



Examining the Relation between Part-Time Work and Happiness in Dual-Earner Couples from a Life Course Perspective: Incorporating Individual, Couple and Country Characteristics

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NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

Research on work hours and happiness have generated equivocal results: some find that working fulltime is related to greater happiness, while others find that those who work part-time are happier. Both findings may be true, but perhaps a missing piece is that the relationship between work hours and well-being is dependent on the context at the individual, couple and country level.

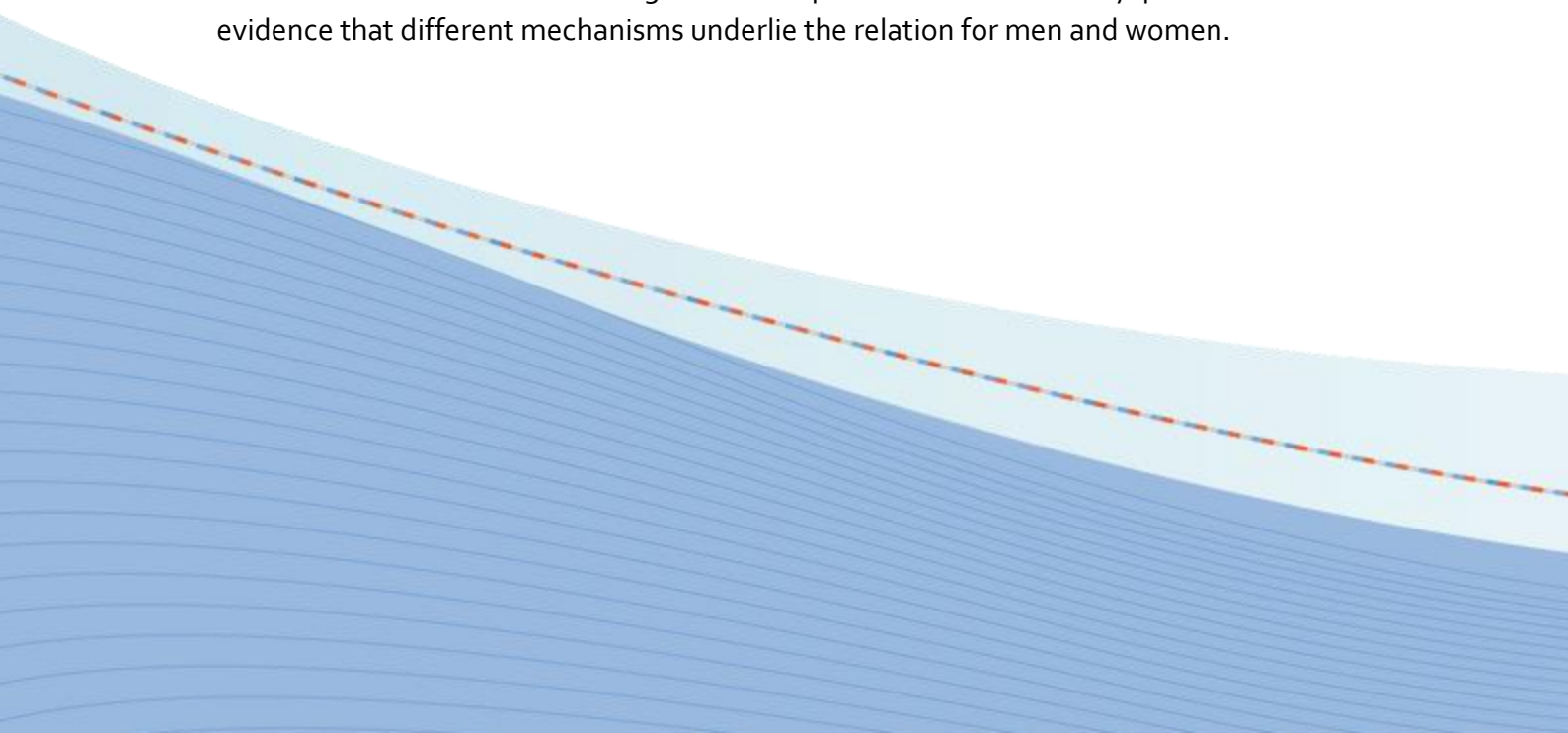
We draw on a life course perspective, focusing on people's gender, the presence and age of children, the partner's work hours, and the country's norms and policies to see whether these factors shape the relationship between work hours and happiness.

We analyze data from the 2012 Family and Changing Gender Roles module of the International Social Survey Programme, in combination with country-level data from the OECD's Family Database.

We find women in dual-earner households are happier working part-time, while men in these households are happier working fulltime. Within dual-earner households, both men and women are happier with a part-time working partner. However, we find these effects pertain only to people with school age children and not to childless people or those with pre-school age children. We also find fulltime working fathers are happier partly because they adhere to gender role prescriptions.

Norms and policies do not shape the relation between work hours and happiness in our sample. In sum, our paper emphasizes that the relationship between work hours and well-being is dependent on people's life course context. Whether individuals are happier working fulltime or part-time depends on their gender, their parental status and the work hours of their partner.

Future studies should consider gendered explanations as our study provides tentative evidence that different mechanisms underlie the relation for men and women.



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Abstract

Research relating work hours to well-being has generated equivocal results: some find that working fulltime is related to greater happiness, while others find that those who work part-time are happier. Both findings may be true – linkages between work hours and well-being might differ depending on individual, couple and country characteristics. We use a life course perspective and focus on people's gender, the presence and age of children, the partner's work hours, and the country's norms and policies. Furthermore, this paper is the first to explicitly test the key explanations for the relation between work hours and happiness. We analyze data from the 2012 module of the ISSP, in combination with country-level data from the OECD's Family Database. Women are happier working part-time, while men are happier working fulltime. Both men and women are happier with a part-time working partner. These effects pertain only to people with school age children and not to childless people or those with pre-school age children. Fulltime working fathers are happier partly because they adhere to gender role prescriptions. Norms and policies do not shape the relation between work hours and happiness. The current paper stresses that how work hours affect well-being is dependent on people's life course context. Whether individuals are happier working fulltime or part-time depends on their gender, their parental status and the work hours of their partner. Furthermore, future studies should consider gendered explanations as our study provides tentative evidence that different mechanisms underlie the relation for men and women.

Keywords: Dual-earner couples; happiness; employment; life course

1. Introduction

Employment confers pecuniary and non-pecuniary benefits that enhance people's well-being (Winkelmann and Winkelmann, 1998). The income provided by employment is not the most important benefit however (Ibid.). Instead, paid work is rewarding in itself, giving people social status, social contacts and self-esteem, as well as structuring their daily life (e.g. Lane, 1992; Spencer, 2004). In light of the advantages of being employed, there is a consensus in the literature that unemployment is related to (substantially) lower well-being (Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, and Diener, 2004). Although being employed conveys certain benefits, the relation between the number of hours a person works and their level of well-being is not evidently positive. Studies examining time-use data suggest that people generally view working as one of the least pleasant activities (e.g. Kahneman, Krueger, and Schkade, 2004). This might be explained by the time demands that paid work places on individuals, which reduce the time available for other activities, such as leisure and household work (e.g. Pouwels, 2011). Working more hours may therefore increase time pressure and work-family conflict, both of which could reduce people's happiness (Ibid.).

It may therefore not come as a surprise that research on the relation between work hours and well-being, often comparing part-time to fulltime workers, has produced mixed results: some studies find that those who work more hours are better off, while others find no relation or a negative effect (for a review see, Dolan, Peasgood, and White, 2008). In this paper we contend that these findings might not be in conflict with each other, as linkages between work hours and well-being are likely to differ by social context. The social context may shape the meaning and the consequences of working part-time or fulltime and may therefore determine whether someone is happier working part-time or fulltime. Linkages between work hours and happiness are likely to differ strongly by differences in one's family constellation. Furthermore, cultural expectations as to whether a person should work fulltime or part-time may differ across countries and there may be repercussions if one deviates from these expectations.

The current paper contributes to the literature by examining how the relation between work hours and happiness is shaped by social context. We do so by employing several key principles from the life course perspective (Elder, 1994). Specifically, we incorporate the concepts of *lives in context* (Moen, Elder, and Lüscher, 1995), *cumulative contingencies* (Dannefer, 2003; Keizer, 2016) and *linked lives* (Elder, 1994). These concepts respectively refer to the interplay of human lives and historical times, the idea that experiences in one life domain may affect those in another and in later life, and the notion that individual lives are

interdependent. They imply that it matters whether someone is a man or a woman, whether someone has children and where he or she lives. Our second contribution to the literature is that we put the two key explanations for linkages between work hours and happiness-- revolving around adherence to gender role prescriptions and experienced work-family conflict-- to the test. So far very little attention has been paid to testing which of these explanations is applicable, and to what extent the applicability of these two explanations differs across contexts. To begin to address these questions, we employ data from the International Social Survey Programme's 2012 module on Family and Changing Gender Roles (ISSP Research Group, 2014) in combination with country-level data on policies from the OECD's Family Database (OECD, 2016).

2. Theoretical framework

The life course perspective is a theoretical model that has emerged over the past decades across a number of disciplines including sociology, demography and psychology. Although definitions of the life course perspective vary across disciplines and the subjects under study, several key themes have been identified (Elder, 1994; Van Wissen and Dykstra, 1999). Central to the life course perspective is the idea that the social context shapes human lives. Three of the core principles of the life course approach include: the interplay of human lives and historical times, alternatively termed *lives in context* (Moen et al., 1995), the idea that experiences in one life domain may affect those in another and in later life, recently dubbed *cumulative contingencies* (Keizer, 2016), and the principle of interdependent or *linked lives* (Elder, 1994; Van Wissen and Dykstra, 1999). Below we outline how these core principles can further our understanding of the relation between work hours and happiness.

2.1 Gender

Whether someone is happier working part-time or fulltime may depend on his or her gender for two reasons. Based on qualitative research, Simon (1995) argues that men and women view the relationship between work and family roles differently. Men see both roles as interdependent and they see their work as an integral part of their family role (Simon, 1995). This idea is confirmed by other research, which finds that providing financially is central to the identities of many fathers (Christiansen and Palkovitz, 2001). Women however see their roles as mothers and as workers as independent and even as conflicting since working more means having less

time to spend on family responsibilities (Simon, 1995). The life course perspective emphasizes the way that men's and women's lives are shaped by the historical context, the notion of *lives in context*. An important aspect of the historical context is the prevailing sociocultural ideology about gender roles (Liefbroer and Billari, 2010). Accordingly, Akerlof and Kranton (2000) contend that the way men and women view and experience their work and family role is shaped by society's prescriptions concerning these roles. Household work and childcare are traditionally viewed as women's work and providing financially is a man's job. Deviating from cultural standards may lead people to experience a loss of identity and have lower well-being (Ibid.). Men may therefore be happier in fulltime jobs, while women may be happier in part-time jobs.

A related reason why women may be happier in part-time jobs concerns the division of household labor. The literature suggests that, in line with traditional role patterns, women perform the majority of household labor, and they do so regardless of the number of hours that they, or their partner, spend on paid work (Knudsen and Waerness, 2007). Hochschild labeled this women's *second shift* (Hochschild and Machung, 1989). For women therefore, having to combine a fulltime job with household work may result in work-family conflict and increased stress, while working part-time may help them deal with their responsibilities at home. Even though this may not be without consequences for women's career path and retirement savings (e.g. Davies, Joshi, and Peronaci, 2000).

Few studies have explicitly examined how paid work hours affect individual well-being among men and women, notable exceptions are studies by Baxter, Gray and Alexander (2007), Booth and Van Ours (2008;2009;2013), and Collewet and De Koning (2011). The results of these studies have been mixed. Some found that neither men's nor women's happiness is affected by working part-time or fulltime (Booth and Van Ours, 2008). Others found that women were happier working less than fulltime, while men were happier working fulltime (Baxter et al., 2007; Booth and van Ours, 2009). Finally, some suggest that paid work hours have no effect on women's happiness, but that men are happiest in large part-time – or fulltime jobs (Booth and van Ours, 2013; Collewet and de Koning, 2011). These mixed results might be explained to some extent by the fact that studies have used different datasets or different model specifications. However, they may also be explained by contextual factors. One such factor is the country context, which we will return to below in section 2.4. Another is parental status: having children may shape how work hours and happiness are related among men and women.

2.2. Parenthood

The life course concept of *cumulative contingencies* stresses the importance of earlier life experiences for later life, as well as the interplay between different roles that people have (Dannefer, 2003; Keizer, 2016; Van Wissen and Dykstra, 1999). The transition to parenthood is such an important experience that changes people's lives and a person's role as a parent is likely to interact with their role at work. There are several (interrelated) reasons why paid work hours may be associated with happiness more strongly among parents than among the childless. First, children greatly increase the time demanded by household duties for men and women (see for example, Sayer et al., 2009). The increased time demands mean that work-family conflict is more likely to arise for parents, making the difference between working part-time and fulltime more pertinent. Another reason why children may matter, is that the transition to parenthood is related to a stronger (gendered) specialization of labor in the household (Thompson and Walker, 1989). As a result, the proportion of women that work part-time is generally higher among parents than it is among the childless (European Commission, 2014). Related to this is the fact that gender roles become more salient after the transition to parenthood. Society's prescriptions concerning appropriate behavior for men and women are more stringent when it comes to their roles as mothers and fathers (Katz-Wise, Priess, and Hyde, 2010). Although some studies have focused on parents (e.g. Baxter et al., 2007), we know of no study that has explicitly compared how the relation between work hours and well-being differs between parents and childless men and women.

In addition to the presence of children, the age of the children may also matter. Pre-school age children may place greater time demands on their parents than school age children, as the latter spend a part of the day away from home and are generally more self-sufficient. A review of the literature by Monna and Gauthier (2008) suggests that parents indeed spend more time with young children than they do with older children. Given these varying time demands by children's life course stage, we expect that differences in happiness between those working fulltime and those working part-time are greater among parents with pre-school age children than those with school age children.

2.3. Partner's work hours

Aside from one's own working hours, people's well-being may also be shaped by the work hours of their partner. Another important principle in life course theory is the notion of *linked*

lives: the idea that people's lives are linked to others around them (Elder, 1994). As people move through life, they are not only affected by their own experiences and the decisions they have made themselves; they may also be affected by the decisions and experiences of those close to them. Within couples, the time allocation of one partner can therefore be expected to affect the well-being of the other partner. A partner's work hours may affect the work-family conflict and stress that someone experiences. Partners who work more, for instance, tend to contribute less to household duties (Knudsen and Waerness, 2007). This would lead to the expectation that both men and women are happier when their partner works part-time, given that these partners are more likely to take on a larger share of household responsibilities.

Akerlof and Kranton's (2000) thesis that the well-being of an individual is negatively affected if one deviates from society's prescriptions may however also be extended to the work hours of the partner. Society's prescriptions do not (only) revolve around individuals, instead they concern the division of tasks between men and women in couples. A fulltime working female partner may challenge men's traditional provider role and negatively affect their well-being. Similarly, a part-time working male partner may challenge women's responsibility at home.

In regards to society's prescription on gender roles within couples, studies on dual-earner couples find that breadwinning women traditionally downplay their economic contributions, in order to neutralize deviating from gender norms/expectations surrounding the male breadwinner model. Studies find that women within these couples do so by either performing a disproportionate amount of housework (Bittman, England, Sayer, Folbre, and Matheson, 2003; Brines, 1994; Evertsson and Neramo, 2004; Tichenor, 2005), or else by turning to husbands in decision-making (Tichenor, 2005).

Furthermore, there is evidence of crossover effects in well-being between partners, which may mean that when a partner's paid work hours negatively affect their well-being this may influence one personally (Wunder and Heineck, 2013). This leads to the expectation that men may be happier with a part-time working partner and, alternatively, women with a fulltime working partner.

Few studies have examined partner influences in the relation between paid work hours and well-being, notable exceptions are papers by Baxter and colleagues (2007), Booth and Van Ours (2008;2009;2013) and Keizer and Komter (2015). The results of these studies were also mixed. Some found no cross-partner effects of work hours on well-being (Booth and Van Ours,

2008). Others found that women's happiness increased if their male partner worked fulltime, but that work hours of female partners did not affect men's happiness (Baxter et al., 2007; Booth and van Ours, 2009). Yet others found the opposite, i.e. the happiness of women was unaffected by the working hours of their partner, while men were happier with a part-time working partner (Booth and van Ours, 2013). Finally, one study indicated that women were happier with a partner who worked more hours, while men were happier with a partner who worked fewer hours (Keizer and Komter, 2015). Once again contextual factors might explain these mixed results. Specifically the results may be affected by the country context, as countries differ in both their gender role prescriptions and in the work-family policies that are in place.

2.4. Country characteristics

The life course concept of *lives in context* recognizes that where people live affects how their lives unfold (Mayer, 2009). In the Netherlands and in Germany the male breadwinner ideology (with a female caretaker) has remained strong compared with, for instance, the Scandinavian countries where more egalitarian gender roles exist (Lewis, Knijn, Martin, and Ostner, 2008). In more gender egalitarian societies, men's and women's roles are less restricted and deviation from these *weaker* norms should be less detrimental to people's well-being. In more progressive societies, women may therefore be comparatively happier working fulltime and men may be comparatively happier working part-time. With respect to the effect of partner's paid work hours, in more progressive societies men may be relatively happier with a fulltime working partner and women may be relatively happier with a part-time working partner.

Incidentally, this might explain why the earlier research discussed above found such mixed results when they examined the relation between work hours and well-being. Studies were done in different countries: the United Kingdom (Booth and van Ours, 2009), Australia (Booth and van Ours, 2009) and The Netherlands (Booth and van Ours, 2013; Collewet and de Koning, 2011). The latter two countries can be considered more traditional and the former is more progressive. Additional evidence for the importance of cultural norms comes from a study that examined the relation between work hours and well-being among women cross-nationally and found that part-time working women were less happy comparatively in more progressive countries (Treas, Van der Lippe, and Tai, 2011).

The reason why countries might differ in the linkages between work hours and happiness might be differences in family policies. Prior studies have shown that family policies

have the capacity to influence the division of labor. For example, Fuwa and Cohen (2007) find that social policies such as parental leave and childcare services affect the gendered division of housework. Policies generally do not determine the number of paid work hours for men and women; instead they facilitate certain work arrangements, such as working part-time or fulltime. The work arrangements that are easier to maintain, as a result of this facilitation, will likely enhance individual well-being, while others decrease well-being.

The relation between paid work hours and well-being may be affected by policies that shape the division of care responsibilities between the family and the state. Familizing policies, which support the family in taking on care responsibilities, are contrasted with de-familizing policies, which delegate these responsibilities to the state (Leitner, 2003). The relation between paid work hours and well-being is expected to be affected by such policies, because they mediate the negative consequences associated with working part-time or fulltime. Familizing policies tend to relieve the financial impact of working part-time compared to working fulltime. We therefore expect that those working part-time, and those whose partner works part-time, are relatively happier in countries with more strongly familizing policies. Defamilizing policies tend to relieve the impact that work-family conflict may have for those working fulltime, for instance by taking on care responsibilities for children. Therefore, those working fulltime, and those with a fulltime working partner, are expected to be relatively happier in countries with more defamilizing policies.

2.5. Work-family conflict and deviation from gender roles

In the literature there are two key mechanisms that may link work hours to men's and women's happiness. These are (1) the work-family conflict that individuals (especially women) experience and (2) deviation from (or adherence to) gender roles. In a review, Umberson, and colleagues (2010) find that although many studies see work-family conflict as a potential threat to well-being, very few explicitly examine the association between the two in general. In the literature on the relation between work hours and well-being specifically, few attempts have been made to test the work-family conflict mechanism. A reason for this is that earlier studies have included non-working individuals (homemakers) in the analyses, in which case a measure of conflict cannot be included (e.g. Treas et al., 2011b). A notable exception is a study by Boye (2011), which finds that accounting for work-family conflict indeed explains some of the relation between work hours and well-being in her study of European mothers and fathers.

The relation between deviation from (or adherence to) gender roles and well-being is somewhat more established in the literature, especially for men. For instance, studies have found that men's well-being suffers when their spouse contributes relatively more to household income, supposedly because it diminishes their role as the breadwinner (Rogers and DeBoer, 2001). Although conversely women are generally happier when their husband does a larger share of the housework, evidence suggests that many women do not want to lose control of the household, which they consider their domain (Thompson and Walker, 1989). In studies on the relation between work hours and well-being, the salience of the gender roles mechanism is generally inferred rather than tested (e.g. Booth and van Ours, 2009).

We put these two explanations for linkages between work hours and happiness to the test by examining which of these is applicable, and to what extent the applicability of these two differs across contexts. We will account for work-family conflict to examine not only whether it explains the relation between personal work-hours and happiness, but also the relation between the partner's work-hours and happiness. We include a proxy for adherence to gender roles in order to examine to what extent it explains the relation between work hours, personal and the partner's, and happiness.

3. The present study

In this study we contribute to the literature by examining the relation between paid work hours and well-being from a life course perspective. Considering different gender role prescriptions and the division of household labour, women are expected to be happier working part-time (H1a) and men are expected to be happier working fulltime (H1b). Furthermore, the relation between paid work hours and happiness is expected to be more pronounced for parents than for the childless, given the impact that children have on time demands at home and the salience of gender roles (H3a). Moreover, the relation between paid work hours and happiness is expected to be greater for parents with pre-school age children than those with school age children (H3b). Gendered role prescriptions also suggest that women are happier with a fulltime working partner (H2a) and men with a part-time working partner (H2b). Based on its effect on the division of household labour however, men and women would both be expected to be happier with a part-time working partner (H3). The expected relations between work hours and happiness may be driven by work-family conflict and/or the deviation from gender role prescriptions. We examine the applicability of both mechanisms in explaining the associations.

At the macro level, women working fulltime and men working part-time are expected to be relatively happier in more progressive countries (H4). Finally, macro level policy arrangements may also shape the relation between paid work and well-being. In countries with more familizing policies, we expect that those who work part-time and those that have a part-time working partner are happier (H5a) and in countries with more de-familizing policies, we expect to find the opposite (H5b).

4. Data and Method

In order to examine the relation between paid work hours and well-being, we use data from the 2012 Family and Changing Gender Roles module of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP Research Group, 2014). The data were collected by independent research organizations and include information representative of the populations of 37 countries. For the individual level analyses we use data from 34 countries, as crucial variables were missing in the data for 3 countries¹. As country level data is not available for all of these 34 countries, the number of countries varies from 34 to 18 across the analyses where we examine country level effects.

The analysis is limited to respondents between the ages of 25 and 55. This is the age range that is normally associated with working life. This age range excludes 45% of the original sample of 51,773. We only examine people who are married or living together as unmarried. We do so in order to ensure we only include couples that are living together, rather than also including couples that are living apart. In the latter category of couples, dynamics are likely very different from those in the former and may in some cases be more akin to singles. This selection criterion excludes 25% of the remaining sample. Of those who are married or living together we only select those couples where both partners are working and where we have information on their number of working hours. This excludes 51% of the remaining sample. For all variables respondents who answered “Don’t know”, who refused to answer, or who did not answer, were excluded by means of listwise deletion. The total sample for our analyses consists of 9,525 respondents. On average, there are 407 respondents per country. The number of respondents range from 31 in India to 1,022 in China. As robustness check, we have also

¹ We use data from Argentina, Australia, Austria, Canada, Chile, China, Taiwan, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, India, Ireland, Israel, Japan, South Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Norway, Philippines, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United States and Venezuela.

conducted analysis excluding 4 countries with very small number of respondents ($N < 100$), finding the results to be similar as those reported here.

4.1. Individual level variables

The dependent variable in our study is happiness. The respondents were asked “If you were to consider your life in general, how happy or unhappy would you say you are, on the whole?” and answer categories ranged from 1 = *completely happy* to 7 = *completely unhappy*. The answers to the original question were recoded so that a higher score indicates that a respondent is happier.

The central independent variable in this study is the number of paid work hours. This is a response to a question about the number of hours respondents worked each week, rather than their contractual work hours. We distinguish between those working part-time, defined as working 32 hours per week or less, and those who work fulltime, defined as working more than 32 hours per week. We acknowledge that variation exists in work hours and what is considered part-time work across the countries. However, we use 32-hours as the definition due to the fact that 30-hours has been validated as the threshold for part-time work for the purpose of international comparisons, although the researchers drew on data from 1973-1995 (Lemaitre, Marianna, and Bastelaer, 1997). As a sensitivity analysis, we have also experimented with a lower cut-off limit for part-time work. Unfortunately this resulted in very small groups of respondents in some part-time work categories (not shown; available from authors). We also acknowledge that full-time work varies in work hours, for example from 40 to 60 hours. As such, we have experimented with the upper-bound of full-time work, yet we found that there were too few people working more than 50 hours per week. Further, as a robustness check, we included work hours in the analysis as a continuous measure. This produced the same substantive results as those presented below (not shown; available from authors). Further, note that part-time work could be voluntary or involuntary, could comprise of one or more part-time jobs, and part-time workers’ work schedule could also vary, and could influence respondents’ well-being. Unfortunately, given the unavailability of the necessary data, we are unable to assess these aspects in this study.

In the analyses, a dummy variable is included that indicates whether someone works part-time, making fulltime workers the reference category. The partner’s paid work hours are

measured in the same way. The information about the partner's paid working hours is provided by the respondent. Note that this may introduce some measurement bias.

In order to examine whether the relationship between paid work and happiness is stronger among parents, we measure the presence of dependent children in the household. We define two groups of dependent children, those younger than school age and those of school age and under 18. We categorize individuals according to whether they have one or more younger or older children in the household. This leads to four categories: (1) those with no children, (2) those with only pre-school age children, (3) those with only older children and (4) those with both younger and older children. People with adult children, whether living at home or not, are in the first category.

Work-family conflict is measured with the responses to four statements. The respondents were asked: "How often has each of the following happened to you during the past three months?". The four statements were: "I have come home from work too tired to do the chores which needed to be done", "It has been difficult for me to fulfil my family responsibilities because of the amount of time I spent on my job", "I have arrived at work too tired to function well because of the household work I had done", and "I have found it difficult to concentrate at work because of my family responsibilities". The answer categories to the four statements range from 1 = *several times a week* to 4 = *never*. The four questions form a reliable scale with a Cronbach's alpha of .77 (ranging from .66 to .87 across countries). The measure used in the analyses is the mean of the four items, recoded so that a higher score represents more work-family conflict.

As a measure of adherence to gender roles, we include the respondent's relative earnings compared to the partner. The question that is used gauges who has the higher income in the household. Although the measure is somewhat crude and subjective, we feel that it is the respondent's perception of relative earnings which really matters in the context of adhering to or deviating from gender norms. For men, earning comparatively more suggests adherence to gender role prescriptions and for women it suggests deviation from these prescriptions. The answer categories range from 1 = *My spouse/partner has no income* to 7 = *I have no income*. The measure is recoded so that a higher score indicates that the respondents earns relatively more than his or her partner.

We include several individual level control variables in the analyses, which previous research has shown to be associated with well-being and work status: age, age squared and the

level of educational attainment. Education is measured with three dummies for the *low educated*, the reference category including those without a formal education or with only elementary schooling, the *middle educated*, including those with lower, upper or post-secondary (non-tertiary) education, and the *high educated*, including those with a lower or upper level tertiary education. We also control for frequency of attendance of religious services, which ranges from 0 = *never* to 4 = *at least once a week* and is included as a continuous variable in the analyses. Finally, we control for *health* with a five-point indicator, ranging from 0 = *poor* to 4 = *excellent*.

4.2. Country level variables

As a measure of gender progressiveness, we generate a scale based the responses to seven statements and aggregate this measure across all respondents within a country. In order to produce an unbiased country measure, it is aggregated by using the entire sample available, i.e. before applying our selection criteria. The seven statements gauge the respondent's gender role values. Examples of statements are "Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay" and "A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family". Answer categories ranged from 1 = *strongly agree* to 5 = *strongly disagree*. Factor analysis shows that the seven items measure one construct and the items form a reliable scale with a Cronbach's alpha of .73 (ranging from .47 to .82 across countries). A higher score on the resulting measure indicates that respondents have more progressive gender role values. The score on the resulting aggregate measure indicates that a country has more progressive gender role norms.

We examine two defamilizing policies and two familizing policies from the OECD's Family Database (OECD, 2016). Fulltime childcare usage for children younger than 3 is used as a proxy for a defamilizing policy. Ideally, the (state provided) childcare coverage rate would be used, however this measure is not available. We use a measure of fulltime care in order to assess the total amount of available childcare for children younger than 3. In countries with more fulltime childcare usage for children younger than 3, it is easier for parents, especially women, to work fulltime. The childcare usage rate was not available for the following countries: Argentina, Australia, Canada, Chile, China, India, Israel, Japan, South Korea, Mexico, Philippines, Russia, Turkey, United States and Venezuela.

We consider the cost of fulltime childcare for children younger than 3 as a familizing policy. Although childcare may provide parents with an opportunity to combine fulltime work with their family role, the price of childcare also matters. As childcare is more expensive, it becomes less interesting financially to keep working and send children to childcare. Instead, parents, especially low-earning women, may choose to stay at home and take care of the children rather than work and pay high fees (e.g. Connelly, 1992). In countries with more expensive childcare, working fulltime may therefore be harder for parents. Data on the cost of childcare was not available for the following countries: Argentina, Chile, China, Croatia, India, Mexico, Philippines, Russia, Turkey and Venezuela.

Another defamilizing policy measure that we look at is the number of weeks of fully paid maternal (parental) leave. Well-paid (short term) leaves reduce family dependency by allowing parents (the mother) to remain strongly attached to the labour market (Lohmann and Zagel, 2015). In countries with more weeks of fully paid leave, working fulltime is expected to be easier (especially for women). Data on the number of weeks of fully paid leave was not available for the following countries: Argentina, China, India, Philippines, Russia and Venezuela.

Leave policies can also be considered familizing when they are long and not well-paid. In this case, the leave policies foster detachment from - rather than attachment to the labour market, especially among mothers (Ibid.). We therefore include a measure of the number of unpaid weeks of leave as a familizing policy indicator. In countries with more weeks of unpaid leave, we expect fulltime working people to be worse off. Data on the duration of unpaid leave is unavailable for the following countries: Argentina, China, India, Russia and Venezuela.

We include GDP per capita (in current prices, adjusted for PPP) as a control variable at the country level to account for the confounding influence of overall wealth in the country. On the one hand, a country's wealth may affect the public provision of childcare, as well as the generosity of leave policies. On the other hand, wealth may also affect the necessity to work fulltime.

Descriptive statistics are presented for the entire sample and for men and women separately in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the variables used in the analyses.

<i>Variable</i>	Total (<i>N</i> = 9,525)		Women (<i>N</i> = 5,163)		Men (<i>N</i> = 4,362)		Range
	<i>Mean/Proportion</i>	<i>St. dev.</i>	<i>Mean/Proportion</i>	<i>St. dev.</i>	<i>Mean/Proportion</i>	<i>St. dev.</i>	
<i>Individual level</i>							
Happiness	5.47	0.91	5.47	0.91	5.47	0.91	1-7
Part-time worker	15%		24%		5%		0/1
Partner part-time worker	13%		5%		22%		0/1
No children	37%		37%		37%		0/1
Pre-school age child(ren)	15%		14%		15%		0/1
School age child(ren)	35%		36%		35%		0/1
Pre-school age and school age child(ren)	13%		13%		13%		0/1
Male	46%						0/1
Age	41.19	8.08	40.63	8.13	41.84	7.97	25-55
Primary education	4%		4%		4%		
Secondary education	58%		55%		60%		0/1
Tertiary education	38%		41%		36%		0/1
Work-family conflict	1.89	0.71	1.94	0.73	1.83	0.68	1-4
Relative earnings	4.13	1.33	3.56	1.25	4.8	1.08	1-7
Health	3.38	0.96	3.37	0.97	3.40	0.95	1-5
<i>Country level</i>							
Progressive gender role norms (<i>N</i> =34)	3.27	0.34					3.23-81.74
Childcare usage (% of 0-2 years old) (<i>N</i> =18)	33.74	22.83					0-28.72
Cost of childcare (% of average income)(<i>N</i> =23)	12.27	7.62					0-62
Fully paid leave (weeks) (<i>N</i> =27)	29.22	16.82					0-118
Unpaid leave (weeks) (<i>N</i> =28)	22.86	30.34					2.81-4.06
GDP (<i>N</i> =34)	30,846	14,294					4948-66357

4.3. Analytic method

In order to test our hypotheses, we employ linear multilevel regression analyses. These models take into account the nested structure of the data; individuals are clustered within countries. Not accounting for this nested structure is likely to lead to inaccurate or incorrect estimates.

We specified individuals as level 1 units and countries as level 2 units. We report regression coefficients, standard errors, and the level 1 and level 2 variance in happiness unexplained by the variables in the models.

We estimate models separately for men and women and separately for those with and without pre-school age and school age children. Estimating the models separately has two main advantages. First, interpretation of the results is more straightforward if we do not include three – and even four way interactions (e.g. *paid work hours* x *gender* x *parenthood* x *country norms*). Second, estimating the models separately allows the effects of the control variables to vary across the groups, such that for example education level is not restricted to have the same effect on happiness for men and women or for parents and childless individuals. Preliminary analyses revealed that analyses should indeed be run separately for men and women, as the effects of several control variables varied substantially for these different groups (results available upon request).

The null model, which is not presented, estimates the variation in happiness at the individual – and the country level. The results of this model suggest that respectively 7.5% and 9% of the variation in happiness is at the country level for men and women. The first model includes a dummy for part-time work and controls for demographic characteristics which may confound the relation between paid work hours and happiness. In the second model, we include the measure of partner's paid work hours to assess the partnered influence. The third and fourth model alternately account for work-family conflict and relative earnings. Finally the fifth through ninth model includes cross-level interactions between the five country level variables and paid work hours in order to assess the impact of gender role norms, familizing and de-familizing policies separately.

5. Results

Table 2. Hypothesized happiness advantages and disadvantages and the support we find for them.

	Men			Women		
	No children	Pre-school age children	School age children	No children	Pre-school age children	School age children
<i>Micro level</i>						
Part-time worker	-	---	---	+	+++	++
<i>Meso level</i>						
Partner part-time worker	+	+++	++	+ -	+++ -	++ -
<i>Macro level^a</i>						
Progressive norms x Part-time worker		+			-	
Progressive norms x Partner part-time worker		-			+	
Familizing policies x Part-time worker		+			+	
Defamilizing policies x Part-time worker		-			-	
Familizing policies x Partner part-time worker		+			+	
Defamilizing policies x Partner part-time worker		-			-	

Note: A minus represents an expected negative effect on happiness and a plus represents an expected positive effect on happiness. A grey box represents a supported expectation. The number of signs represents the expected size of the relation. Opposite signs represent contrasting expectations. ^a Macro level hypotheses do not vary across the different categories or men and women.

Table 2 provides an overview of our hypotheses and the support that we found for them. Tables 3 and 4 show the results of the first four models for women and men with and without young (pre-school age) and older (school age) children. We find some support for our first hypothesis that women are happier working part-time and men working fulltime. Women with only older children are happier working part-time, although the effect is only marginally significant ($p < .10$). The size of the effect (0.095) is small considering the happiness measure ranges from 1 to 7 and has a standard deviation of 0.91. Men with only older children are happier working fulltime. The effect (-0.239) is larger than for women, however it is still modest considering the range and standard deviation of the happiness measure. These findings also provide some support for second hypothesis that the relation between work hours and well-being would be more pronounced among men and women with children. Crucially however, the presence of older children seems to be important in this regard and not the presence of young children.

Turning to the effect of the partner's working hours on individual well-being, we see that both men and women are happier with a part-time working partner. Again the effects are only found for men and women with older children. For women, the effect is about twice as large as the effect of own work hours (0.181) and marginally significant ($p < .10$). For men the effect is somewhat smaller (0.137). These findings are in line with the fourth hypothesis based on the partner's available time to contribute to household labor. Accounting for the partner's work hours decreases the effect of women's own work hours (0.068) and it is no longer significant. Among men we see the opposite, the effect of their own work hours becomes stronger when accounting for their partner's work hours (-0.267).

In order to examine the mechanisms underlying the happiness differences between those working part-time and those working fulltime, we accounted for work-family conflict and relative earnings in two separate models. The inclusion of the measure for work-family conflict halves the positive effect of working part-time for women. Although this effect was not significant to begin with, this seems to indicate that there are differences in work-family conflict between those that work part-time and those that work fulltime. For men, the negative effect of working part-time is not altered by accounting for work-family conflict. The main effect of work-family conflict is negative for both women (-0.170) and men (-0.221). The effect of the partner's working hours on individual happiness is not affected by accounting for work-family conflict. In contrast to our expectation, this suggests that the effects of partner's work hours are not driven by the experienced stress of dealing with work and family responsibilities.

The measure for relative earnings was included as an indicator for the breadwinner position and the adherence or deviation from gender role prescriptions. After accounting for their relative earnings compared to the partner, the positive effect of working part-time is larger among women (0.101) and marginally significant ($p < 0.10$). This indicates that the positive effect of working part-time for women is partially suppressed by the fact that these women earn relatively less. This is emphasized by the main effect of relative earnings, which is positive (0.032) and marginally significant. The effect of the partner's work hours is considerably smaller (0.155) and no longer significant for women, after accounting for relative earnings. Women therefore seem happier with a part-time working partner because in that case their own earnings are relatively higher. For men, both the effect of the own work hours and the effect of the partner's work hours are diminished after accounting for relative earnings. This suggests that men are unhappier working part-time and happier with a part-time working partner, partially because they have respectively lower versus higher relative earnings.

Before we examined the effect of country level characteristics on the relation between paid work and happiness, we estimated models with a random slope for own paid work hours and those of the partner. These models give an indication whether there is cross-national variation in the effects that these have on happiness. Using a likelihood ratio-test, we then examined whether the random slope fit the data better than the fixed slope. We tested different specifications in which either personal work hours, or those of the partner, or both were given a random slope. In none of the specifications for any of the categories of men and women did we find evidence that the model with the random slopes fit the data better than those without.

In order to check whether there were indeed no effects of country characteristics, we nevertheless included a cross-level interaction between our country-level variables and own/partner's paid work hours, each in a separate model and accounting for GDP per capita (results not reported here). We did not find any cross-level interactions to be significant.

Table 3. Multilevel regression models predicting women's happiness among women with and without children.

	Women without children				Women with young children				Women with older children				Women with young and older children			
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M1	M2	M3	M4	M1	M2	M3	M4	M1	M2	M3	M4
Part-time worker	0.079 (0.055)	0.077 (0.055)	0.044 (0.055)	0.066 (0.056)	-0.016 (0.078)	-0.009 (0.079)	-0.050 (0.079)	0.003 (0.080)	0.092 ⁺ (0.054)	0.087 (0.054)	0.042 (0.054)	0.101 ⁺ (0.054)	0.077 (0.072)	0.079 (0.072)	0.061 (0.072)	0.101 ⁺ (0.054)
Partner part-time worker		0.036 (0.094)	0.029 (0.093)	0.050 (0.094)		-0.131 (0.133)	-0.125 (0.131)	-0.144 (0.134)		0.181 ⁺ (0.109)	0.179 ⁺ (0.108)	0.155 (0.110)		-0.037 (0.145)	-0.008 (0.147)	0.155 (0.110)
Work-family conflict			-0.198* (0.030)				-0.186* (0.044)				-0.170* (0.031)				-0.110* (0.044)	
Relative earnings				-0.023 (0.017)				0.022 (0.027)					0.032 ⁺ (0.018)			0.032 ⁺ (0.018)
Constant	4.849* (0.489)	4.842* (0.490)	5.295* (0.489)	4.917* (0.493)	4.008* (0.941)	3.924* (0.945)	4.493* (0.944)	3.887* (0.944)	4.702* (0.818)	4.627* (0.819)	5.244* (0.820)	4.504* (0.821)	3.811* (1.233)	3.832* (1.238)	4.196* (1.245)	4.504* (0.821)
Individual level variance	0.030 (0.013)	0.030 (0.013)	0.028 (0.013)	0.031 (0.014)	0.019 (0.016)	0.019 (0.017)	0.033 (0.020)	0.018 (0.016)	0.045 (0.017)	0.044 (0.017)	0.054 (0.020)	0.044 (0.017)	0.006 (0.013)	0.007 (0.013)	0.015 (0.016)	0.044 (0.017)
Country level variance	0.681 (0.023)	0.681 (0.023)	0.665 (0.023)	0.680 (0.023)	0.718 (0.040)	0.717 (0.040)	0.692 (0.038)	0.717 (0.040)	0.746 (0.026)	0.745 (0.026)	0.730 (0.025)	0.744 (0.026)	0.676 (0.040)	0.675 (0.040)	0.663 (0.039)	0.744 (0.026)
Observations	1753	1753	1753	1753	690	690	690	690	1685	1685	1685	1685	608	608	608	1685

Standard errors in parentheses. ⁺ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$. Controls included in each of the models include: age, age squared, level of education, attendance of religious services and general health.

Table 4. Multilevel regression models predicting men's happiness among men with and without children.

	Men without children				Men with young children				Men with older children				Men with young and older children			
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M1	M2	M3	M4	M1	M2	M3	M4	M1	M2	M3	M4
Part-time worker	-0.051 (0.101)	-0.066 (0.102)	-0.078 (0.101)	-0.060 (0.103)	-0.151 (0.155)	-0.119 (0.157)	-0.115 (0.157)	-0.117 (0.158)	-0.239* (0.108)	-0.267* (0.108)	-0.271* (0.107)	-0.245* (0.108)	0.222 (0.153)	0.209 (0.155)	0.156 (0.154)	0.173 (0.157)
Partner part-time worker		0.062 (0.061)	0.054 (0.060)	0.054 (0.062)		-0.127 (0.093)	-0.126 (0.093)	-0.130 (0.095)		0.137* (0.061)	0.138* (0.060)	0.104+ (0.062)		0.045 (0.086)	0.065 (0.085)	0.080 (0.090)
Work-family conflict			-0.157* (0.034)				-0.041 (0.053)				-0.211* (0.034)				-0.175* (0.053)	
Relative earnings				0.014 (0.021)				0.004 (0.033)				0.057* (0.023)				-0.046 (0.034)
Constant	5.905* (0.580)	5.872* (0.581)	6.289* (0.584)	5.806* (0.590)	5.926* (1.110)	5.968* (1.109)	6.110* (1.121)	5.944* (1.126)	4.720* (0.991)	4.653* (0.990)	5.322* (0.983)	4.382* (0.994)	5.649* (1.275)	5.696* (1.278)	6.205* (1.275)	6.032* (1.300)
Individual level variance	0.023 (0.013)	0.022 (0.012)	0.023 (0.012)	0.022 (0.013)	0.036 (0.022)	0.039 (0.023)	0.042 (0.024)	0.040 (0.023)	0.049 (0.020)	0.041 (0.018)	0.045 (0.019)	0.043 (0.019)	0.110 (0.047)	0.105 (0.047)	0.101 (0.044)	0.104 (0.046)
Country level variance	0.687 (0.026)	0.687 (0.026)	0.677 (0.025)	0.687 (0.026)	0.780 (0.045)	0.776 (0.045)	0.774 (0.045)	0.776 (0.045)	0.708 (0.027)	0.707 (0.027)	0.687 (0.026)	0.704 (0.027)	0.635 (0.041)	0.636 (0.041)	0.623 (0.040)	0.634 (0.041)
Observations	1462	1462	1462	1462	621	621	621	621	1408	1408	1408	1408	519	519	519	519

Standard errors in parentheses. + $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$. Controls included in each of the models include: age, age squared, level of education, attendance of religious services and general health.

6. Conclusions

The current paper contributes to research on the relation between work hours and well-being by taking a life course perspective, focusing on how individual, couple and country characteristics may affect linkages between work hours and happiness. Specifically, we examined whether the association between working part-time or fulltime and happiness was affected by: gender, the presence and age of children, the partner's work hours and cultural norms and policies at the country level.

We find that gender and parenthood shape the relation between paid work hours and well-being. In accordance with the expectations based on the different roles prescribed for men and women (e.g. Akerlof and Kranton, 2000), we found evidence, albeit limited, that women are happier working part-time. In contrast, men were found to be happier working fulltime. These findings are in line with some of the earlier studies that have explicitly focused on the effects of gender on the relation between work hours and happiness (Baxter et al., 2007; Booth and van Ours, 2009). With regard to parenthood, we expected to find that the happiness differences between those working fulltime and those working part-time would be more pronounced among mothers and fathers than among childless men and women. Our results suggest that among childless men and women, working part-time or fulltime does not affect how happy they are. The results for mothers and fathers are puzzling however. We found that working part-time or fulltime only affects happiness among those with school age children and not those with pre-school age children or both. Based on the time demands placed on parents by younger children, we expected to find that working part-time would be more salient for these parents, considering the experienced work-family conflict, especially for women. How might these findings be explained? Assuming that indeed the time demands faced by parents of younger children are greater, perhaps a selection effect can explain these findings. Fulltime working women with young children may be those that can deal with the time demands, while those that work part-time need to work less in order to do so. In that case, we would not expect to find a difference in happiness between part-time and fulltime working women (with young children). Older children place fewer time demands on parents, which may mean that those working part-time actually enjoy a substantial advantage in leisure time, explaining the happiness advantage of mothers with older children who work part-time. However, this does not explain why only men with older children are happier working fulltime. Perhaps working part-time is generally socially accepted for men with younger children, so that they can help at home, and not for men with older children. It is beyond the scope of the current study to examine

these explanations further and we urge future research to do so. Our findings lend support to the salience of the life course perspective and the emphasis it places on the notions of *lives in context* and *cumulative contingencies*.

We expected, based on the notion of *linked lives* (Elder, 1994), that the partner's paid work hours would also affect men's and women's happiness. Our findings are most in line with expectations based on time demands and related work-family conflict (e.g. Pouwels, 2011), which suggested that both men and women would be happier with a part-time working partner. We found that among mothers and fathers with dependent (older) children, those with a part-time working partner were happier. For women, these findings are not in line with expectations based on men's and women's gender role prescriptions (e.g. Akerlof and Kranton, 2000), that men and women would be happier with a partner who adhered to gender norms.

In an effort to uncover the mechanisms underlying the association between work hours and well-being, we accounted for measures of work-family conflict and the respondent's relative earnings compared to the partner, as a measure of adherence to gender role prescriptions. Our results provide a first indication that different mechanisms underlie the relation between work hours and happiness among mothers and fathers with older children. The findings for women provide tentative evidence that part-time workers are happier because they experience less work-family conflict, presumably because they have more time to spend on family responsibilities. Note however that the effect for women was not significant, nor was it very large. In contrast, adhering to gender role norms did not explain why women are happier when working part-time. In fact, accounting for relative earnings actually increased the happiness advantage for those who work part-time, indicating that the positive relation is suppressed by their lower earnings compared to their partners. For men with older children, we find that the happiness advantage of those who work fulltime is unaffected by work-family conflict, which is to be expected given women's greater responsibility for household labour. After accounting for relative earnings, the happiness advantage of fulltime workers decreases, suggesting that fulltime working men are happier because they adhere more strongly to gender role norms by earning more. A substantial happiness advantage remains after controlling for relative earnings however. Although explaining the remaining happiness advantage is outside the scope of this study, explanations might be sought in the characteristics of part-time work.

Surprisingly, the positive effect of a part-time working partner on the happiness of mothers and fathers does not seem to be explained by decreased work-family conflict. Instead, we find evidence among both men and women that the happiness advantage of having a part-

time working partner is at least partly driven by relative earnings. For men, this is in line with the expectations based on gender role norms, but for women it is not. Puzzlingly, it seems that women are also happier with a part-time working partner because they earn comparatively more. Perhaps this could be explained from a relative resources perspective, which suggests that the marital power of each partner is related to the proportion of the household income they contribute (Blood and Wolfe, 1960). Women with more marital power may in turn be happier.

Finally, we found no evidence that country-level conditions affect the relation between work hours and well-being. Counter to the ideas based on the notion of *lives in context* (Mayer, 2009; Moen et al., 1995) neither cultural norms concerning gender roles nor familizing and defamilizing policy arrangements seem to shape the relation between paid work and happiness for either men or women. Given the modest effect sizes that were found this is however not surprising. Mathieu and colleagues (2012) show that the expected size of the cross-level interaction and the sample size at the higher level greatly affect the statistical power to uncover cross-level interaction effect. In this study, both the cross-level interaction effect that can be expected based on the individual level effect, as well as the sample size at the country level, may be too small to provide enough statistical power. Our findings diverge from the findings of Treas and colleagues (2011b) among women. They found cross-level interactions between country level variables and the effect of work hours on women's happiness using an earlier dataset from the ISSP. For example, in line with our own expectations, the benefit of working part-time compared to working fulltime was found to be smaller in more progressive countries. Although differences may be due to selection criteria or modelling choices, another possibility is that the contextual effect has weakened over the past decade. Perhaps differences in gender role prescriptions across countries have diminished and come to matter less in the past decade for how work hours and happiness are linked in individuals. For instance, in one study using three waves of the World Values Survey, of 36 countries around the world, Dorius and Alwin (2011) find a convergence of gender attitudes, towards more gender egalitarian views.

The study has several limitations that warrant mentioning here. We use cross-sectional data and we can therefore not any make strong causal claims. The selectivity of the sample should also be taken into account when interpreting the results. We do not examine singles for instance, and the effect of work hours on happiness may be markedly different for these individuals, especially if they are single parents. The effect of work hours may also differ when one has a partner who is not employed or where one of the partners is considerably older or younger. Finally, given the necessary statistical power to find evidence of cross-level

interactions, our sample size at the country level is a serious limitation. Unfortunately, very few data sources exist that include data from a large number of countries and also all of the necessary information at the individual level, let alone longitudinally collected data.

On the whole, our life course approach has provided some interesting insights into the relation between work hours and well-being. We learned that a deeper understanding of the relation between work hours and happiness can be gleaned by considering the social context in which individuals operate; their gender, parental status, children's age and partner's work hours. Our findings also provide a first indication that the mechanisms underlying the relation between work hours and happiness differ for men and women. A task for future research will be to further explicate these differences, and to consider other policies and contexts that may mitigate differences in happiness and promote better well-being.

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