part-time in addition to caring for the children and the household) is swiftly becoming the dominant pattern. The one-and-a-half earner family, in which the man works more than 32 hours and the woman works 12 to 32 hours, has established itself as the successor to the traditional breadwinner family. In our research, we found that the majority of women (53%) even belonged to this "moderate breadwinner model" (Hooghiemstra & Keuzenkamp, 2000) or "neo-traditional" family type (Moen, 2003). The traditional breadwinner family (19%) appears to differ the most from family types in which both parents work part-time (9%). It is characteristic of mothers in half-and-half earner families that they have a higher education. Among them, the care culture dominates the least, couples are better at agreeing about work in and outside the home, and the division of this work is the least disproportionate.

Because most of the women with a lower and secondary education also regard the one-and-a-half earner type as the ideal, it would appear that they have achieved a new balanced situation. Families with a higher education are possibly in a transitional phase. For them, the situation is uncertain: Half of the women with a higher education want to be half-and-half wage earners, but for the time being, many of them have not succeeded in persuading their partner to work part-time. The combination ideal, which is the principal guideline of the government's family policy, is indeed subscribed to by mothers with a higher education. However, they have not been able to realize this in practice. Mothers with less education are also not realizing the combination ideal in practice, but in contrast to mothers with a higher education, this is not what they want. In particular for mothers with a lower education, their partner's role as a breadwinner is barely under discussion. For the majority, combining caring and paid work still remains a matter for the mother alone.

In this study, we interpreted by way of cross-sectional data the current culture of care of mothers as the result of their past experiences regarding the division of paid work between them and their partner. In the absence of longi-

tudinal data, we do not know to what extent their current point of view about care is a matter of rationalization, for instance, a resignation to a situation that the mothers failed to change, or a matter of free choice (cf. Hochschild & Machung, 1989). Anyhow, we do expect that this factor constitutes a crucial link in the prediction and explanation of future changes in Dutch families, especially a further transition to the half-and-half earner type instigated by higher educated women among whom the care culture dominates the least.

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