

Economic crisis, work life balance and class.

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Introduction

Labour market evidence suggests that the 2008-9 recession and subsequent on-going economic crisis in the UK have led to a reduction in the proportion of workers reporting over-long working hours and an expansion in work-time underemployment (Bell and Blanchflower 2013, 2011). The study of 'work life' balance has a long-standing interest in the impact of work-time and work-time preferences on work life imbalance. This interest has largely concentrated on work-time intensification with a common conclusion that spending 'too many' hours in the labour market can impact negatively on work life balance. If there are indeed fewer workers working 'too many' hours, albeit with more working 'too few', then this development raises vital questions about the potential impact of economic crisis on work life balance in Britain. There are concerns too about work life balance and class during this crisis because working too many and too few hours are both related to workers' class positions. Heralded originally as 'the first middle class' UK recession, what have been the class ramifications so far of this crisis: have recessionary work-time developments in the UK impacted class differences in work life imbalance?

The chapter offers a consideration of work life balance and class in the context of economic crisis. To do this, it incorporates an economic root of work life imbalance rather than a focus only on work-time. The chapter is influenced by the author's argument (Warren forthcoming) that we need a more holistic understanding of work life balance if we are to give recognition to the types of work life imbalance that are

experienced more by the working class. It proposes that the analysis of economic-based work life imbalance is over-due, and is particularly apt in this time of economic crisis. Data from the *British Household Panel Survey* and its follow-on *Understanding Society* are analysed to explore class variations over time. The chapter concludes that the persistence of class inequalities in self-reported economic security raise serious questions about the work life balancing of the working class in the UK.

The economic crisis and work-time developments

Economic crises can have inconsistent impacts on the number of hours committed to the labour market. Table 1 groups these impacts into categories and summaries the types of labour market based work-time changes that can occur as an outcome of recession. First, a rise in unemployment serves to dampen overall hours in the labour market as jobs, and their work-time, are lost. Second, any replacement of full-time jobs with reduced and/or part-time hours contracts for incoming workers brings further work-time reductions, as does, third, cuts to the work-time of those already in employment. Fourth, and in contrast, hours worked can increase for some workers. Work-time expansion can result for some workers when a downsized organization requires remaining staff to increase their workload and/or when workers increase their hours to demonstrate commitment to a firm. Fifth, workers may seek longer work-time to compensate for lost income within their household and/or when living costs are rising.

Table 1. The economic crisis and work-time developments in the UK

<i>Labour market work-time developments in an economic crisis</i>	<i>Work-time impact</i>
1. Unemployment: The rise in the level of unemployment that follows a recession brings about substantial reductions in the paid work-time of those who	Reduction

have lost their jobs.	
2. Involuntary part-time: Organisational work-time responses to economic crisis have meant that jobs that would previously have been available full-time to applicants have instead been offered only in a part-time capacity.	Reduction
3. Labour adjustment: Companies that opted for a process of labour adjustment saw work-time fall: usual over-time hours were commonly the first hours to be shed, followed by cuts to contractual hours.	Reduction
4. Work intensification: Companies attempts to improve competitiveness and/or to deploy staff to cover the work of those who had been 'let go' saw hours rise for some. Workers' informal attempts to preserve their own job in a time of job uncertainty can also lead to more (potentially unpaid) hours.	Increase for some workers
5. Income-related work intensification: Paid hours might rise if workers need to boost their take home pay because of a reduction in household income and/or when living costs are rising.	Increase for some workers

Sources: Bell and Blanchflower 2011; Campos et al. 20120; European Foundation 2012; Gregg and Wadsworth 2010; Grimshaw and Rafferty 2012; Hijzen and Venn 2011; Hogarth et al. 2010; Levell and Oldfield 2011; Lyonette and Baldauf 2010; Muriel and Oldfield 2011; Perek et al. 2010.

There is evidence to support the reality of all these potential work-time scenarios in Britain since 2008-9. Overall, however, hours have fallen. Grimshaw and Rafferty (2012: 13) calculated a drop in average hours for men 2008-2009 from 36.9 to 36.2 hours (a fall from 589 to 556 million total weekly hours) and for women from 26.6 to 26.2 hours (354 to 353 million). Further, Bell and Blanchflower (2011: 215, r25), analysing *Labour Force Survey* data, found that the proportion of workers saying that they would 'prefer longer hours' of work increased by 20% between the start of recession and 2010, whilst the numbers of workers saying that they would 'prefer fewer hours' fell by 2.3 million over the same time period (See ONS 2012 too). Being underemployed, in effect not having enough paid work, has been interpreted in various ways but it is the notion of work-time underemployment that is its most prevalent usage (ILO 1998; Strangleman and Warren 2008).

Work-time and work-time preferences are classed strongly in the UK. It is argued next that developments in work-time – in hours and preferences - raise fundamental questions for researchers interested in issues of work life balance in this time of crisis.

Work life imbalance, work-time and class

The above changes to work-time have prompted interest in the potential of economic crisis for work life balance. Work-time has long been identified as a key variable in the achievement of the smooth reconciliation of demands from ‘work’ and ‘life’ (Bond 2004; Crompton and Lyonette 2006, 2008; Dex and Bond 2005; Eikhof et al. 2007; Fagan et al. 2008, 2012; Gershuny 2005; Gregory and Milner 2009, 2011; Hennig et al. 2012; Lyness et al. 2012; Scherer and Steiber 2007; Van der Lippe et al. 2006; Warren 2004; White et al. 2003). This chapter was stimulated by the prioritisation of the problems that arise from long and, in particular ‘too many’, hours (Veblen 1899; Linder 1970; Schor 1991; Reidmann et al. 2006). In the UK, we know that long hours’ working is concentrated amongst workers, mostly men, at the top *and* bottoms of the occupational hierarchy (Fagan and Norman 2012). Yet the workers who are most likely to express preferences for hours’ reductions are those in higher-level occupations, and it is this select group of long hours’ workers who dominate the work life imbalance literature.

There has been far less attention paid to workers who report that they work ‘too few hours’ and would prefer more, but such work-time underemployment can surely also impact on work life balance. A small number of studies that look across the topics of class, hours preferences and work life have also shown that even when working hours are long, *economic-based fears* of having ‘too few’ hours emerge as a common

concern for working class employees, men in particular (Lautsch and Scully 2007; Warren et al. 2009).

It would seem then that there are two broad typologies of work life imbalance, one that has roots in the temporal and one that emerges from the economic. These typologies pre-dominate for different social groups. Temporal work life imbalance is more prevalent amongst middle-class workers, in the UK and elsewhere: the lives of many have been depicted as time-poor, time-squeezed, time-rushed and harried. Economic-based work life imbalance seems far more pertinent for the analysis of working class workers, but this economic cause of imbalance has been rather overshadowed in work life debates. Accordingly we urge more consideration of questions of class inequalities in work life imbalance at this time of economic crisis. Before moving onto the chapter's findings on class inequalities, the next section outlines its methodological approach.

Researching work life imbalance and class

Peoples' experiences of work life balance or imbalance have been subject to detailed methodological attention. Work life research has been particularly innovative for building upon the 'quality of life' agenda, a key tenet of which is to explore qualitative data. This is apparent even within large-scale survey-based research that is the approach adopted in this chapter, where subjective variables are analysed (in which respondents self-report on their lives). A common approach is also to focus upon a specific life 'domain' that is key in the achievement of a balanced work life. Many domains have been specified in the quality of life literature, including jobs and job conditions; leisure time; friendships; health; and peoples' evaluations of their

overall lives, to cite only a few examples (Cummins 1996; Hsieh 2003; Massam 2002).

Drawing upon this research tradition, this chapter looks specifically at the economic domain, and at class diversity here. The economic context of peoples' working lives provides a crucial backdrop for any analysis of the reconciliation of the demands from 'work' and 'life', but the chapter is arguing that the economic has been somewhat overlooked in work life debates. This is despite the fact that the economic is a fundamental domain in the quality of life literature. It has been shown to interrelate closely with other life domains and has critical ramifications for all other aspects of wellbeing (Gudmundsdottir 2013; Schrecker 1997).

The chapter draws upon secondary analysis of large cross-sectional data from the *British Household Panel Survey*, the BHPS, and its follow-on *Understanding Society* (US). Between them, the two surveys have collected nationally representative data that span two decades (Taylor 2011). The most recent full wave of US data that was available at the time of analysis was collected over a two-year period (2010-11). It holds data on 100,000 individuals in 40,000 British households (US 2011). For our concerns with work life imbalance and class in this chapter, we focus upon variation by occupational class (as measured by 'standard occupational classification') amongst working age employees. We look to class variation in work-time and in self-reported financial situations.

Work life imbalance and class

Comparing BHPS data from before the crisis hit (2005-6) with US Wave B (2010-11), one of the most striking work-time developments amongst working age employees has been the growth in part-time working (1-29 hours a week) for men in certain manual occupations (Figure 1). This is amid an overall increase in male part-time employment (up from 3% to 8%). Very long hours working (49 or more hours per week) dropped a little for men (25-22%), but it remained concentrated at the top of the occupational hierarchy. Fully a third of men in management/administration worked very long hours in both years, for example, as did 27% of male professionals. Amongst manual workers, large minorities (27-29%) of men in plant/machine work also worked very long weeks in both years, but the figures fell for men in elementary/other, sales and personal/protective.

INSERT FIGURE 1 AROUND HERE

The lesser proportions of women working very long hours changed little in the same time period but, similar to the picture for men, certain manual occupations saw substantial growths in workers with part-time hours (elementary/other, craft/related, plant/machine)(Figure 2).

INSERT FIGURE 2 AROUND HERE

Looking at hours' preferences in the most recent wave of BHPS data available (the US does not ask about hours preferences), we can see how workers in higher-level occupations in 2008-9 reported more work-time dissatisfaction (Figure 3). The group of men who were most likely to express a preference for working fewer hours were

managers/administrators (fully 45% would have liked to reduce their hours). For women, it was professionals (47%) and then managers (39%). Only small percentages of employees overall reported that they were working ‘too few’ hours. But work-time underemployment was highest for workers in manual occupations: elementary/other and sales for women and men; plus plant/machine and personal/protective for women and clerical/secretarial for men. Lautsch and Scully (2007) even argue that such data tend to underreport working class employees’ preferences for reducing their hours: because these preferences are overwhelmed by a concentration on managing financially.

INSERT FIGURE 3 AROUND HERE

One of the most substantial sections of the work-time underemployed in the UK labour market features involuntary part-time workers: those working part-time hours but preferring full-time. The bulk of *new* part-timers since 2008-9 have cited their inability to find full-time work as the main reason for these hours, and new male part-timers are more likely to express a wish for full-time hours than female (Grimshaw and Rafferty 2012). In 2010, the proportion of part-timers in the UK saying that they wanted full-time hours had hit 1.1 million, compared with 700,000 in 2008 (Parek et al 2010: 40), and figures have grown since (Bell and Blanchflower 2013). In our BHPS data, we can see the link between hours worked and hours preferences. Part-timers are the group of employees most likely to express preferences for more hours, especially men, and particularly male part-timers in manual occupations (Figure 4).

INSERT FIGURE 4 AROUND HERE

Unfortunately, BHPS respondents who expressed a preference for a different number of hours were not asked why they might prefer these (or indeed what obstacles were preventing the enactment of these expressed preferences. Fagan et al. 2012), but there is evidence of economic forces at play. *Labour Force Survey* data show that wanting to work more hours is associated with being in a low-level occupation (ONS 2012), and the BHPS data here affirm that the work-time underemployed – especially men - were the group most likely to report being in financial difficulties (Figure 5).

INSERT FIGURE 5 AROUND HERE

This section supports the work life theory that, if we derive ‘imbalance’ as spending long, and in particular ‘too many’, hours in the labour market, work life imbalance is classed and to the detriment of the higher-level workers. Indeed, by 2010-11, we saw some manual males fall out of the group of occupations marked by a high concentration of employees with very long working weeks, potentially suggesting a deepening of this middle class disadvantage. However, when we operationalise temporal work life imbalance as working ‘too few’ hours, a different picture of class work life inequality emerges, with manual workers more likely to fare poorly. The proportion of workers impacted by work-time underemployment was low in the BHPS, but LFS data show that this proportion has been growing over the years of the crisis and that the lowest waged occupations have been most affected. The ramifications of work-time underemployment warrant far more investigation.

Finally, to support the assumption that underpins this chapter - that the working class feel more financially disadvantaged than the middle class - we looked to respondents' subjective reports of financial difficulty in the crisis. Is there indeed substantial class variation in responses to the over-arching question 'How well would you say you are managing financially these days?'. Figure 6 presents the proportion of employees in financial difficulties: it merges those who reported that they were 'just about getting by' with those 'facing difficulties'. Manual workers stand out with the greatest proportions in reported difficulties. Moreover, though the overall proportions of women and men reporting financial problems have increased since the onset of the crisis, the increases are especially noticeable for workers in low-level manual occupations (elementary/other and plant/machine). For example, by 2010-11, fully one half of elementary/other workers reported 'being in financial difficulties/just about getting by'.

INSERT FIGURE 6 AROUND HERE

Discussion and conclusions

The economic crisis in the UK is altering the number of hours spent in the labour market. There is evidence that, since 2008, there has been a drop in the number of workers reporting very long working weeks and a growth in short-time working.

The hours that we spend in the labour market, and our evaluations of our work-time, have long been fundamental to work life debates. The chapter has argued, however, that the critical problems that can result from working long and, in particular, 'too many', hours have drowned out the difficulties that can arise from working 'too few'.

Yet work-time underemployment has serious ramifications for workers. Though we have not addressed ‘zero-hours contracts’ (ZHC) in this chapter, recent media interest in those workers in the UK who have no guaranteed hours of work at all has placed work-time underemployment more firmly onto the policy agenda. In summer 2013, the *Department for Business, Innovation and Skills* committed to an informal review of ZHCs. Estimates of the extent of ZHCs from diverse sources vary widely, and so late 2013 the ONS began a review of how best to collect data so that debate and policy on ZHCs can be better informed (ONS 2013). In terms of work-time underemployment, we do not know yet the extent to which workers on these contracts would prefer more hours, and any variety across different occupations (Brinkley 2013).

It has been argued in this chapter that the dominance of the temporal in the conceptualisation of work life balance has left the economic domain comparatively under-researched by work life analysts. The social preferences of some workers to spend more time out of work have attracted far more attention than other workers’ economic preferences for longer hours. This neglect of the economic has ramifications for how we understand class inequalities in work life imbalance: with the experiences of workers in high-level occupations dictating ‘work life discourses’, according to Lewis et al. (2007). In the context of the current economic crisis, this chapter has looked towards economic insecurity, arguing that the economic should also be core to work life studies. It has proposed that post-recessionary growth in work-time underemployment and the economic ramifications of working too few hours raises questions about the work life of workers in lower level occupations. Before the crisis, manual workers were more likely than non-manual to report

dissatisfaction with their financial security. These problems have deepened since the onset of the crisis.

The emphasis on the economic for work life balancing here is not arguing that the working classes do not experience work-time problems. Working class temporal work life imbalance is in evidence, but it is less likely to be rooted in working 'too many' hours. Although we have not explored other measures of working time here, working class temporal work life imbalance has been related to a lack of 'time sovereignty' and poorly 'time-synchronised' lives. Working class employees are over-concentrated in jobs that are marked by shift-working, unsocial schedules, and work-time tightly monitored by employers (Fagan et al. 2008).

The impact of the current economic crisis on working conditions is likely to be prolonged. We are seeing a growth in involuntary short-time working that may persist for some time, even after recovery. Alternatively, work-time underemployment may dissipate with the resumption of economic growth. Bell and Blanchflower (2011) have argued that when recovery comes employers are more likely to increase the hours of their underemployed workers than take on new staff, reducing work-time underemployment but dampening any positive impact of recovery on job gains. The final wave of data explored for this chapter was collected in 2010-11: before the double dip of 2012 and before the Coalition government's programme of cutbacks. Clearly then, further research, including on new waves of US data as they are released, is essential to facilitate an on-going examination of the classed experiences of work-time, economic hardship and work life balance.

Acknowledgments

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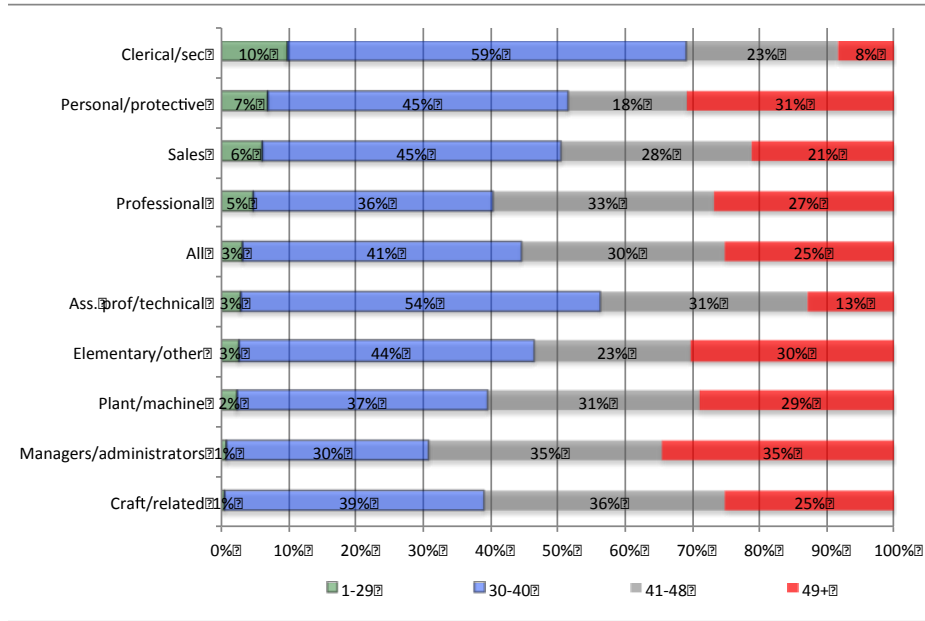
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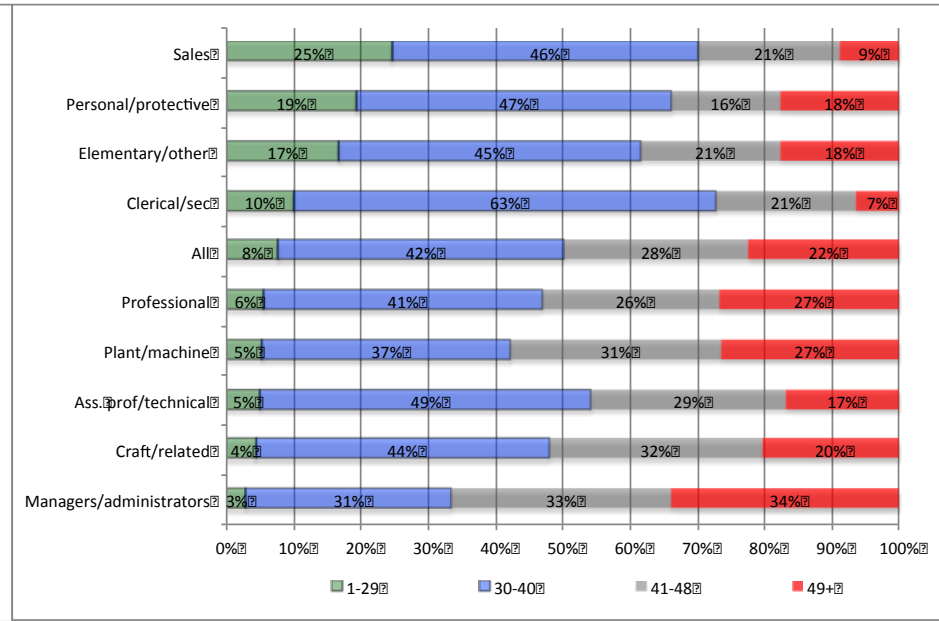
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FIGURES TO BE INSERTED

Figure 1. Weekly working hours* of female employees (aged 18-64) by occupation, sorted by part-time hours.
 a. 2005-6



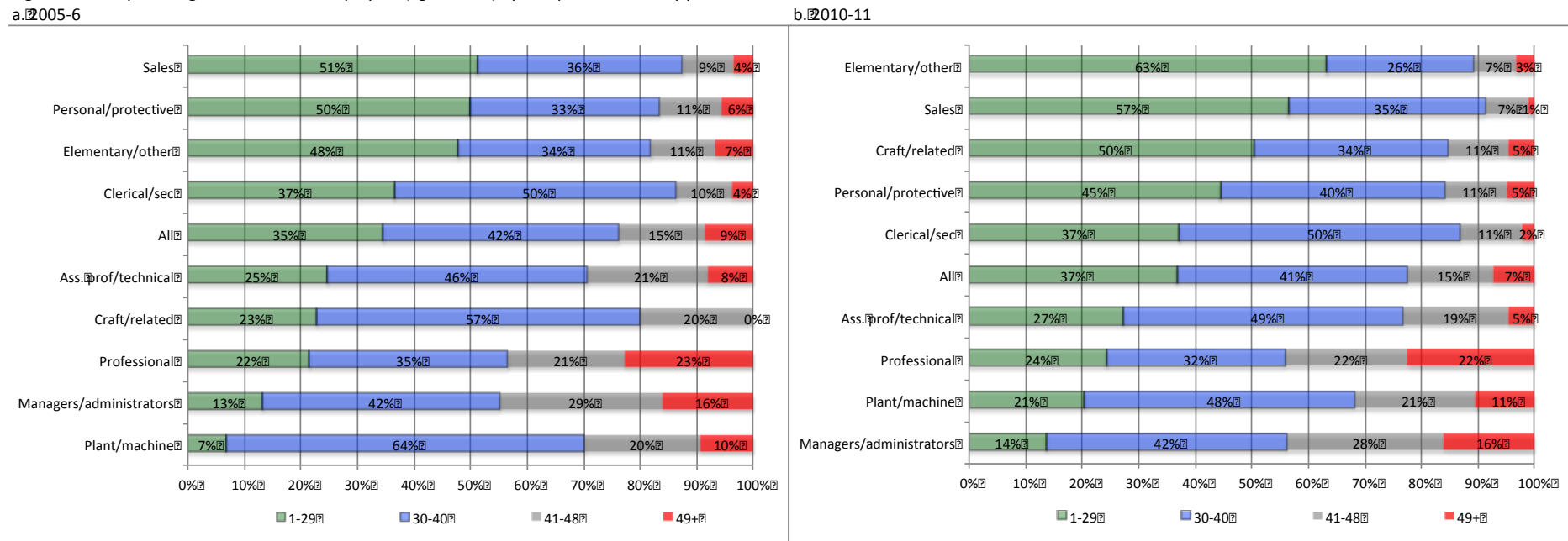
b. 2010-11



*Paid and unpaid job hours

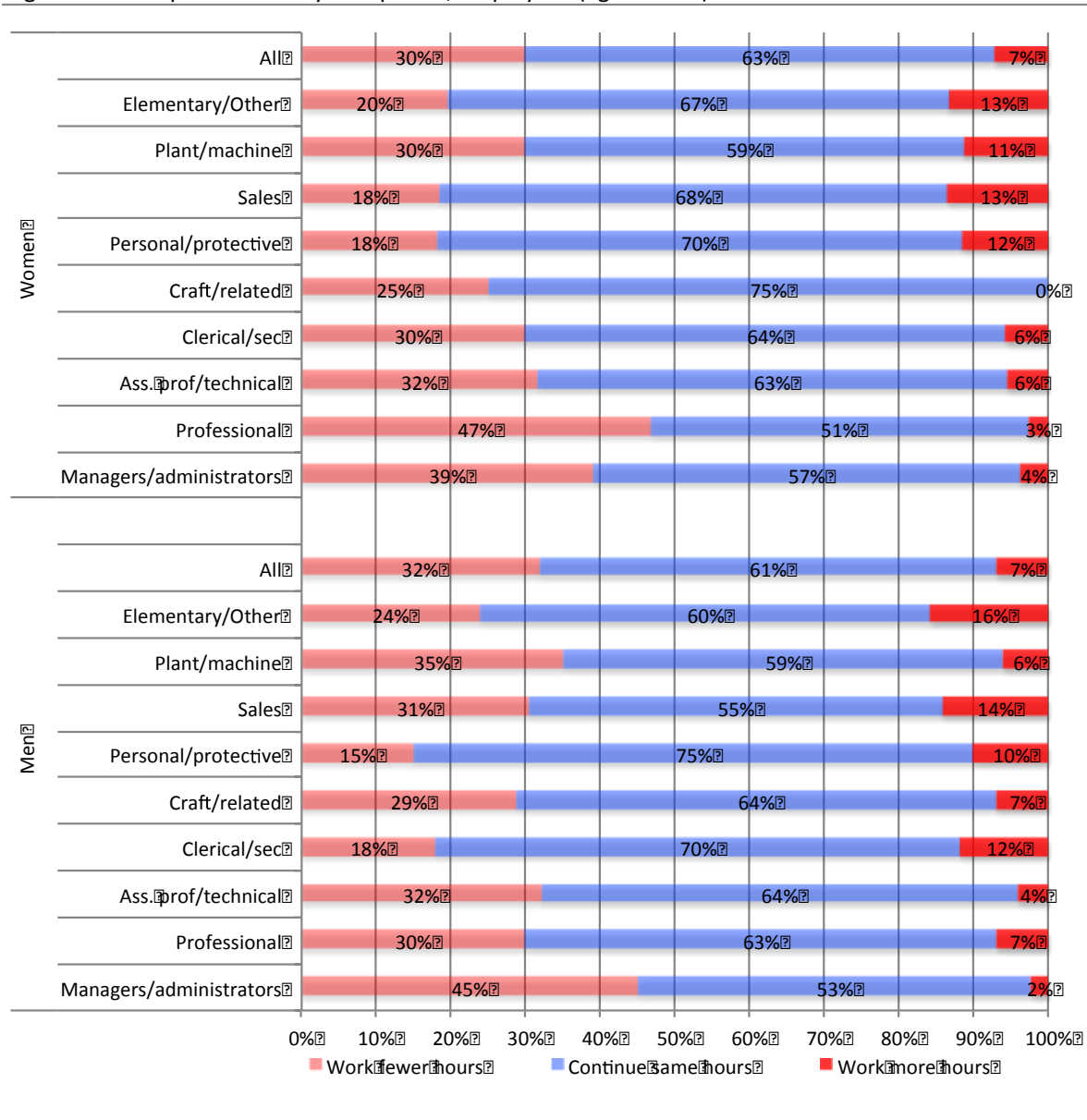
Source: Author's analysis of 2005-6 (BHPS Wave D) and 2010-11 (US Wave B) data.

Figure 2. Weekly working hours of female employees (aged 18-64) by occupation, sorted by part-time hours.



*Paid and unpaid job hours
 Source: Author's analysis of 2005-6 (BHPS Wave D) and 2010-11 (US Wave B) data.

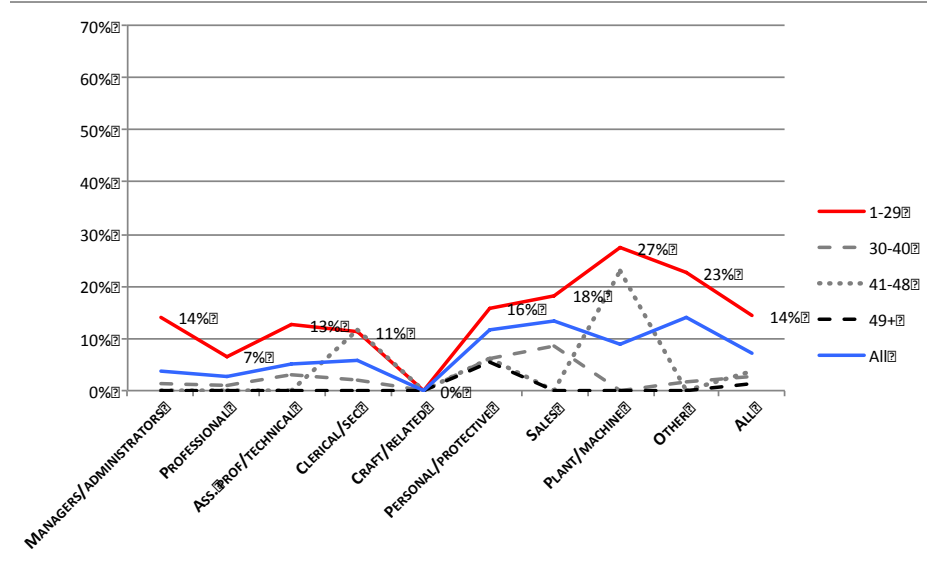
Figure 3.1 Hours preferences by occupation, employees (aged 18-64).



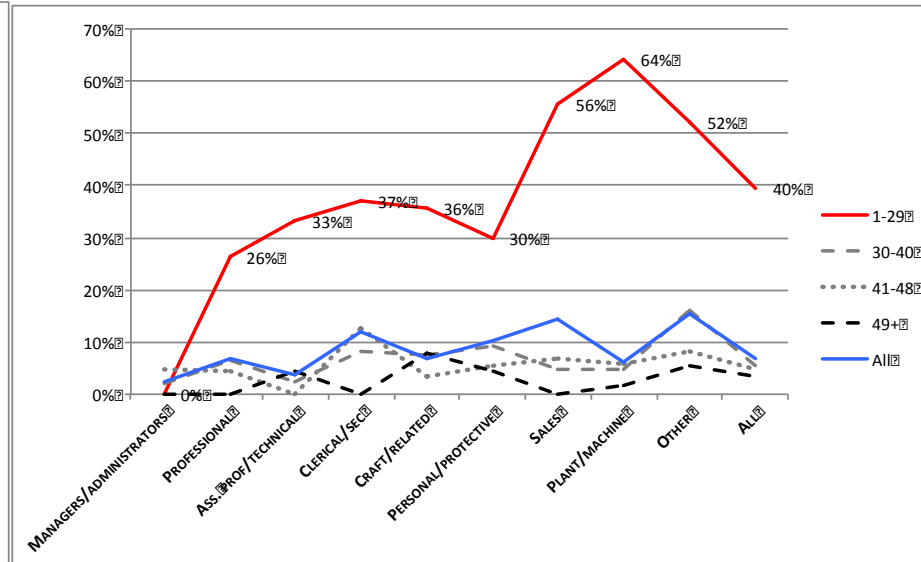
Source: Author's analysis of 2008-9 BHPS Wave 8.

Figure 4. Proportion of employees (aged 18-64) who want to work more hours, by occupation and work-time.

a. Women

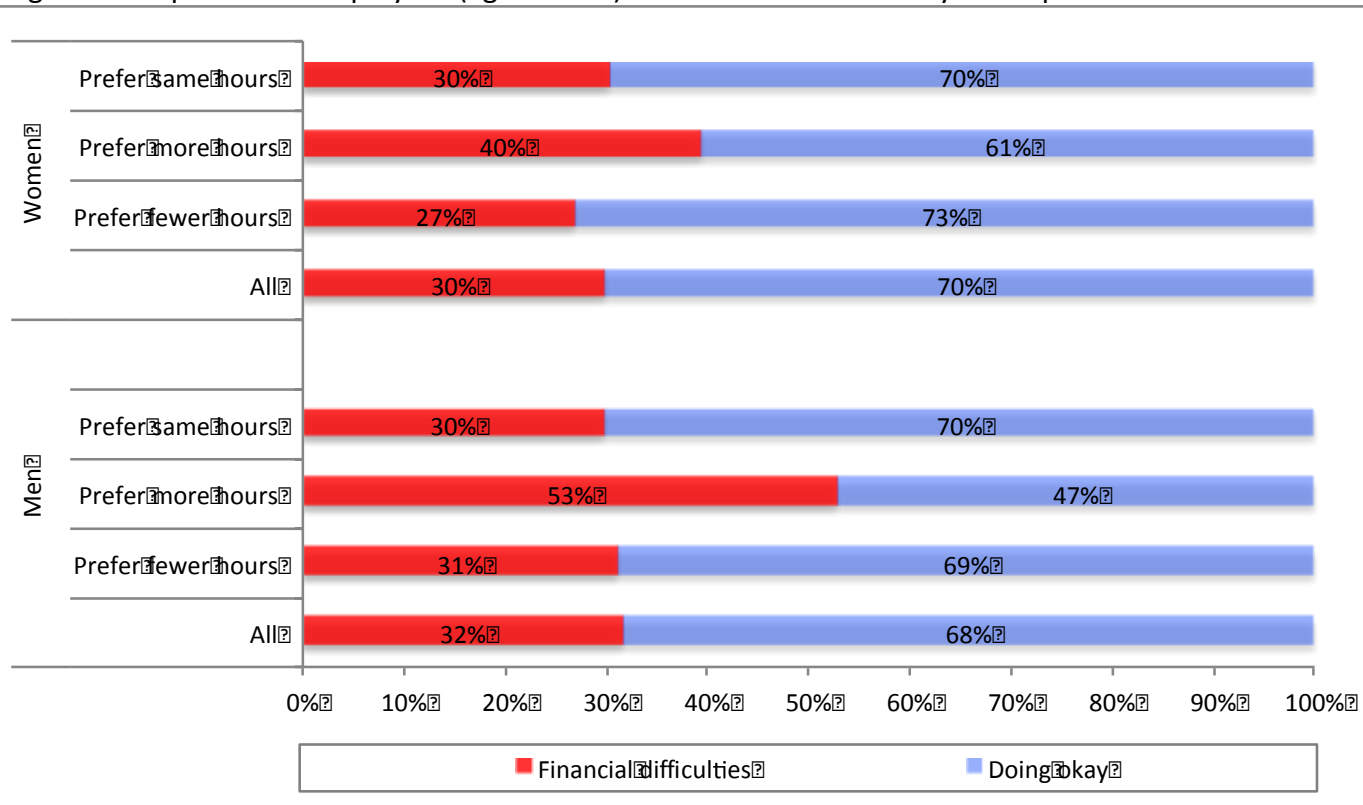


b. Men



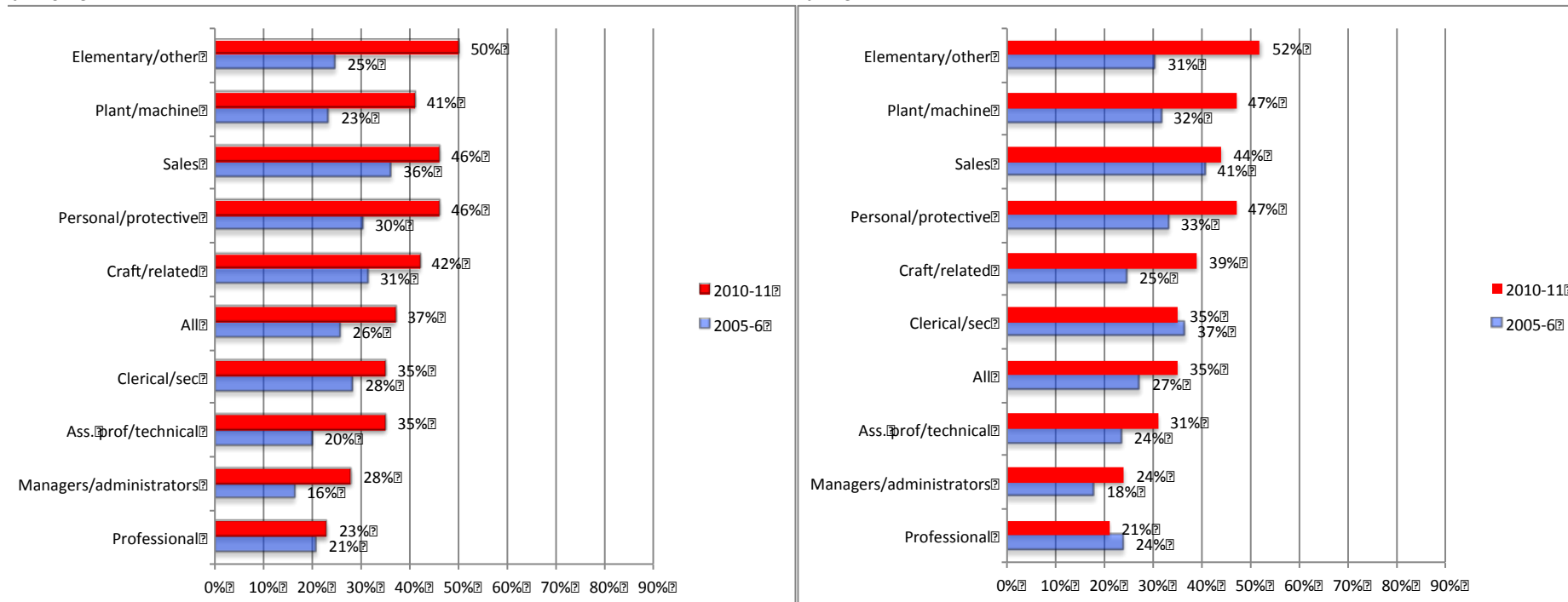
Source: Author's analysis of 2008-9 BHPS Wave 8 data.

Figure 5. Proportion of Employees (aged 18-64) in Financial Difficulties by Hours Preferences.



Source: Author's analysis of 2008-9 (BHPS Wave 8) data.

Figure 6. Female and male employees (aged 18-64) in working age reporting financial difficulties/just about getting by*. Sorted most difficulties to least in 2010-11.
 a. Women
 b. Men



Source: Author's analysis of 2005-6 (BHPS Wave D) and 2010-11 (US Wave B) data.

*How well would you say you yourself are managing financially these days?