

Research-in-Brief



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Part-Time Opportunities for Professionals and Managers

While it is often assumed that part-time work in professional or managerial jobs would provide parents with increased flexibility to juggle work and family responsibilities while also earning a good income, a recent study by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) shows that few professionals and managers are employed part-time. The study further shows that very few professional and managerial careers offer compensation and benefits that would allow more employees to work part-time.

According to the IWPR report, *Part-Time Opportunities for Professionals and Managers: Where Are They, Who Uses Them, and Why*, 22 percent of all U.S. employees work part-time, while only 12 percent of professionals and managers are part-time workers. A substantial portion of part-time professionals and managers (29 percent) report that they would prefer to work full-time. IWPR's research indicates that almost nine out of ten professionals and managers either prefer full-time work or are unable to find desirable part-time work with comparable earnings, pensions and benefits to their full-time counterparts.

The data analyzed in IWPR's report come from the March Supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS) for 1992 and 1993, and from the 1987, 1988, 1990 and 1991 panels of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP). Both data sets provide a nationally representative sample of the population generated by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Who Works Part-Time?

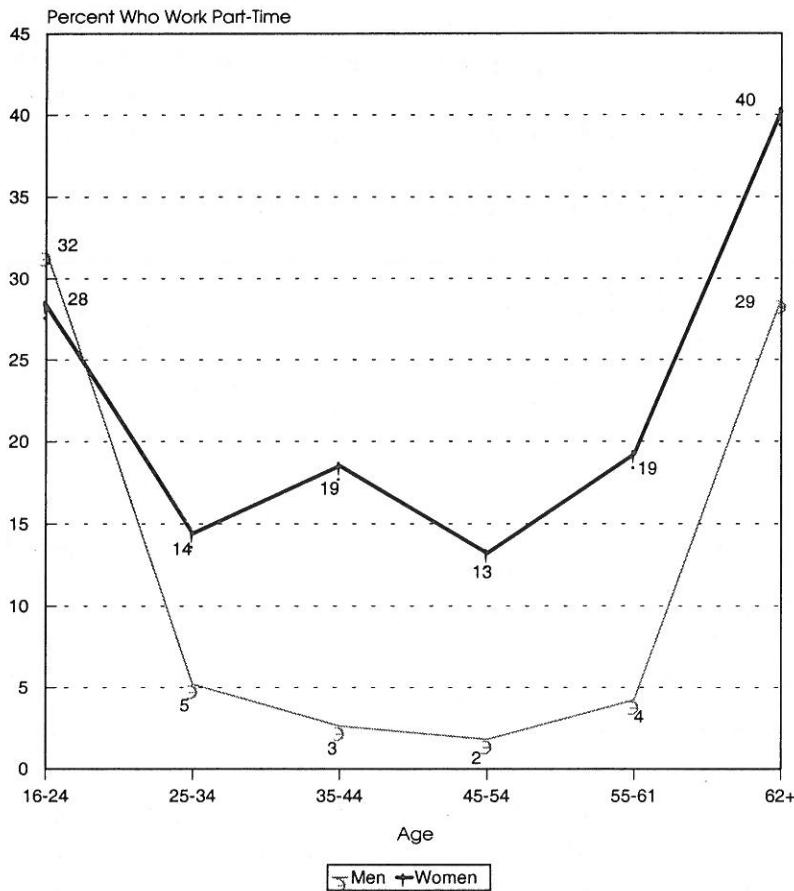
Part-time professionals and managers differ from their full-time colleagues in terms of many demographic and human capital characteristics. The importance of marital status, age of children and income varies for men and women in different race and ethnic groups. Most part-time professionals and managers are white, married women with young children. In addition, female professionals and managers with husbands who have high salaries are more likely to work part-time than those female professionals and managers with husbands who have medium to low salaries.

In contrast, men working part-time in professional and managerial occupations are more likely to be unmarried and Asian American, and less likely to have young children. And, contrary to expectations regarding financial need, most men's part-time work is unrelated to greater family resources; in fact, men with wives with higher earnings are *less* likely to work part-time.

Despite these gender differences, men and women have remarkably similar patterns of part-time employment across age groups. For both genders, part-time work as professionals or managers is most common among those who are younger than 24 years of age or older than 62; 30 percent or more work part-time at the beginning and end of their working lives (see Figure 1). Young professionals and managers may work part-time as assistants or interns until they have finished school or found permanent jobs. Older professionals and managers may reduce their work hours before or after retirement to balance their desire for a reduced work load with the need for income or their desire to continue their careers.

Data from the 1992 and 1993 CPS March Supplements indicate that professionals and managers in the major child-rearing years (between the ages of 25 and 44) are much less likely to work part-time than those in other age groups. However, among part-time professionals and managers between the ages of 25 and 44,

Figure 1.
Percent of Professionals and Managers Working Part-Time
by Gender and Age



Source: IWPR analysis of data from the March 1992 and 1993 Current Population Surveys.

more women work part-time (14-19 percent) than men (3-5 percent). Overall, of all professionals and managers who work part-time, 73 percent were women and 28 percent were men in 1992-93.

Where Are the Part-Time Careers?

Part-time professionals and managers are more likely to be located in different types of work places than full-time professionals and managers. The IWPR study found that there are relatively more part-time jobs for professionals than managers, more part-time jobs in small firms than in large firms, and more part-time jobs in the service sector industries. Part-time employees also tend to be employed disproportionately in particular occupations, such as teachers, entertainers and athletes, nurses, librarians, and writers and artists.

The five occupations with the largest proportion of part-time jobs are:

- ◆ teachers (not elsewhere classified) (39 percent),
- ◆ entertainers and athletes (37 percent),
- ◆ post-secondary school teachers (36 percent),
- ◆ kindergarten teachers (34 percent), and
- ◆ registered nurses (28 percent).

The average wage for part-time professional and managerial employees is \$12.09 per hour, and on average those wages represent only 74 percent of full-time hourly wages for the same career locations. Overall, only 31 percent of the part-time professionals and managers rely on health benefits provided through their employers and only 23 percent participate in pension plans offered by their employers.

Where Are the Best Part-Time Jobs?

To determine the best part-time jobs for professionals and managers, IWPR looked at the equity in pay of part-time compared to full-time

workers in the same careers and at the availability of health insurance and employer-provided pensions plans. The result was that men and women who work part-time in the best part-time career locations are not only the most highly paid (averaging \$19.86 an hour), but also enjoy equity in hourly pay compared to full-time professionals and managers (average ratio equals 1.01). In addition, 51 percent receive health benefits and 56 percent participate in employer-provided pension plans.

The following four career locations stood out significantly above the rest as the best part-time jobs (see Table 1). These careers are:

- ◆ registered nurses in the public sector,
- ◆ registered nurses in large, private firms,
- ◆ scientists (including engineers, mathematicians, and

Table 1.
The Best Part-Time Career Locations Among Professionals and Managers

Career Locations	Part-Time Hourly Wage (1)	Ratio of Part-Time to Full-Time Hourly Wages	Percentage of Employer-Based Health Benefits for Part-Time	Percentage of Employer Provided Pension Coverage for Part-Time	Attractiveness Composite Index Score
Registered Nurses; Public Sector	\$21.55	1.05	50%	63%	36.29
Registered Nurses; Large, Private Firms	\$21.95	1.11	43%	52%	34.06
Scientists (2); Large, Private Firms	\$21.28	0.94	53%	49%	32.97
Special Education Teachers	\$14.67	0.95	56%	58%	31.70

Notes: (1) Hourly earnings are reported in 1997 constant dollars.

(2) Scientists include engineers, mathematicians, computer and natural scientists.

Source: IWPR analysis of data from the March 1992 and 1993 Current Population Surveys.

computer and natural scientists) in large, private firms, and
 ♦ special education teachers.

Although there are a few other career locations that offer relatively generous salaries to part-time employees, such as lawyers and judges and scientists in small, private firms (including engineers, mathematicians, and computer and natural scientists), the majority of those employees do not receive employer-provided pensions or health insurance benefits.

How Good Are the Best Part-Time Jobs?

The top four careers pay their part-time employees, on average, between \$15 and 22 per hour, which is 95 to 105 percent of what full-time positions in the same careers are paid per hour. Unfortunately, these careers comprise only four of the 51 careers that were identified in the study and represent only 13 percent of all part-time professional and managerial positions.

A closer look at these four career locations reveals that they appear especially adaptable to part-time work. For example, nurses work shifts that are

relatively unique among professionals and managers, and special education teachers and computer scientists often work in situations that do not typically require a traditional 8-hour workday. In addition, there are often shortages of nurses and computer scientists that are likely to account for their relatively generous part-time compensation. Nurses and teachers are often unionized, which may also account for their better pay and benefits as part-time workers. The somewhat unusual characteristics of these professional career locations make it unlikely that many other sectors of the labor market will follow their lead in terms of providing better pay and benefits to part-time professionals and managers.

Since three of the four careers with the best compensation for part-time employment are in the traditional female careers of nursing and special education, it is not surprising that women are more likely than men to be employed in these careers with better compensation for part-time work. Although this is good news for women in these occupations, it does not make up for the overall poor pay and benefits that most part-time professionals and managers, many of whom are women, experience.

Table 2.
The Worst Part-Time Career Locations Among Professionals and Managers

Career Locations	Part-Time Hourly Wage (1)	Ratio of Part-Time to Full-Time Hourly Wage	Percentage of Employer-Based Health Benefits for Part-Time	Percentage of Employer-Provided Pension Coverage for Part-Time	Attractiveness Composite Index Score
Managers in Personal Services; Large, Private Firms	\$5.78	0.42	13%	0%	0.45
Sales Representatives in Distributive Sector; Large, Private Firms	\$7.95	0.44	16%	12%	4.46
Managers in Distributive Services; Small, Private Firms	\$7.27	0.64	18%	8%	6.84
Managers in Distributive Services; Large, Private Firms	\$7.20	0.48	26%	12%	6.90

Notes: (1) Hourly earnings are reported in 1997 constant dollars.

Source: IWPR analysis of data from the March 1992 and 1993 Current Population Surveys.

Where Are the Worst Part-Time Jobs?

The vast majority of professionals and managers who are employed part-time do not receive generous salaries, pensions or health insurance benefits. In fact, despite assumptions that professional or managerial positions are the best-paying occupations available for both full-time and part-time employees, many professional and managerial careers offer part-time salaries that, even at 34 hours per week, are insufficient to support a family of four above the poverty line. Furthermore, few provide employer contributions to health insurance or pension benefits for their part-time employees.

As Table 2 shows, the four worst part-time career locations are:

- ◆ managers in personal services (such as domestic, hotel and restaurant services) in large, private firms,
- ◆ sales representatives in large, private firms in the distributive sector,
- ◆ managers in retail and other distributive services

(such as transportation, communications and trades services) in small, private firms, and

- ◆ managers in retail and other distributive services in large, private firms.

Examples of other part-time career locations that do not offer generous salaries, pensions or health insurance benefits include writers and artists, entertainers and athletes, and preschool and kindergarten teachers. Many of these positions pay less than \$10 per hour and offer benefits to fewer than one-third of their part-time professional or managers.

Why Work Part-Time?

The factors that affect part-time work patterns vary greatly between men and women, especially when financial security is considered. Contrary to expectations, most men's part-time work is unrelated to higher income from other sources; in fact, men with wives with higher income are less likely to work part-time and, if they do, it is often involuntarily. It is only for the oldest men that greater financial security, as measured by larger Social Security benefits or retirement income,

is associated with working part-time rather than full-time.

In contrast, financial security does apparently influence women's decisions to work part-time; women are more likely to work part-time rather than full-time (and do so by choice) when their husbands have higher salaries and their income from family assets is higher. Similarly, older women are more likely to work part-time rather than full-time when they have higher Social Security benefits.

Childbirth

Surprisingly, part-time employment does not appear to be a common strategy used in response to specific life events such as childbirth. The study found that the vast majority of women return to work within three months of the arrival of a new child, and most stay employed full-time. Moreover, most women apparently make a long-term decision to work either part-time or full-time, or leave the labor force for a period of time, and generally stay with that decision regardless of the birth of another child or a breakdown in child care arrangements.

Although more than 50 percent of mothers and 30 percent of fathers reduce their average hours of work after a child enters the family, this does not usually mean a reduction from full-time to part-time work. Rather, parents typically reduce the number of full-time hours worked, for example from more than 40 to between 36 and 39 hours a week. In fact, more women change from part-time work during pregnancy to full-time work after childbirth than vice versa. The decision to work part-time versus full-time after childbirth seems to have little or no association with greater family financial resources or the quality of part-time compensation in the career locations where these women are employed.

Child Care

While public debate regarding employed mothers often assumes that mothers return to the workforce after childbirth because they need to contribute to the family's economic security, the IWPR study indicates that many of the women who work part-time as professionals and managers earn very little and spend a large proportion of their earnings on child care. How-

ever, the research also indicates that the costs of child care do not decrease much for mothers working part-time rather than full-time, and thus the lower salaries of part-time work are not counterbalanced by lower expenses.

Married women professionals and managers who have children are much more likely to work part-time than male professionals and managers, with or without children, and more than women professionals and managers without children. Between 26-29 percent of married women professionals and managers with children work part-time, while only 1-2 percent of married male professionals and managers with children work part-time. It appears to be the case that because of child care responsibilities, women are more likely than men to work at part-time jobs with lower salaries and poorer benefits. Unfortunately, this decision can impact women's lifetime earnings and later affect their access to pensions and Social Security income.

Retirement

In contrast to the relatively modest movement from full-time to part-time work among parents with children, many professionals and managers switch from full-time to part-time work as they age. Whether it is because of their need to care for others who are ill, their need to cut back hours because of their own fatigue or failing health, or the desire to continue to work while receiving Social Security benefits, part-time work is a relatively popular choice before or after retirement, especially for men. However, most employed professionals and managers in their late 60s and 45 percent of those in their 70s are still employed full-time — it is not until their 80s that the vast majority who work are employed part-time. Nevertheless, part-time employment is more popular for women and men over the age of 62 compared to any other age group, with approximately one-third of professionals and managers in that age group working part-time.

Policy Implications

The findings from the IWPR study suggest that part-time employment is not currently a viable alternative for most professionals and managers who are juggling career and family responsibilities, except possibly those dealing with the responsibilities of elder care that are experienced by men and women age 60 and older.

Except for older workers, many of whom have retirement income, our findings clearly indicate that most professionals and managers do not significantly contribute to the family income with a part-time salary, and they are dependent on spouses for health insurance.

Moreover, many of the married female professionals and managers who are able to afford to work part-time because of their husband's salary and family health care benefits may find themselves with little or no pension benefits in their own name when they retire. This is especially troubling because women who are widowed, divorced or separated are more likely to become impoverished than other women when they retire, mainly due to the lack of a pension.

There are several ways that new public and private sector policies could increase the viability of part-time employment, including:

- ◆ The federal government could stimulate more equitable policies for part-time employees in the private sector and in the government by requiring equitable policies for entities that do business with the federal government and establishing more favorable civil service rules for part-time federal workers.
- ◆ Federal legislation could require equal hourly pay and equitable training opportunities for part-time and full-time employees with identical job responsibilities.
- ◆ New legislation could establish a new labor standard to require that any business offering benefits to full-time employees must also pay a proportional share of the same benefits to part-time employees.
- ◆ Employees could demand better compensation for part-time work when they work in career locations where employers are more likely to be motivated to be accommodating.
- ◆ Unions could develop additional strategies to negotiate for more equitable compensation and benefits for part-time employees.
- ◆ Family friendly policies, such as flextime or flexplace policies and improved on-site child care facilities, could be improved to help employees deal with career and family responsibilities.
- ◆ Programs to increase the availability of child care for part-time workers could be developed and implemented.

This Research-In-Brief was written by Shannon Garrett and formatted by Anna Rockett in December 1998. It is based on a full report written by Heidi Hartmann, Young Hee Yoon and Diana Zuckerman entitled *Part-Time Opportunities for Professionals and Managers: Where are They, Who Uses Them, and Why*. The report was made possible by the support of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

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The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) is a public policy research organization dedicated to informing and stimulating the debate on public policy issues of critical importance to women and their families. IWPR focuses on issues of poverty and welfare, employment and earnings, work and family issues, the economic and social aspects of health care and domestic violence, and women's civic and political participation.

The Institute works with policymakers, scholars, and public interest groups around the country to design, execute, and disseminate research that illuminates economic and social policy issues affecting women and families, and to build a network of individuals and organizations that conduct and use women-oriented policy research. IWPR, an independent, nonprofit organization, also works in affiliation with the graduate programs in public policy and women's studies at The George Washington University.

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