

Bente Abrahamsen
Centre for the Study of Professions
Oslo University College
Bente.Abrahamsen@hio.no

Employment Status and Commitment to Work in Professions

Abstract

The main question in the article is to what degree underemployed and overemployed professionals are committed to the profession and the organisation which employ them. Ten professional groups are included in the study and more than one of four respondents are either underemployed or overemployed. The results show that overemployment affects commitment to the profession and the organisation negatively. Unexpectedly, underemployed professionals do not report weaker commitment neither to the profession nor to the organisation compared to colleagues who work equally number of hours but preferred hours.

Key words

Underemployment, overemployment, professional commitment, organisational commitment, profession

There are two traditional statements concerning professionals: they are strongly committed to work and they work full-time (Epstein et al. 1999, Freidson 2001). These statements, however, do not cover all the professions and professionals. Firstly, commitment to work varies between professions and professionals. Some report relatively weak commitment (Wallace 1995, Mastekaasa 2009). Secondly, it is well documented that a significant number of professionals work part-time, partly because they prefer reduced hours, and partly because of lack of full-time positions (Forsell and Jonsson 2005, Kjeldstad 2007). In addition, a significant proportion of the professionals is overemployed, and would prefer to work less hours (Abrahamsen 2007, Kitterød 2007). Underemployment seems mainly to be a problem within fields where part-time work is widespread, particularly within the nursing professions (Forsell and Jonsson 2005). Overemployment is supposed to exist mainly within male dominated professions like medicine and law (Abrahamsen 2007, Epstein et al. 1999). In Norway, as in most European countries, about twenty per cent of the employees report either underemployment or overemployment (Torp og Barth 2001).

Underemployment and overemployment represent a demand–supply mismatch where the employer does not satisfy employee’s preferences concerning working hours. Underemployment refers to persons who desire to work more hours, while overemployed persons desire to work fewer hours. The main question posed in this article is to what degree underemployed and overemployed professionals are committed to their profession and the corresponding organisation. Do they differ in commitment to work compared to professionals who work a preferred amount of hours (respectively part-time and full-time work)? Despite the fact that discrepancies in working-hours are quite common, and presumably a serious situation for the affected professionals (particularly regarding those underemployed), knowledge concerning the relationship between employment status and professional involvement and loyalty to the professional work-organisation is limited. However, a large number of studies have examined the relationships between part-time work and attitude to work. Part-time workers are often considered to have weaker commitment to work than full-time workers (Epstein et al. 1999, Hakim 2000). Very few studies, however, have examined if employees with respectively weak or strong commitment experience underemployment or overemployment. We may expect a weak professional and organisational commitment among professionals who do not achieve desired working hours, particularly among underemployed professionals. In the empirical section of this article, professional and organisational

commitment among underemployed and overemployed are compared with professionals who work preferred hours (respectively part-time work and full-time work).

The results reveal the proportions of underemployment and overemployment in ten professional groups. The analysis includes physicians, registered nurses, physiotherapists, ergonomists, schoolteachers, preschool teachers, social workers, journalists, librarians and economists/engineers. Most of these professions face both overemployment and underemployment. The analyses cover both professions where underemployment is a serious challenge, like registered nurses, and professions where a significant part of the professionals report overemployment, like physicians (Abrahamsen 2007).

The empirical study is based upon data from a Norwegian database for Studies of Recruitment and Qualification in the Professions (StudData).¹ The database includes data collected three years after graduation. 1720 respondents are included.

Professionals' Commitment to Work

Commitment is regarded as a stabilizing or obliging force that gives direction to behaviour (Becker 1960, Meyer and Herscovitch 2001), and has been systematically linked to lower work-absence, turnover and turnover intentions, as well as higher job satisfaction (Meyer and Allen 1991, Ostroff 1997, Meyer and Herscovitch 2001, Boheim and Taylor 2004). The link between commitment to work and the quality of services is less emphasized, although motivation and loyalty are important in securing high quality of the professional services.

Commitment is defined and measured in many ways. In general, commitment is considered as a multidimensional construct which includes dimensions of affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment (Allen and Meyer 1990, Meyer et al. 1993). In this article, the focus is on affective commitment, which refers to employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement with the profession or organisation respectively (Meyer, Irving and Allen 1998:32).

The professional's affective commitment to work is furthermore divided into organisational and professional commitment (Somech and Bogler 2002). Commitment to one's profession has not been studied as extensively as organisational commitment. However, professionals are assumed to have stronger commitment to their profession than to the employing organisation (Freidson 2001). Several authors have suggested that professional

¹ StudData is developed and carried out by Centre for Studies of Professions, Oslo University College.

groups may exhibit relatively low levels of organisational commitment (Blau and Scott 1962, Freidson 2001). One reason given is the competing focus upon commitment within the professions. The professional-organisational conflict model assumes that commitment to the organisation and the profession relates as a zero-sum game where greater commitment to one implies less commitment to the other (Gouldner 1957). Alternatively, organisational and professional commitment may be viewed as separate and distinct phenomena (Wallace 1995) which allows for the possibility that commitment to the organisation does *not* necessarily restrict commitment to the profession, and vice versa. The idea is that professionals can be strongly committed to both. It also permits us to investigate whether factors like underemployment and overemployment are different, or equally related to professional and organisational commitment. Previous research on the relationship between underemployment and commitment to work has mostly focused on organisational commitment. In a study including professional groups it will also be relevant to investigate the relationship between underemployment and professional commitment. Weak professional commitment might determine low quality in the professional services. Preserving high quality in the professional services plays a decisive role in professions' development and prospective status.

Researchers in this field have advanced a number of hypotheses concerning many different negative consequences of underemployment including poor work attitudes, lower work performance and poor health (Burries 1983, Feldman 1990, 1996, Johnson and Johnson 1996, 2000, Bolino and Feldman 2000, Maynard et al. 2006).² However, it is argued that none of these relationships is particularly well understood. Previous research is generally consistent with the growing evidence that underemployment is related to poorer work attitudes (Maynard et al. 2006: 509). Underemployed workers hold poorer attitudes and intentions compared to voluntary part-time employees who mainly express attitudes and intentions similar to full-time employee counterparts (Maynard et al. 2006: 530). However, no studies have focussed on the relationship between different employment statuses and commitment systematically. Most of the studies include only underemployed and employees who work full-time. Few studies cover both underemployed, voluntary part-time workers, overemployed and employees who work full-time (and who are satisfied with their respective working hours).

Previous studies of commitment have mainly included groups of professions or investigated commitment within one specific profession, and rarely carried out comparative

² In some studies underemployment is defined as holding a job that is in some way inferior or of lower quality relative to some standard. This often includes time-related underemployment (Maynard et al. 2006: 509).

studies of professions. One exception is a Norwegian study covering seven professions which shows significant variations between professions in levels of organisational commitment (Mastekaasa 2009). Schoolteachers and preschool teachers report strongest organisational commitment, while registered nurses report a relatively low level of commitment. A relevant question is whether nurses' low level of commitment is related to relatively high proportions of part-time work and underemployment in the Norwegian nursing profession. In Norway, more than 60 per cent of registered nurses work reduced hours (part-time work) (Abrahamsen 2002), and in some hospital wards between 35-50 per cent of the nurses are underemployed (Hitland 2002, Amble 2008).

Theoretical framework

One of the limitations when researching underemployment and overemployment is the lack of a theoretical framework (Feldman 1996, Maynard et al. 2006). Theories on the relationship between working hours and worker's attitude to work exist, however, discrepancies between preferred and actual working hours are not taken into consideration. In sociological research working hours often become a measure of commitment to the organisation and serve also as a hallmark for ambition and commitment to a career (Epstein et al. 1999). Employers and full-time employees often believe that part-time employees are less committed to paid employment, choosing to commit themselves more fully to non-work activities. This is in line with Hakim's Preference theory, women's decisions regarding hours they spend at work are active choices made in accordance with personal orientation (Hakim 2000). She argues that women who work part-time are 'qualitatively different' from those who work full-time. Women who work part-time are less committed to work than women who work full-time, and are generally perceived to be more committed to non-work activities (family and marriage) than to paid work.

Hakim's Preference theory is controversial mainly because of the lack of contextual perspective (Crompton and Harris 1998, McRae 2003). In studies of professional groups, shift work, restricted career opportunities and lack of full-time positions have been used to explain high proportions of part-time work (Abrahamsen 2002, Kjeldstad 2007). It has also been argued that Hakim's preference theory is static (Fagan 2001). Fagan claims that part-time work and brief periods out of the labour market could be well compatible with strong professional commitment. Most women change between full-time and part-time work over the

life course, and the level of commitment does not necessarily change proportionally with working hours. This corresponds with Bielby and Bielby's (1989) conceptualisation of work commitment where commitment is seen as developed in a process where work life experiences are central.

In the next model introduced here, the reward model, the presence and lack of job rewards are central elements. Studies of commitment based on reward models mainly investigate the impact of structural dimensions (rewards) which are critical in the performance of professional work. One example is Wallace's (1995) study of lawyers where he finds that loyalty to the employing organisation appears to be highly dependent upon the opportunities the professionals have for career advancements, of authority, autonomy and collegiality.

Both Hakim's preference theory and the reward-models ignore that a significant proportion of the employees experience working hour discrepancy. However, it can be argued that underemployment and overemployment are negative work life experiences, and presumably regarded as lack of job rewards. Based on these assumptions underemployment and overemployment will affect professionals' commitment to work in a negative fashion. Underemployed and overemployed professionals are assumed to be less committed than professionals who work according to preferred hours.

In studies of underemployment and overemployment a distinction between full-time and part-time work is relevant. Weaker commitment among part-time professionals than full-time professionals corresponds with Hakim's Preference theory and with the reward model because several studies find that part-time workers achieve less job rewards than full-time employees (Bolle 1997, Edwards and Robinson 1999, Hoque and Kirkpatrick 2003, Tomlinson 2006). From this follows that part-time professionals who experience respectively underemployment or overemployment are assumed to report an even lower level of commitment compared to those that are working full-time and experience either underemployment or overemployment. Working hour discrepancy is assumed to affect commitment to work negatively, and underemployed and overemployed professionals who work part-time experience in addition lack of rewards linked to part-time work.

It should be noted that Hakim's preference theory and a reward model can be understood as predicting *different* causal relationships between employment status and commitment to work. Hakim's model definitely implies a causal relationship from attitudes to employment status. The reward model assumes that work attitudes are shaped primarily by the benefits and the utilities that employees obtain from work and their organisations. Models

based on work life experiences, however, the conceptualisation does not imply a causal relationship from employment to commitment only. The development of commitment to work can be seen as a dynamic process in which attitudes and experiences interact in a complex way (Ellingsæter 1995).

Data, measures and methods

Data

The analyses are based on data from StudData, a Norwegian database for studies of recruitment, qualification and individual careers within the professions. This is a longitudinal survey which collects information from students at eight different university-colleges, both while they still are in the college system and three years after graduation. In this article, only data collected three years after graduation is used. Underemployment and overemployment are assumed to be a challenge, particularly in this stage of the career. Newly-graduated professionals have to accept work contracts which include undesirable working hours, more frequently in the beginning of their career compared to experienced professionals.

As already mentioned, the data analysed includes ten groups of professionals: Physicians, registered nurses, physiotherapists, ergonomists, social workers, school teachers, preschool teachers, journalists, librarians and a group comprising both economists and engineers. Compared to other professions, relatively few economists were included. The sample consists of all individuals who graduate in these programmes in 2003 at the university colleges and universities (medicine) included in the survey. A questionnaire was sent by mail three years after graduation in the spring of 2006. The response rate was close to 60 per cent and data from 1720 persons were obtained. At the time of the survey, 1323 women and 392 men were employed, and returned the questionnaire with information on their employment situation, commitment to work and job rewards. In the regression analyses the number of respondents drops to 1597 (professional commitment) and 1400 (organisational commitment) due to missing responses on commitment to work or independent variables in the analyses.

The majority of professionals are women in the professions included in the dataset. The number of men and women in each profession is presented in Table 1. Despite questions concerning gender differences and gender equality which are relevant in a study of employment status and commitment to work, the dataset (number of male respondents) restricts comparisons between men and women.

The information about persons who did not participate in the survey is less than preferred, however we know that men have a slightly higher rate of drop out than women. In general, persons who answer the questionnaire are presumably more committed to work compared to those who do not participate. This means that estimated commitment may be slightly higher compared to average commitment in the professions. Further, persons who are underemployed are assumed to have more time to answer the questionnaire compared to overemployed professionals, and particularly overemployed who work long hours. From this follows, both the proportion of overemployed professionals and the negative influence of overemployment may be underestimated in the study.

Measures

Employment Status:

Underemployment and overemployment refer to employment situations where employees prefer to work respectively more or fewer hours. Employees who desire fewer working hours are overemployed and employees who wish to work more hours are underemployed. In this study, however, we in addition distinguish between part-time employees and full-time employees regarding underemployment and overemployment. The individual's employment status is measured by two criteria: actual working hours and preferred working hours. Actual working hours are measured by the question: '*How many hours do you usually work per week?*' The respondents then reported the actual number of hours. Preferred working hours are measured by the question: '*Do you have the working hours which suits you best, or do you want to work fewer or more hours?*' Six different employment situations are identified: 1) *Part-time work underemployment*: individuals who work part-time (less than 35 hours per week) and prefer more working hours (N=59), 2) *Full-time work underemployment*: individuals who work full-time (35 hours per week or more) and prefer more hours (N=51), 3) *Full-time work overemployment*: persons who work full time and desire fewer working hours (N=335), 4) *Part-time work overemployment*: persons who work part-time and desire fewer working hours (N=10). In the dataset this group contains very few persons and is excluded from the analysis except table 1, 5) *Full-time work preferred hours*: persons who work 35 hours or more per week and are satisfied with their working hours (N=1103), 6) *Part-time work preferred hours*: persons who work less than 35 hours per week and are satisfied with their working hours (N=149). In the text full-time work means full-time preferred hours and part-time work means part-time preferred hours.

Organisational commitment:

Organisational commitment is measured by four criteria taken from the Porter scale (Porter et al. 1974). The following statements (variables) are included in the index of organisational commitment: 1) I am proud to work for this organisation, 2) I am willing to make an extra effort for this organisation, 3) I would accept almost any work-task to be able to continue working for this organisation, 4) I feel very little attachment to this organisation (reverse coding). Responses (N= 1744) were registered on a four-point increasing scale (1 to 4). Cronbach's Alpha for the summated scale is 0.72. Average (mean) is 3.34 (st.dev. 0.42). Significant variations between professions range from 3.41 (st.dev. 0.45) for preschool teachers (N=106) to 3.30 (st.dev. 0.43) for nurses (N=299).

Professional commitment:

Professional commitment is measured by the following seven statements which are frequently used in previous research on professional commitment (Mastekaasa 2009). 1) I read magazines regularly which particularly address nurses (name of respondents' profession), 2) There is no question about my membership in an organisation which works for nurses' interests, 3) I am proud to tell others I am a nurse, 4) It is important that nurses support their interest organisation, 5) I could not imagine any another occupation than to work as a nurse, 6) If I should make the choice again, I would not choose nursing (reverse coding), 7) I feel little attachment to the nursing profession (reverse coding). Responses (N= 1647) were given on a five point increasing scale (1 to 5). Cronbach's Alpha is .67. Average (mean) is 3.77 (st.dev. .73). Significant variations between professions range from 3.94 (st.dev. .63) for physicians (347) to 3.42 (st.dev. .67) for economists/engineers (N=102).

Job rewards:

Job rewards refer to actual experiences in present job. A set of six items is used. All these variables are well known in international literature (Kalleberg 1977): 1) Having a secure job, 2) Having interesting work, 3) Having a job with opportunities to work independently, 4) Having a job with high income, 5) Having a job with opportunities to professional development, 6) Having a job with opportunities to be useful to society. Responses were registered on a five point increasing scale (1 to 5).

Methods

In addition to estimating percentages (Table 1) and means (Tables 2), linear regression analyses were applied (Tables 3). Three models of regression analyses are presented in analyzing professional and organisational commitment. Few men in the professions included restrict the analysis of men only. One exception is made, the percentage of underemployment and overemployment in professions (Table 1). In addition, regression analyses which include only women are carried out.

Empirical results

Underemployment and overemployment in professions

More than one in four professionals in the study is either underemployed or overemployed (Table 1). The rates of underemployment and overemployment are respectively 6.4 percent and 20.3 percent. The proportion of underemployed part-time professionals and underemployed full-time professionals are respectively 3.4 percent and 3.0 percent.

Underemployment among part-time employees has become a challenge in several Norwegian professions, however, the proportion is lower in this study than the mean level in Norway (4.3 per cent in 2004) (Fevang et al. 2004:8). The results support previous studies which find relatively few underemployed part-time professionals. Part-time work underemployment is most common among employees with low education. This seems to be a pattern in all Nordic countries and even in the US (Caputo and Cianni 2001, Nyberg 2003, Fevang et al. 2004, Kjeldstad og Nymoen 2004, Ottosson og Lundequist 2005).

However, the relatively low rate of respectively underemployment among part-time professionals and full-time professionals conceals considerable variation between different groups of professionals. The underemployment among part-time professionals is highest among school teachers (8.2 per cent), which is clearly above the national level among highly educated employees. The part-time work underemployment rate in the nursing profession is 4.7 per cent which is close to previous estimates for this group in Norway (Fevang et al. 2004:30).³ The results show a significant higher rate of part-time work underemployment among school teachers compared to other professional groups (Table 1). Part-time work underemployment is lowest among physicians (0 per cent), physiotherapists (0 per cent), journalists (1.7 per cent) and preschool teachers (1.9 per cent).

³ Fevang et al. (2004) find 4.9 per cent underemployment among registered nurses.

The underemployment in full-time work is highest among physicians and physiotherapists with respectively 5.7 percent and 4.7 percent. Underemployment among full-time professionals is lowest among ergonomists (0 percent), preschool teachers (1.0 percent), journalists (1.7 percent) and school teachers (1.8 percent).

In line with previous research, overemployment is more common than underemployment (Torp and Barth 2001, Abrahamsen 2002, Kitterød 2007). In this study, overemployment is three times more frequent than underemployment. As expected, very few part-time professionals desire to work fewer hours (0.6 percent). Overemployment is mainly reported among full-time professionals (19.7 percent) and in the following overemployment refers to overemployment among full-time professionals. Some professions stand out with a very high proportion of overemployment. One of three physicians, and one of four schoolteachers and journalists desire to work fewer hours.

The results only partly confirm previous studies on employment status discrepancy among women and men, which show significant gender differences in underemployment (Nyberg 2003, Watson et al. 2003, NOU 2004, Ottosson and Lundequist 2005) and overemployment (Torp and Barth 2001, Abrahamsen 2002, Kitterød 2007). The results in Table 1 show significant gender differences in underemployment (both concerning part-time work and full-time work). As expected, part-time work underemployment is more frequent among women than men (4.1 per cent versus 1.3 per cent). In contrast, full-time work underemployment is more frequent among men than women (5.4 per cent versus 2.3 per cent). The proportion of overemployment is at the same level for men and women.

Up until now there have been few studies which examine gender differences in overemployment and underemployment *within* occupations (Forssell and Jonsson 2005). However, differences between men and women within professions appear not to be consistent (Table 1). Generally, the proportion of part-time work underemployment is higher among women compared to their male colleagues, however, female journalists report lower part-time underemployment than male journalists. Further, gender equality is found in medicine, physiotherapy and economics/engineering. Concerning full-time work underemployment the situation is different. In general women report lower proportion of underemployment compared to men, however, in this study female physiotherapists report higher full-time underemployment than male physiotherapists. Further, in most professions gender equality is found in overemployment, however, in medicine and teaching, women report higher overemployment compared to men.

[Table 1 here]

Relationship between Employment Status and Professional Commitment

The next step is to examine the relationships between employment status and professionals' commitment to work. In table 2 the average levels of professional and organisational commitment in each employment status groups are presented. In addition working hours and job rewards are estimated (means). As expected, working hours vary between the groups, particularly between underemployed part-time professionals and overemployed professionals. Working hours (mean) among the underemployed part-time professionals are 24.2 hours per week, while the overemployed professionals work 45.0 hours. Significant differences also exist between part-time workers and underemployed part-time professionals. An insignificant difference is found between professionals who work full-time and underemployed full-time professionals. On the other hand, a significant difference between overemployed professionals and full-time professionals is found. Overemployed professionals work 4.2 hours per week more than full-time professionals (40.8 versus 45.0 hours).

In line with the majority of previous research, part-time employees report weaker commitment to work than those who work full-time (Hakim 2000, Marks and Houston 2002, Feldman et al. 2002). Table 2 also shows that overemployed professionals are less committed both to the profession and to the organisation compared to full-time workers. Underemployed part-time professionals report mainly same level of commitment as part-time professionals (insignificant differences). Insignificant difference in level of commitment is also found between underemployed full-time professionals and professionals who work full-time.

When it comes to job rewards, the tendency is not so clear. Job rewards do not vary systematically between the five employment status groups. Underemployed part-time professionals usually experience same job rewards than full-time workers. Only two of six job rewards included in the analyses are less prevalent among underemployed part-time professionals than part-time professionals. Underemployed full-time professionals have better outcomes and report only two of six job rewards less prevalent compared to full-time professionals. On the other hand, overemployed professionals experience mainly the same level of job rewards as other full-time professionals. However, high income is far more widespread among overemployed. Variations between the five groups of employment status are most visible regarding high income and job security. Underemployed part-part

professionals and overemployed professionals report less and most frequently job security and high income respectively. Being useful to society is fairly equally widespread among all five employment status groups.

[Table 2 here]

The regression estimates in Table 3 supply further information involving the relationship between employment status and professionals' commitment to organisation and to profession. Three models are included in the analyses. The relationship between gender, employment status, profession and commitment (organisational and professional) are examined in Model 1. Model 2 includes job rewards in addition to the variables included in Model 1. Female schoolteachers working full-time comprise the reference group in the analyses. Model 3 includes the same variables and reference groups as in Model 2, except the reference groups for employment status. In Model 3, part-time work is the reference groups.

The results (Model 1) show that the level of professional commitment is related to gender, employment status and profession. Part-time work, underemployment part-time work and overemployment are negatively related to professional commitment with full-time work as reference category. On the other hand, underemployment full-time work does not affect professional commitment significantly. Further, schoolteachers, nurses and physicians stand out as most committed when controlled for gender and employment status. Women are slightly more committed than men. Gender difference in commitment is also found in previous studies of professions (Hasselhorn et al. 2003, Laine 2006).

The results based on Model 2 shows that the relationship between employment status and professional commitment is slightly reduced when job rewards are included in the analysis. However, the relationships are still significant. Underemployed part-time professionals, overemployed professionals and part-time professionals have significantly weaker professional commitment compared to full-time professionals. From Model 3 follows that the levels of commitment for underemployment part-time work, underemployment full-time work and overemployment are not significantly different from part-time professionals.

When controlling for employment status and job rewards, social workers and economists/engineers stand out with significantly weaker professional commitment compared to other professional groups. Work autonomy, interesting work, to be useful to the society and

opportunities for professional development are positively related to professional commitment. However, job security and high income do not affect professional commitment significantly.

The results concerning organisational commitment are not very different from professional commitment. Differences in commitment between the professionals are partly explained by employment status, profession and job rewards. But some differences exist. First, contrary to professional commitment, gender does not affect organisational commitment. Secondly, the relationship between employment status and organisational commitment is partly different from the relationship to professional commitment. The influence of part-time work underemployment on organisational commitment in model 1 is mainly explained by job rewards. When job rewards are included in the analyses (Model 2), the relationship between underemployment part-time work and organisational commitment becomes no longer significant. This means that a relatively weak organisational commitment among underemployed part-time professionals is related to fewer job rewards and not the status of underemployment itself. Based on a comparison between coefficients in the analyses, employment status seems stronger related to professional commitment than to organisational commitment. On the other hand, job rewards affect organisational commitment more strongly compared to professional commitment which is in line with previous studies (Wallace 1995). Contrary to professional commitment, job security and high income affect organisational commitment significantly. In addition, interesting work, useful to society and a job with opportunities for professional development are positively related to organisational commitment. Thirdly, while social workers and economist/engineers stand out as less committed to the profession compared to other professions included in the study, physicians and nurses stand out as less committed to the organisation.

In all professional groups except economists/engineers, the majority of the professionals are women. In most of the professions included in the study, up to 70 per cent of the professionals are women (Table 1). This may have consequences concerning the relationship between employment status and commitment to work in professions. Similar regression analyses are carried out for women only. However, the similarities appear to be more visible than the differences. There are some interesting results regarding female professionals. Contrary to professionals in general, female professionals who work part-time and female professionals who work full-time are equally strongly committed to the profession (i.e. not significantly different). This supports previous empirical research (Ellingsæter 1995,

Jacobsen 2000, Whittock et al. 2002). In addition, job security seems to affect commitment to work stronger for female professionals than for professional in general.

[Table 3 – here]

Discussion

The study shows that underemployment and overemployment are common in many professions. More than one in four newly graduated professionals does report either overemployment or underemployment. However, overemployment and underemployment seem to affect commitment to work differently. While overemployed professionals have weaker commitment compared to their colleagues who work equally hours and are satisfied with the number of hours, the situation of underemployment appears not to have a similar negative effect. Unexpectedly, underemployed part-time professionals do not report weaker professional or organisational commitment compared to colleagues who work equally number of hours (part-time) and satisfied with hours worked. Further, underemployed full-time professionals do not report significant weaker commitment neither to the profession nor to the organisation compared to colleagues who work full-time preferred hours.

The influence of underemployment on commitment to work appears to be weaker than expected according to previous research (Feldman et al. 2002, Johnson et al. 2002, Maynard et al. 2006). Low commitment among underemployed (part-time and full-time) professionals was particularly expected concerning organisational commitment. According to reward models, underemployment should be associated with negative outcome – and in this study, a weak organisational and professional commitment. Particularly underemployed part-time professionals were expected to report low commitment, both underemployment and part-time work were assumed to affect commitment negatively. However, up to now few studies have compared underemployed among part-time workers with colleagues who work similar hours, but preferred hours, and more studies are needed. Most of the studies include only underemployed part-time employees and employees who work full-time (Maynard et al. 2006).

The situation for underemployed full-time professionals is different. Usually, underemployment among full-time professionals is not linked to loss of job rewards (for example income). This study only partly confirms this assumption. Underemployed full-time professionals mainly report equally level of job rewards as full-time professionals who work

preferred hours. However, exceptions exist. Underemployed full-time professionals do report lower job security and lower possibilities for high income (table 2). Despite reduced level concerning some job rewards, underemployment among full-time professionals do not affect commitment to work negatively.

Insignificant differences between underemployed (both part-time and full-time) professionals and professionals who work equally number of hours might be explained in different ways. The small number of underemployed included in the analyses (N=59 and N=51) might be one explanation. Another explanation is linked to underemployment as a temporary situation. In the Norwegian labour marked the average period of underemployment is six months (Fevang 2004: 5). However, the proportion of underemployed part-time professionals varies between professions, and a lack of full-time positions in for instance nursing has been relative high and stable for the last ten years. The study does not uncover the association between underemployment and commitment to work within each profession, but the negative impact of underemployment on commitment may be stronger in a profession with high and stable proportion of underemployment than in a situation of low proportion of underemployment.

This study uncovers overemployment as more challenging than underemployment concerning commitment to work. Contrary to the underemployed, overemployed professionals address their dissatisfaction both to the profession and to the organisation. The relatively weak commitment among overemployed professionals has attracted limited attention from researchers up to now. Despite overemployed professionals systematically report equal or higher levels of job rewards, they report weaker professional and organisational commitment than their colleagues who work full-time (Table 2). The knowledge on overemployment is in general scarce, but researchers partly explain the desire for fewer working hours as a lip service (Ellingsæter 2002, Kittereød 2007). Overemployment is often understood as a role-conflict among women who experience full-time work incompatible with the norms for 'being a good mother'. Other interpret the desire for less hours as structural constraints in the labour market, lack of part-time positions or employers demand for long hours (Reynolds 2003, McDonalds et al. 2006). However, the relatively weak commitment to profession and to organisation among overemployed professionals supports overemployment as a complex challenge. Further, overemployment is in general equally widespread among male and female professionals, which links overemployment mainly to professionals' work condition, presumably working hour norms. In many

professions long hours is the dominant norm, and professionals who do not follow the norm and worked reduced hours, experience reduced opportunities for interesting work and promotion prospects (Epstein et al. 1999).

The results support theories which claim a weaker commitment to work among part-time professionals than full-time professionals (Hakim 2000, Epstein et al. 1999). However, the analyses indicate gender differences concerning professional commitment. When analyses include women only, the results show an equal level of professional commitment among part-time professionals and full-time professionals. This supports a dynamic model where commitment is seen as developed in a process over the life course (Bielby and Bileby 1989). Female professionals often alternate between part-time and full-time work, and brief periods with part-time work are not necessarily related to reduced or lower commitment to work (Ellingsæter 1995, Jacobsen 2000, Whittock et al. 2002).

As mentioned above, the results show significant differences between part-time workers and full-time workers in commitment to work (both to the profession and the organisation). The difference is partly related to fewer job rewards among part-time workers, but the results also support theories which claim that the differences are related to different attitudes to work between the two groups (Hakim 2000). The results do not provide sufficient and adequate information to uncover the direction of the causal relationship. However, a relatively weak commitment among overemployed professionals supports a dynamic model where work life experience is central, more so than Hakim's Preference theory which implies a causal relationship between attitudes to employment status.

In the theories on commitment to work, the level of commitment depends on actual working hours. Discrepancies between actual and preferred hours are not an issue. The results in this study make it relevant to raise the question involving the impact of working hours discrepancies on commitment to work. Not only do actual working hours seem to be associated with employees' attitudes to work, but also unrealized preferences might have a significant impact on employees' loyalty to the organisation and professional involvement. Working hour preferences among professionals who work more hours than desired seem to be particularly important; the relationship between working hour discrepancy and commitment to profession appears to be stronger for persons who are overemployed than for underemployed.

Finally, the analyses confirm a systematic and strong relationship between job rewards and commitment to work. The levels of job rewards seem to be the strongest predictor of the levels of professionals' commitment to work, which in this study is shown by the increase in

R Square from Model 1 to Model 2. High levels of job rewards systematically increase professionals' commitment to the profession and to the organisation. The results also confirm that part-time professionals experience fewer job rewards than professionals working full-time, regardless of their working hour preferences. Different work conditions between part-time and full-time workers appear to be the pattern within many professions (Lane 2000, Whittock et al. 2002, Abrahamsen 2002). Further, the results uncover fewer job rewards among underemployed part-time professionals compared to other part-time professionals, particularly regarding job security. However, additional studies are needed to investigate the relationship between underemployment and job security. Although job insecurity is significant related to organisational commitment, other aspects of job rewards have stronger impact on commitment to work among professionals. Interesting work has the strongest effect on professionals' commitment, both to the organisation and to the profession.

Conclusions

In this study, the relationship between professionals' employment status and commitment to work has been investigated. The results support a significant influence of overemployment on professional and organisational commitment. However, the relationship between underemployment and commitment to work appears to be weaker than initially expected. Underemployment does not affect commitment negatively when comparing with professionals who work similar hours (preferred hours). Further, job rewards have a significant impact on both professional and organisational commitment, and appear to be the most relevant predictor on the levels of professionals' commitment to work. The results also support previous research concerning variations between professions in the levels of commitment to work. Schoolteachers, nurses and physicians stand out with strong professional commitment as well as high level of overemployment (physicians) or underemployment (school teachers and nurses). However, physicians and nurses seem to have relatively weak organisational commitment.

The results reveal a significant proportion of professionals as being either underemployed or overemployed. In previous research, underemployment among part-time employees has attracted most attention by researchers. Very few studies cover overemployment. This is understandable since underemployment, and particularly among part-time employees, is regarded as a serious problem for whom it concerns, and more serious

than overemployment. However, the results show that overemployment is far more widespread than underemployment. Taking into consideration the association between overemployment and weak commitment to both profession and organisation, the high level of overemployment in many professions is a serious challenge for the professions in order to secure high quality of their services. High quality depends both on highly-committed professionals and a sufficient number of professionals.

The question of how severe the problem of overemployment is, is not only related to the number of persons affected, but also with how difficult it is to make a transition from one employment status to another. Professionals in the present study are relatively fresh in the labor market, but a relatively weak professional commitment among overemployed professionals may indicate that many professionals do not perceive the working hour mismatch as a temporary situation.

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Table 1 Underemployment and overemployment in ten professional groups. Physicians, registered nurses, physiotherapists, ergonomists, school teachers, preschool teachers, social workers, journalists, librarians and economists/engineers. Per cent.

	Underemployment Part-time work	Underemployment Full-time work	Overemployment Part-time work	Overemployment Full-time work	Sum	N	
Women and men							
Economist/engineers	4.1	3.3	0.0	17.2	24.6	122	
Ergonomists	3.4	0.0	0.0	12.1	15.6	58	
Journalists	1.7*	1.7	0.0	25.4	28.8	59	
Librarians	3.7	3.7	0.0	11.1	18.5	27	
Physicians	0.0*	5.7*	0.3	35.3*	41.3	371	
Physiotherapists	0.0*	4.7	0.0	21.2	25.9	85	
Preschool teachers	1.9*	1.0	1.0	23.8	27.7	105	
Registered nurses	4.7	1.0	1.3	8.4*	15.4	297	
School teachers	8.2	1.8	1.1	16.1	27.2	280	
Social workers	3.5*	3.8	0.6	15.5	23.4	316	
All	3.4	3.0	0.6	19.7	26.7	1720	
Women							
Economist/engineers	5.4	0.0	0.0	12.5	17.9	56	
Ergonomists	3.8	0.0	0.0	11.3	15.1	53	
Journalists	0.0*	0.0	0.0	19.4	19.4	36	
Librarians	4.2	4.2	0.0	12.5	20.9	24	
Physicians	0.0*	3.0	0.0	41.6*	44.6	202	
Physiotherapists	0.0*	5.9	0.0	17.6	23.5	68	
Preschool teachers	2.0*	1.0	1.0	24.8	28.8	101	
Registered nurses	5.0*	1.1	1.4	8.6*	16.1	280	
School teachers	9.5	1.8	1.4	18.2	30.9	220	
Social workers	3.9*	3.9	0.7	15.5	24.0	283	
All	4.1	2.3	0.8	19.0	26.2	1323	
Men							
Economists/engineers	3.0	6.1	0.0	21.2*	30.3	66	
Ergonomists	-	-	-	-	-	5	
Journalists	4.3	4.3	0.0	34.8*	43.4	23	
Librarians	-	-	-	-		3	
Physicians	0.0*	8.4*	0.6	27.5*	36.5	167	
Physiotherapists	0.0*	0.0	0.0	35.3*	35.3	17	
Preschool teachers	-	-	-	-	-	3	
Registered nurses	0.0*	0.0	0.0	6.2	6.2	16	
School teachers	3.4	1.7	0.0	8.5	13.6	59	
Social workers	0.0*	3.0	0.0	20.0	23.0	33	
All	1.3	5.4	0.3	21.9	28.9	392	

*Significant different from school teachers ($p < 0,05$)

Table 2 Working hours, job rewards and attitudes to work among professionals in different employment status groups. Mean (st.dev.)

	Underemployment Part-time work	Underemployment Full-time work	Overemployment Full-time work	Part-time work Preferred hours	Full-time work Preferred hours	All	
<i>Working hours</i>	24.2 (5.93)b	41.6 (6.46)	45.0 (7.79)a	26.7 (5.71)a	40.8 (6.19)	39.8 (8.47)	
<i>Commitment</i>							
Professional commitment	3.58 (0.74)	3.83 (0.61)	3.73 (0.69)a	3.64 (0.78)a	3.86 (0.70)	3.81 (0.71)	
Organizational commitment	3.25 (0.42)	3.30 (0.39)	3.30 (0.41)a	3.20 (0.44)a	3.37 (0.41)	3.34 (0.42)	
<i>Job rewards</i>							
Job security	2.91 (1.47)b	3.35 (1.35)a	3.91 (1.21)	3.61 (1.32)a	3.90 (1.22)	3.82 (1.26)	
Interesting work	3.88 (0.91)	4.03 (0.82)	4.05 (0.88)	3.72 (1.02)a	4.12 (0.85)	4.06 (0.88)	
Work autonomy	3.74 (0.90)b	4.09 (0.70)	4.22 (0.78)	4.02 (0.91)a	4.20 (0.77)	4.17 (0.79)	
High income	2.06 (1.08)	2.15 (1.12)a	2.93 (1.30)a	2.27 (1.10)a	2.63 (1.15)	2.63 (1.20)	
Professional development	3.49 (1.15)	3.72 (1.10)	3.79 (0.97)	3.40 (1.14)a	3.82 (1.00)	3.77 (1.02)	
Useful to society	4.57 (0.67)	4.43 (0.87)	4.49 (0.69)	4.57 (0.68)	4.52 (0.72)	4.52 (0.72)	
N	59	51	335	149	1103	1708	

a) Significant difference from full-time work preferred hours ($p < 0,05$)

b) Significant difference from part-time work preferred hours ($p < 0,05$)

Table 3 Coefficients of linear regression analyses of professional and organisational commitment (st.dev.). Three models. Ten professional groups: physicians, registered nurses, physiotherapists, ergonomists, school teachers, preschool teachers, social workers, journalists, librarians and economists/engineers.

	Professional commitment			Organisational commitment		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Men	-0.17** (0.04)	-0.14** (0.04)	-0.14** (0.04)	0.02 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)
Preferred hours. Full-time work			0.14* (0.06)			0.08* (0.03)
Overemployed. Full-time work	-0.16** (0.04)	-0.15** (0.04)	0.00 (0.07)	-0.06** (0.02)	-0.05* (0.02)	0.02 (0.04)
Underemployed. Full-time work.	0.00 (0.11)	0.06 (0.10)	0.20 (0.12)	-0.06 (0.06)	-0.00 (0.05)	0.07 (0.06)
Underemployed. Part-time work	-0.35** (0.10)	-0.27** (0.09)	-0.12 (0.11)	-0.13* (0.05)	-0.04 (0.05)	0.04 (0.06)
Preferred hours. Part-time work	-0.26** (0.07)	-0.14* (0.06)		-0.17** (0.03)	-0.08* (0.03)	
Physicians	0.08 (0.06)	0.06 (0.06)	0.06 (0.06)	-0.10** (0.03)	-0.14** (0.03)	-0.14** (0.03)
Nurses	-0.06 (0.06)	-0.05 (0.06)	-0.05 (0.06)	-0.07* (0.03)	-0.08* (0.03)	-0.08* (0.03)
Physiotherapists	-0.20* (0.09)	-0.14 (0.08)	-0.14 (0.08)	-0.07 (0.05)	0.00 (0.04)	0.00 (0.04)
Ergonomics	-0.29* (0.11)	-0.18 (0.10)	-0.18 (0.10)	-0.09 (0.06)	-0.00 (0.05)	-0.00 (0.05)
Social workers	-0.28* (0.06)	-0.23** (0.06)	-0.23** (0.06)	-0.02 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)
Preschool teachers	-0.12 (0.08)	-0.11 (0.08)	-0.11 (0.08)	0.02 (0.04)	0.03 (0.04)	0.03 (0.04)
Librarians	-0.34* (0.16)	-0.17 (0.15)	-0.17 (0.15)	-0.11 (0.08)	0.00 (0.07)	0.00 (0.07)
Journalists	-0.32* (0.10)	-0.16 (0.10)	-0.16 (0.10)	-0.02 (0.06)	0.09 (0.05)	0.09 (0.05)
Economists/ engineers	-0.39* (0.09)	-0.31** (0.08)	-0.31** (0.08)	-0.04 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)
Job security		0.02 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)		0.03** (0.00)	0.03** (0.00)
Work autonomy		0.05* (0.02)	0.05* (0.02)		-0.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)
Interesting work		0.14** (0.02)	0.14** (0.02)		0.10** (0.01)	0.10** (0.01)
High income		0.01	0.01		0.02**	0.02**

		(0.01)	(0.01)		(0.00)	(0.00)
Professional development		0.06** (0.02)	0.06** (0.02)		0.06** (0.01)	0.06** (0.01)
Useful to society		0.08** (0.02)	0.08** (0.02)		0.04** (0.01)	0.04** (0.01)
Constant	4.193** (0.07)	2.580** (0.16)	2.432** (0.17)	3.399** (0.04)	2.272** (0.09)	2.190** (0.09)
R2	0.061	0.155	0.155	0.018	0.191	0.191
N	1400	1400	1400	1597	1597	1597

