

Social and individual mechanisms behind choices for work hours

Aim

The project aims to study how people make choices on the question of how many hours they work according to their contract. It will contribute to the causal knowledge about how individual preferences and (perceived) societal influences affect those choices.

Theoretical background

A considerable group of part-time workers in the Netherlands wish to work more hours but face barriers such as financial concerns and balancing work-family obligations. The *Meer uren werkt!* program, funded by Nationaal Groeifonds, investigates how people who would like to work more hours can be enabled to actually do so.

This project develops a theoretical and experimental underpinning of how people decide on the number of hours they want to work according to their contract. The project considers mainly people working part time, who would have the possibility to extend their contract to more hours. Choosing your work hours is a complex decision process in which one's preferences, a partner's preferences, and social contexts play a role. To better understand and anticipate the effects of interventions developed in the larger program that aim to increase work hours, the mechanisms behind these choices need to be understood better. People have different individual reasons why they want to work more or less depending on alternatives in life that they find important. Furthermore, such preferences might depend, e.g., on whether we look at men or women (Valet et al. 2021). Moreover, gender norms or work hour norms at the workplace might affect how people choose their own work hours (Helgøy, 2024). The theoretical approach will likely resemble the one of Valet et al. (2021) combining economic and sociological aspects that determine choice, while also gendered aspects are included.

Research design

The project will develop different experiments to obtain causal evidence on what determines people's choices regarding how much they work. First, we want to design discrete choice experiments in which participants evaluate alternatives for personal working hours that are related to the Dutch context and to the interventions that are planned within the *Meer uren werkt!* program. On top of that, we want to develop contextualized and incentivized laboratory experiments in which normative explanations can be tested in interactive choice settings. Finally, we want to combine the individual and normative motivations in an online game to determine the relative weight of these motivations, which is important to understand on which types of elements interventions can best focus. Proficiency in Dutch is required for this project.

Literature

- Helgøy, A. (2024). What sustains feminized part-time work at the gender equality frontier? Evidence from a vignette experiment. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 34(5), 542-555.
- Valet, P., Sauer, C., & Tolsma, J. (2021). Preferences for work arrangements: A discrete choice experiment. *PLoS One*, 16(7), e0254483.

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