

Long-term effects to part-time hours: Study finds women bear costs in job quality - fewer promotions, supervisory roles and lower wages [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

After her second son was born, Kaz Flinn asked her employer if she could return to work part-time. "There was absolutely no hesitation; they were very, very accommodating," said Flinn, director of government affairs at the Bank of Nova Scotia.

She has been working three days a week for more than three years and said the arrangement has worked "beautifully." She spends time at home with her 4- and 5-year-old boys, heads the board of directors at their preschool and still maintains a challenging corporate career.

But Flinn may be an exception to the rule. Women who work part-time are less likely than their full-time counterparts to win promotions or supervise other workers, despite high levels of education and long job tenure, suggests a study released recently by Human Resources Development Canada and Statistics Canada.

"The data ... support the notion that whatever flexibility women gain through part-time work may bear costs in terms of job quality," wrote the authors of Part-Time Work and Family-Friendly Practices in Canadian Workplaces.

Only 17 per cent of women who work part-time reported being promoted by their employer, compared with 41 per cent of women who work full-time. Only 19 per cent supervised others, compared with 35 per cent of women who work full-time.

On both counts, women who work part-time- fewer than 30 hours per week- did the same or slightly better than men who hold part-time jobs. But, the study notes, they tend to be better qualified than those men.

Women who work part-time "are twice as likely their male counterparts to have a post-secondary education, are more likely to occupy managerial/professional positions, have higher earnings, and potentially possess a good deal of establishment-specific knowledge as witnessed in their higher training rates and greater organizational tenure."

Those findings reflect demographic differences in the part-time labour pool. Men tend to be young and just entering the workforce, while women are trying to balance work and family in their child-rearing years.

About 30 per cent of women working part-time earned less than \$9 per hour, double the percentage of women who work full-time. Women in part-time work were half as likely as their full-time counterparts to have access to benefits, such as disability insurance and dental care.

The study is based on responses to Statistics Canada's 1999 Workplace and Employee Survey. It also found that one-third of Canadian employees had flexible time arrangements, but "access to other family-friendly work arrangements was extremely low."

Over the past 20 years, part-time employment has grown three times as fast as full-time work, the study said. Under increasing competitive pressures, employers are hiring more part-time employees to lower their costs and accommodate changing demand. And while many employees work part-time because they cannot find full-time work, previous studies have shown 73 per cent work part-time because they want to.

In 1999, 2.7 million people, or nearly 20 per cent of Canada's labour force, worked part-time. And 22 per cent of women work part-time, compared with only 8 per cent of men.

Flinn, 41, isn't in a hurry to go back to work full-time. Colleagues hold meetings on days she is in the office, and so far, she says, her decision to spend time with her children while they are young hasn't hurt her career. "My whole life has taken on this kind of flow and I really like it."

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