Work-time underemployment and financial hardship: class inequalities and recession in the UK.

Abstract

The current economic crisis is impacting in multiple ways on work and economic life. This paper examines changes to the work-time of employees in the UK. The UK stands out for its recessionary expansion of work-time underemployment. Working in a job that provides 'too few' hours can have serious ramifications for the economic livelihood of workers. Working class workers are central here. Drawing on analysis of large-scale survey data, the paper identifies that workers in lower level occupations have experienced the most substantial post-recessionary growth in the proportions working 'too few' hours. Have these work-time changes narrowed or widened class inequalities in feelings of financially hardship? The paper concludes that although middle class workers have also seen their financial positions eroded, this so-called 'first middle class recession' has widened not narrowed class inequalities in financial hardship amongst UK workers.

Introduction

The current economic crisis has impacted across the globe, but the form and severity of its effects have varied by country. Lallement noted in this journal in 2011 that levels of unemployment, and societal labour market adjustments to job loss, have varied substantially across nations, but he suggested that part of what marks the UK out is its post-recessionary growth in 'work-time underemployment'. An increase in the number of workers with 'too few' hours raises questions about recessionary ramifications for the UK work-time regime (Rubery et al., 1998). These are also class concerns: work-time and work-time preferences are classed in Britain. The paper is stimulated by the potential impact of recessionary work-time developments on the financial wellbeing of workers in the UK: have work-time changes narrowed or widened class inequalities in feelings of financially hardship?

Data from the *British Household Panel Survey* (BHPS) and its follow-on *Understanding Society* (US) facilitate the examination of class variation in work-time and in financial hardship before and after the onset of the recession in 2008. The next section of the paper considers potential recessionary changes in the number of working hours in the UK. This is followed by discussion, first, of the classed nature of work-time underemployment and, second, of the linkages between working 'too few' hours and financial difficulties. After outlining the methodological approach, findings are presented on financial hardship and work-time in the UK before and after 2008. It is concluded that in the context of debates over the 'first middle class recession' and the 'squeezed middle', the growth in work-time underemployment signals instead poor recessionary outcomes for the financial positions of working class employees in Britain.

The recession and work-time.

The current economic crisis has ignited interest in the ramifications of recession for multiple aspects of our working lives. This paper focuses upon work-time in the UK. A great deal of research attention has been dedicated to exploring rising levels of unemployment, including variation between countries, and societal responses to job loss. Lallement (2011) grouped European societies according to their dominant methods of labour market adjustment as unemployment levels began to rise after recession hit: variety in societal work-time strategies and outcomes are central to his account. What is clear from the existing literature on work-time, on this and previous economic crises, is that recessions can have quite contradictory impacts on the number of hours committed to the labour market. Certain developments in the labour market in a recession can lead to drastic cuts in paid work-time, but – during the same recession - longer hours in the labour market can result for some workers due to quite different processes. These debates are summarised below using UK data after the 2008-9 recession.

a. Unemployment and work-time reduction

The rise in the level of unemployment that follows a recession necessarily brings about substantial reductions in the paid work-time of those who have lost their jobs, certainly if the period of unemployment is prolonged. Although levels of unemployment have not yet reached the high rates recorded during previous recessions, initially unemployment did rise steeply in the UK after 2008 (Campos et al., 2012; Gregg and Wadsworth, 2010; Grimshaw and Rafferty, 2012; 4; Hogarth et al., 2010; Lallement, 2011).

b. Work seekers and work-time reduction

Considering those looking for a job, Lyonette and Baldauf (2010) discuss how organisational work-time responses to economic crisis can mean that jobs that would previously have been available full-time to applicants might instead be offered only in a part-time capacity. Early post-recession research showed that part-time employment grew in the UK soon after the recession began and, moreover, the bulk of *new* part-timers cited their inability to find full-time work as the main reason for part-time working (Parek et al., 2010).

c. The employed and work-time reduction

The third potential work-time outcome of economic crisis is a cut to the working hours of the employed. Usual over-time hours are commonly the first hours to be shed, followed by cuts to contractual hours, perhaps here for a negotiated time-delineated period (Hijzen and Venn, 2011; Lallement, 2011). A potential result of such work-time measures is the expansion of so-called economic short-time workers (ESTW). At their extreme, ESTW, though employed, might be 'zero hours' workers' with no hours at all. There were almost two million ESTW in Europe by 2009, already three times more than had existed only one year previously (Hijzen and Venn, 2011: 36).

d. The employed and work-time expansion

The fourth potential work-time outcome of recession is longer hours for those in paid work. This can result if companies attempt to improve competitiveness at a time of crisis and/or deploy existing staff to cover the work of those who have been 'let go'.

Longer hours can also result from workers' informal attempts to preserve their own job: to display strong work commitment in a time of job uncertainty and cutback (Chandola, 2010). Work-time intensification can occur too if workers need to work a longer week to boost their take home pay.

Given these four potential work-time scenarios emerging from the 2008-9 recession, what is the aggregate work-time picture? Overall, hours have fallen in the UK since the onset of recession (Gregg and Wadsworth, 2010; Grimshaw and Rafferty, 2012). Bell and Blanchflower (2011: 215, r25) argued that work-time changes have heralded an expansion in 'work-time underemployment' and a reduction in 'work-time intensification'. In Lallement's analysis of dominant labour market adjustments, cited earlier, the key feature of the UK recessionary labour market has been a growth in work-time underemployment.

This paper thus focuses specifically upon labour market work-time in the UK. Because of this, the core sample under investigation in this paper is working age employees. This excludes, amongst other groups, the unemployed whose financial situations are likely to be far more precarious than those of employees, and the self-employed whose work time is difficult to compare with employees. In its focus on employees and class, the paper does not address in detail other inequalities in work-time, and neither does it provide a household level of analysis. The paper thus concludes with suggestions for further research into the economic consequences of the crisis.

Work-time and class

There are a number of dimensions to work-time but ‘too many hours?’ has been the most long-standing work-time research question in the literature. Veblen’s 1899 interest in long hours of paid work can be traced through to fears about a ‘harried’ society in the 1970’s (Linder, 1970), into Schor’s (1991) discussion of the growth of a ‘long hours culture’ and ‘greedy’ organisations in the US and, later, debates over the notion of ‘total time commitment’ for executives across Europe (Riedmann et al., 2006). These debates are all classed. In the UK, long hours’ working is concentrated amongst men at the top and bottoms of the occupational hierarchy, but it is the middle class workers – those with a ‘salary’ rather than a ‘labour’ contract to use Erickson and Goldthorpe’s (1992: 42) Weberian class ‘ideal types’, who have dominated the ‘too many’ hours literature (Hammermesh and Lee, 2007). A labour contract is based upon the purchase of a quantity of time, whilst workers with a salary contract have more autonomy and discretion over their work time (Erickson and Goldthorpe, 2002). Middle class men with more work time autonomy are the long hours’ workers who are most likely to express preferences for working fewer hours (Fagan, 2001). Their ‘too many’ hours have been identified as a problem in large part because they leave little time to dedicate to other areas of their lives. Yet ‘too few’ hours can also impact negatively on workers. In particular, working in a labour contract job that provides ‘too few’ hours can have serious ramifications for the economic livelihood of workers, in the short and longer terms.

An interest in economic livelihoods also links us to Weberian analyses of class that are dominant in Britain, and that have shaped influential class schemas (as discussed later). In Goldthorpe and McKnight’s (2005) research into the economic basis of social class, for example, they draw upon the Weberian idea that people in different class locations inhabit very different 'economic worlds'. Key to this is that economic worlds do not refer only to class inequalities in income, but also to economic security, economic stability and economic prospects. The economic is linked directly to work-time underemployment here. When a worker has a labour contract based on the purchase of time, any post-recessionary work-time cuts are likely to create 'economic short-time workers' (see earlier) amongst the working class. Indeed, looking to earlier studies on work-time and class, a real fear of work-time underemployment marks the economic worlds of the working class. For example, Lautsch and Scully's (2007) US research into the impact of organizational work-time restructuring found that impending work-time cuts were causing severe financial worries amongst the working class respondents. In the UK, AUTHOR A (2009) found similar economic-based fears about potentially working 'too few' hours expressed within working class families. Boulin et al.s' (2006) analysis of large-scale data demonstrated the economic importance of long hours in labour contracts for low-wage workers across the globe.

In this light, do recessionary cuts in hours and the proposed growth in 'work-time underemployment' signal severe economic problems for workers in the UK? Are those in working class jobs faring particularly poorly or is the 'middle' being squeezed the most?

Financial hardship, recession and class

The impact of the crisis is wide-ranging but this paper focuses purely upon its economic consequences. The economic is important: it interrelates closely with other areas of life and has critical ramifications for wellbeing in general (Gudmundsdottir, 2011). The paper is concerned with class variation, and change over time, in financial hardship. Rather than examine objective indicators, however, feelings of financially insecurity are the focus. Multiple studies have shown how important it is to explore subjective measures of economic lives (Stiglitz et al., 2007). Weller's recent (2012) US research into the financial impact of job loss stressed that, even though it might suggest an over-individualized approach to the analysis of economic crisis, researching subjective feelings of financial hardship is valuable for exploring the impact of austerity on peoples' everyday lives. Moreover, in-depth studies in the UK have long revealed how central worries about finances have been to working class lives in post-war Britain (Kempson, 1996; Skeggs, 2011).

Weller's study also suggested four ways in which this crisis might have more wide-ranging and deeper consequences for peoples' feelings of financial hardship than did its predecessors. Class is important to all. First, she argues, middle class and not just working class households might be facing financial problems this time because of the impact of this recession on middle class jobs. Second, there are now far more casual workers than in previous decades, and so a lower proportion of employees have work-based financial security nets. Third, the rollback of welfare benefits has heightened the risks of financial insecurity. Fourth, more households are in debt than were in previous decades, and even "'Ordinary workers' households are now embedded in complex long-term financial arrangements that commit them to onerous repayment schedules, reduce their cash reserves and simultaneously limit their access to savings" (Weller, 2012: 22).

The potential class ramifications of this crisis are clearly open to research. As it rolled out, the crisis was trumpeted as the 'first middle-class recession', due in large part to early, well-publicised mass lay-offs in the financial sector (Vaitilingam, 2009). The middle class also appear in debates about the 'squeezed middle' including notably in the speeches of the Labour Party leader Ed Milliband (e.g. on the day he took over as party leader and at the 2013 Labour Party Conference. Labour Party 2014). Yet numerous analysts have already pointed to the heavier impact on working class finances of post-recessionary increases in living costs. Levell and Oldfield (2011), for example, calculated that poorer households in the UK saw much higher inflation on average than richer households: with the poorest fifth of households facing an average annual inflation rate of 4.3% between 2008 and 2010, compared with 2.7% for the richest fifth. Increases in the prices of gas, electricity and food have hit poorer households particularly hard (and see Dolphin, 2009). The Resolution Foundation (2012: 76) predicted that these problems will have long term and classed financial ramifications, so much so that 'low income households in 2020 now look likely to have incomes 15 per cent below those in 2008' compared with 3 per cent lower for middle incomes households.

In this context, the paper is examining the growth in work-time underemployment in the UK, feelings of financial hardship, and class. Before moving onto its findings, the next section outlines the methodological approach.

Researching work-time, financial insecurity and occupational class

The paper draws upon secondary analysis of large cross-sectional data from the *British Household Panel Survey*, the BHPS, and its follow-on *Understanding Society* (US). The BHPS collected nationally representative details on labour force participation, standards of living as well as on a range of other social, demographic and attitudinal topics for 18 years (Taylor, 2011). The BHPS was then incorporated into and replaced by US that is tracking 100,000 individuals in 40,000 British households (US, 2011). The most recent full wave of US data (Wave C. Released 2013) that was available at the time of analysis was collected over a two-year period (2011-12).

For our concerns with class, the paper focuses upon a measure of *occupational* class: variation by socio-economic group (SEG). There are multiple ways to operationalise and measure class. In the UK, Weberian-inspired approaches dominate those class schemas with a theoretical grounding. Neo-Marxist schemas such as that of Wright have failed to take such a strong hold (see the recent review by Savage et al., 2013). Rose et al.'s (2005) NS-SEC (National Statistics Socio-economic Classification), for example, builds upon and adapts Erickson and Goldthorpe's (1992) Weberian-rooted class schemas. The NS-SEC was devised to offer a robust and theoretically grounded means with which to explore class inequalities and is widely used now. Unfortunately it is absent from the early waves of data analysed for this paper. The paper thus explores the SEG variable that is available consistently across the waves. The SEG variable reflects one of the foundations of the Erickson/Goldthorpe schema – the identification of employees with a 'salary contract' (namely managers and professionals), intermediates and the remainder with a 'labour contract'. Rose et al. concluded that occupationally based classifications such as SEG do remain useful in class analysis, often for such pragmatic reasons as their wide availability (Savage et al., also note the pragmatic in choice of variable when analysing class in surveys that are not 'bespoke'). The limitations of this variable are returned to to end.

For work-time, usual weekly hours are examined (paid normal and over-time, plus any unpaid over-time). The work-time underemployed are taken to be those employees who, when asked 'Thinking about the hours you work, assuming that you would be paid the same amount per hour, would you prefer to….', responded 'work more hours'.

To explore financial hardship, two subjective indicators are focused upon. Respondents are asked to report whether they are managing financially or finding it difficult ("How well would you say you are managing financially these days?"); and what they had or would like to be able to afford for their households. For affordability, a question[i] is explored that taps into the impact of recession on a key aspect of peoples' lives: a holiday away from home (for at least one week a year, not staying with relatives at their home). Holidays were selected because this indicates class variation in the opportunity to be able to afford a concentrated time of rest and leisure time during a time of economic crisis. In their qualitative research into what the UK population believed to be a minimum basic income, Davis et al. (2012: 22) found that 'All groups agreed that it was essential for people to be able to have a break away from home each year'. But, after 'family treats', holidays were identified as the most likely area of recessionary household cutbacks by respondents in an early survey carried out by the Association of British Insurers (ABI, 2009). European Foundation (2012: 45) research found that, across Europe 'The inability to pay for a week's annual holiday away from home (not staying with relatives) is associated with particularly low satisfaction with standard of living'. Furthermore, in the data that is analysed here, compared to the other items available (such as being able to buy new clothes, keep your home warm, feed visitors once a month), holidays were rated as wished for but unaffordable by the largest group of employees in 2008-9 (10% of male and 12% of female employees). Holiday's affordability was also chosen because, if employees in 2008-9 could afford to pay for a holiday, then the vast majority could afford all the others items too (e.g. 99% could afford to buy two pairs of shoes, 96% to replace furniture, and 95% home contents insurance.)

These variables were chosen because they draw expressly upon respondents' subjective evaluations of their lives. Yet such variables are known to present challenges for interpretation in survey, and indeed other types of, research. In terms of class, for example, Crompton argued peoples' evaluations of their lives are 'shaped by (amongst other things) habit, low expectations and unjust background conditions' (Crompton, 2006: 50). The limitations of subjective indicators of financial hardship are returned to, to end. We will see too how respondents in surveys commonly group together when asked to evaluate aspects of their lives. Given the focus of the paper on the economic impact of recession, it explores which respondents choose the most 'problematic' categories that indicate financial difficulties.

Work-time, class and recession

The first of the UK's recent recessions began technically in April 2008 and lasted for 18 months (Bell and Blanchflower, 2011). Looking at employees in the data-sets and their hours spent in the labour market (all hours including unpaid over-time), Figure 1 displays how work-time is classed in the UK. For men, very long hours (over 48 a week) feature most amongst salaried managerial workers (a third worked these long weeks), but were prevalent too amongst professionals and manual workers. For women, there were high levels of part-time working (fewer than 30 hours a week) amongst junior non-manual and ‘Semi/Unskilled manual/Other’ workers (around half work part-time). Between 2005-6 and 2011-12, female employees’ weekly work time remained rather stable on aggregate. Men overall saw more change including a doubling of part-time working (albeit from a low base: from 3 to 7 per cent of male employees)ii. Part-time working grew most for those men working in ‘junior non-manual and personal service’ and ‘semi/unskilled manual/Other’ jobs, and for women in ‘professional’ and ‘skilled manual’. For men, there is also a fall in very long hours working (over 48 hours a week) in manual occupations.

INSERT FIGURE 1 AROUND HERE

We are interested too in work-time underemployment: those who wish to work more hours. Data on hours’ preferences were available only from the BHPS. Comparing preferences over time (years 2005-6 and 2008-9), the dominant picture before and after the recession began was that employees in the sample were happy with their hours of work, in the sense that the majority expressed a preference for continuing with their current hours (over 60% of women and men. Figure 2). Only small percentages of respondents were working ‘too few’ hours, and the overall proportions were similar for women and men. *Understanding Society* does not ask a work-time preference question, but LFS data show that work-time underemployment had grown in the UK to 10 per cent of workers by the close of 2012 (ONS, 2012). The BHPS data can be used to see which workers were most likely to be work-time underemployed: in 2008-9 it was female and male respondents in semi/unskilled manual and junior non-manual work.

INSERT FIGURE 2 AROUND HERE

Work-time underemployment was related to actual hours worked, as we might expect. Part-timers (working 1-29 hours a week) were the group of women and men most likely to say that they would prefer longer hours (Figure 3), men especially. The proportion of part-timers who were work-time underemployed had already grown by 2008-9, particularly for men (up to fully 39% of part-timers from 25% in 2005-6) and those in lower level jobs. Of course, there are more women than men working part-time in Britain: in the (weighted) sample for 2008-9 were 187 women and 69 men who were working part-time and wanted more hours. The potential economic ramifications of work-time underemployment are considered next.

INSERT FIGURE 3 AROUND HERE

Work-time, class and financial insecurity

Are those working 'too few' hours experiencing financial problems?

i. Financial difficulties

We look first at respondents' subjective feelings of financial difficulty. Were the workers 'doing okay'? (merged categories 'living comfortably'/'doing all right') or in financial difficulties ('just about getting by'/'finding it difficult'), and how did they fare after the recession began?

First, Figure 4 shows that wanting to work *more* hours was indeed likely to be associated with being in financial difficulty. In 2005-6, women and men who expressed a preference for working more hours were twice as likely to report being in 'financial difficulties/just being able to get by' as those wanting to continue the same hours or work fewer. By 2008-9, the financial disadvantage felt by work-time underemployed women had eased a little, but it had deepened for the men so that fully 53% reported being in difficulties. Work-time underemployed men were more likely to report financial difficulties than other male employees for each category of work-time (Figure 5. And see Blyton and Jenkins, 2012).

INSERT FIGURES 4 AND 5 AROUND HERE

Looking specifically at SEG, however, has there been an overall weakening or deepening of class inequalities in financial hardship over time? Is there evidence of a middle class crisis, of the financial squeezing of the middle? Figure 6 presents the proportion of employees who felt that they were in financial difficulties. It is grouped by SEG and sorted according to the level of financial difficulty that was reported after the start of recession. By 2011-12, there is a separation of the salariat and intermediate non-manual from other employees. In the top 'above average financial disadvantage' section of the chart lie the manual and junior non-manual workers, for women and men. The group seeing the most substantial increase in financial problems by 2011-12 were the skilled manual/'foreman' workers.

INSERT FIGURE 6 AROUND HERE

Figure 6 compares financial hardship at two points before and after the recession. Figure 7 instead charts changes over time, from 2005 onwards. It reveals some classed consistency in that manual and junior non-manual workers (the lighter lines) dominate 'above average financial difficulties', for women and men. They also show a wider class gap between the top and bottom by 2011-12. What the charts also suggest however is an easing off of the rise in financial difficulties, a fall for some groups: perhaps a levelling off in financial hardship but at a rate above the pre-recession level.

ii. Affordability of a holiday

The work-time underemployed again reported the most financial problems, before and after the recession began (years 2005-6 and 2008-9. Figure 8). More work-time underemployed women than men reported problems affording holidays. Similarly, there was real recessionary growth in the proportions of employees who felt financially excluded from this. Looking at employees by SEG up to 2010-11 (variable not available in 2011-12) there were increases across all groups in those who could not afford a weeks' holiday away from home (Figure 9). But clear class inequalities persisted, and widened, over time. By 2010-11, the figure for 'unskilled/semi-skilled manual/other' employees stood at fully a third.

INSERT FIGURE 8 and 9 AROUND HERE

iii. Multivariate analysis

Lastly, the paper considers whether the picture portrayed so far of substantial class inequalities in financial hardship in Britain stands up under multivariate analysis. Binary logistic regressions were carried out with the financial hardship variables as dependents (using the 2010-11 data when both variables were available). The results were similar for feelings of financial security and being able to afford a holiday, and so only feelings of financial hardship are reported here. This variable was recoded into a dummy variable with those who reported being in ‘financial difficulties or were just about getting by’ as 1 and ‘Other’ as 0. The following independent variables were added in a series of logistic models: first only SEG (reference: mangers); then a dichotomised work-time variable (Reference: part-time hours); then a dichotomised level of education (reference: those who had less than sixth form level education); then a batch of background variables that includes partnership status (reference: not in a couple); responsible for a child aged under 16 (reference: no child); age in years; age squared. Rather than focus here on the fit of the model to try to explain the dependent variable, these regressions are used to see whether the significance of class persists or disappears after the controls are added[iii].

INSERT TABLE 1 AROUND HERE

The final model is shown in Table 1. SEG indeed remained significant after controlling for the independent variables. For women, all the groups were different to managers in their experience of financial hardship: professionals were *less* likely to be in financial difficulties (odds ratio of 0.7, statistically significant at 0.05 level) but all other groups were *more* likely (statistically significant at 0.001 level). Semi/unskilled manual/Other workers were over twice as likely to be in financial difficulty as female managers (odds ratio of 2.5), even after controls. Full-time women fared better than part-timers (though statistical significance was lost after adding in the background independent variables). The more financially advantaged were those women with higher levels of education; in couples; and without dependent children.

The results were similar overall for men: class remained statistically significant in the final model (though male professionals were not statistically different to managers). As for women, the semi and unskilled manual workers fared far worse: an odds ratio of 2.9 signalling that they almost three times more likely to be in financial difficulties as men in managerial positions. Full-timers were also significantly less likely to be in financial hardship than part-timers (odds ratio of 0.7).

Discussion and conclusions

The economic crisis is impacting in multiple ways on work and economic life in the UK. This paper has explored work-time, stimulated by the recessionary growth in ‘work-time underemployment’. Hours spent in the labour market are fundamental to the financial security of most workers, but studies have shown that a fear of the economic consequences of working ‘too few’ hours features strongly in accounts from the working class. This paper thus proposed that post-recessionary work-time changes raise concerns about the financial situations of workers in the UK, and for the working class in particular. Work-time underemployment is far more likely to impact on the economic worlds of workers with labour contracts who are paid by unit of time than on the middle class with a salary contract in which levels of autonomy over work-time are higher.

Rather than a crisis for the middle class, the paper has shown that work-time underemployment was indeed more likely to impact lower manual workers. Furthermore, these workers were at much greater risk of dissatisfaction with their financial situations and problems in affording a holiday. The paper has shown that many middle class workers have also seen their levels of financial security eroded but, by 2011-12, the so-called first middle class recession had widened not narrowed class inequalities in subjective financial hardship in the UK. The gap between the salariat and those on a labour contract, especially between the salariat and those in semi and unskilled manual positions, was more stark by 2011-12, reinforcing the distinctions between their 'economic worlds'. By 2011-12, though, the post-recessionary overall growth in reported financial hardship appears to have eased. Further waves of data can allow us to explore whether stability or a reduction in hardship followed, into 2013 and onwards.

The paper has focused upon subjective assessments of financial situations as a valuable indicator of the impact of the economic crisis on peoples' everyday experiences, and of any growth over time in the prevalence of financially strapped lives. Subjective data are not without their challenges, however. Subjective measures of financial wellbeing are valuable because they encourage respondents to reflect on their aspirations as well as their current situation, but aspirations, experiences and life chances are classed. Thus we might see respondents whose economic worlds appear scarred by real financial difficulty rating their financial situations comparatively well. If financial hardship is routine and expected in an economic world, as Skeggs (2011) argues has been case for much of the working class in post-war Britain, such respondents may not emerge as the most subjectively financially disadvantaged. This paper might be underestimating their financial problems. Furthermore, given the focus on change over time, and only on employees, rather than reporting more financial hardship as the crisis deepens, those who are in jobs may feel subjectively better off even if their economic worlds are objectively worse than they were before the recession hit. A separate paper explores variety in objective measures of financial wellbeing.

The paper has utilised SEG as a measure of occupational class. Some limitations to this approach were identified earlier in a discussion of the increasing use of the Weberian-grounded NS-SEC. Yet Savage et al. (2013) have criticised even this dominant schema in the UK (and see Crompton et al., 2000). Drawing upon Bourdieu's analysis of capitals, they developed a 'bespoke' class survey to capture the role of social and cultural processes in generating class divisions. The authors conclude that a fragmentation is occurring in the traditional middle and working class divisions in Britain that the dominant schemas utilise, and propose instead a seven-class schema polarised by an Elite with very high economic, social and 'highbrow' capitals and the Precariat who fare poorly on all forms of capital. That study provides a more sophisticated and multi-dimensional analysis of class inequalities than this paper has been able to offer using the BHPS and US, though of course it does not provide the picture of change over time that BHPS/US has allowed here.

Finally, in its emphasis on occupational class, the paper did not address important questions about other inequalities in work-time and financial insecurity. In terms of gender, for example, there has been a growth in part-time employment for men overall, more underemployment amongst men, but higher levels of problems affording holidays reported by women. The gender impact of this crisis is fascinating but this impact is lagged and the data analysed pre-date major on-going changes to women's working lives. It was in 2012 that the Fawcett Society argued that women were facing a 'triple jeopardy' in the UK: hit hardest by the deepening cuts to public sector jobs, wages and pensions; to services and benefits; and left to 'fill the gaps' that the withdrawal of services creates (Fawcett Society, 2012: 5. And see Rubery and Rafferty, 2013; McKay et al., 2013). More waves of data are needed to explore these issues further. A key research question for further study is just how this triple jeopardy might play out for different groups, from diverse social backgrounds, as the crisis persists. On-going research is essential to examine how the economic crisis and policy responses are impacting work and economic lives, to identify which groups of workers are carrying the heaviest burdens of financial hardship, and to also explore whether the intensification of hardship is easing.

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