University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland
School of Applied Psychology

member of
swissuniversities

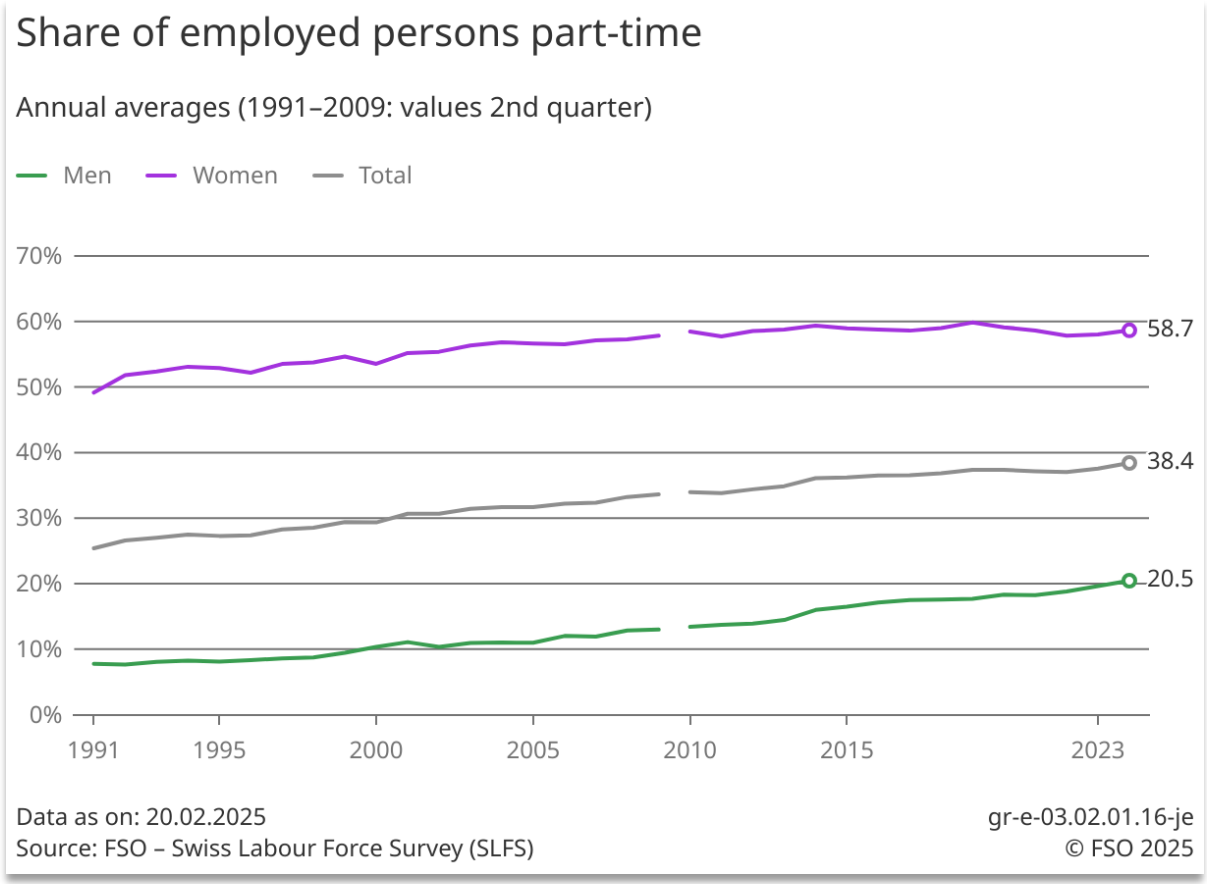
When Less isn’t More

Swiss managers’ gendered perceptions of part-time work

Barbara Germann
Prof. Dr. Dörte Resch

23.05.2025

Part-Time Employment in Switzerland on the Rise



But… Swiss Men Face Considerable Obstacles

– Switzerland may be characterised as a country with a pronounced breadwinner model – men are expected to fulfil financial roles, women to manage domestic and childcare responsibilities (Liebig et al., 2018)

– Structural and policy factors (e.g. tax and social transfer systems) create financial disincentives for dual-income households with children (Balthasar & Müller, 2018; Makarova & Herzog, 2015)

Fathers are expected to align with the “ideal worker” norm, emphasizing long working hours and minimal adaption to family life (Acker, 1990; Williams, 2000)

Findings on Men in Part-Time Work

- Part-time work for men is frequently interpreted as a signal of low commitment and motivation (Beham et al., 2020; Kopp, 2022), therefore…
  - Managers seem to be less inclined to approve men's requests to work part-time (Klein et al., 2000)
  - Men seeking part-time work face disadvantages in job searches, career development opportunities and promotions compared to full-time workers and part-time women (Kopp, 2022; Becker et al., 2019; Pedulla, 2016; Backes-Gellner et al., 2014; van Osch & Schaveling, 2017).

(HR) Managers as Key Players

Managers and HR managers play an important role in initiating work-life-balance policies and translating them into practice (Maxwell, 2005; McCarthy et al., 2010; Peper et al., 2011)

Qualitative research question: What are (HR) managers' perceptions of part-time work?

Quantitative research question: Do (HR) managers interpret part-time work as a sign of a lack of career commitment?

Methods

Mixed-methods approach

Semi-structured interviews with 12 managers analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Quantitative online survey with 119 managers to evaluate perceptions of whether male and female part-time employees are seen as less invested in their careers

«Men who work part-time are less invested in their careers.» (agreement on 5 point likert scale)
«Women who work part-time are less invested in their careers.» (agreement on 5 point likert scale)

Qualitative Results

Official stance: Part-time employment as a gender-neutral choice

→ Part-time work is permitted and supported equally for both genders.

Realities: The nature of part-time work is gendered

→ Women's part-time work: A necessity driven by family responsibilities

«A young mother with two or three children needs to spend more time at home. I mean, they don't start a family to work more […]; they do it to be there for the family.»

→ The nature of male part-time work: job remains central - especially in traditionally male domains

→ Female part-time work often involves low workloads, while male part-time work typically entails higher percentages.

Qualitative Results

Understanding the gendered nature of part-time work: Managers perspectives

- Managers see gender differences in part-time work as rooted in stereotypical gender roles and reinforced by a lack of structural support for work-family balance (e.g., affordable childcare).
- Some managers critically observe that men, especially those working less than 80%, lack socially accepted reasons for reduced hours – unlike women. Furthermore, they lack role models who are not career-focused.

«Let's be honest, what role models do men have? The successful men you see are those who wake up at four in the morning and work late into the night, throwing money around and driving Ferraris. These extreme images are ingrained in people's minds. And now, he's sitting on his yacht with a 40-year-younger wife, enjoying everything because he worked 24-hour days. Now, try introducing a part-time model into that.»

Quantitative Hypothesis: Gender-Based Perceptions

H1: (HR) managers are more likely to interpret part-time work in men as a lack of career commitment compared to part-time work in women.

Female managers are generally more supportive of family-related requests from employees like part-time work (Devicienti et al., 2019; Fuwa, 2021) and are less likely to discriminate against flexible workers (Chung, 2020).

H2: Male (HR) managers are more likely than female (HR) managers to interpret part-time work as a sign of lacking career commitment.

Quantitative Hypothesis: Gender-Based Perceptions

Swiss men tend to hold more traditional gender role attitudes than women (Bornatici et al., 2020), which may result in them perceiving part-time work as particularly unsuitable for men, reinforcing gender norms. Female managers may assess part-time work more consistently across genders.

H3: The difference in perceived career commitment between male and female part-time workers is greater among male evaluators than among female evaluators.

Quantitative Results

Managers who view part-time work as a sign of lacking career commitment (%)
(likert scale of 4 or 5)

	Male part-time worker	Female part-time worker
Total sample	**29%**	**16%**
Male managers	51%	30%
Female managers	15%	7%

Quantitative Results

Hierarchical Regression Results for Part-Time Work Interpreted as Low Career Commitment

Step	Variable	B	*SE*	95% CI [LL, UL]	*p*	R^2	Overall Model Significance (*F*, *p*)
Step 1	Age	0.02	0.01	[0.01,0.04]	<0.001 ***	0.195	F(3,234) = 18.87
	Company size [a]	-0.03	0.14	[-0.29,0.24]	0.848		p <0.001 ***
	Gender of evaluated part-time worker: Male	0.74	0.15	[0.46,1.03]	<0.001 ***		
Step 2	Age	0.02	0.01	[0.01,0.04]	<0.001 ***	0.233	F(4,233) = 17.65
	Company size [a]	-0.03	0.13	[-0.29,0.24]	0.844		p <0.001 ***
	Gender of evaluated part-time worker: Male	0.74	0.14	[0.46,1.02]	<0.001 ***		
	Gender of evaluating manager: Male	0.45	0.13	[0.19,0.7]	<0.001 ***		
Step 3	Age	0.02	0.01	[0.01,0.04]	<0.001 ***	0.238	F(5,232) = 14.51
	Company size [a]	-0.03	0.13	[-0.29,0.24]	0.844		p <0.001 ***
	Gender of evaluated part-time worker: Male	0.57	0.2	[0.18,0.95]	0.004 **		
	Gender of evaluating manager: Male	0.31	0.17	[-0.03,0.64]	0.072		
	Interaction: Gender of manager x gender of part-time worker	0.35	0.27	[-0.17,0.88]	0.189		

Note. N = 119. B = unstandardized regression weights; *SE* = standard error; CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit.
[a] 0 = Small and medium-sized companies (<250 employees), 1 = Big companies (over 250 employees)

H1 ✓

H2 ✓

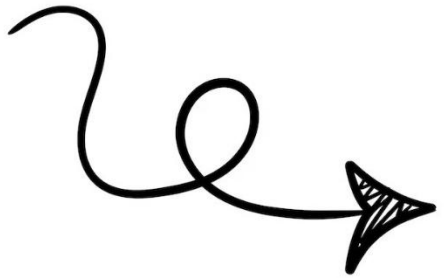
H3 ✗

Discussion

- Despite a gender-neutral policy on part-time work, stereotypes against male part-time employees in Switzerland persist, especially in male-dominated domains.
- Male managers tend to view part-time workers more negatively, which aligns with existing research.
- Although female managers are less likely to interpret part-time work as a sign of low career commitment, they also impose penalties on male part-time workers, offering limited protection against prevailing gender norms.
- The prevailing expectation among some managers that constant availability signals career commitment - particularly for male employees - highlights the urgent need to raise awareness of these biases and implement measures to address them.
- Further research should replicate these findings with a larger sample and improved study design, with particular focus given to traditionally male-dominated fields. Additionally, it should explore interventions to reduce managers' biases.

Thank you for your attention!

Děkuji za pozornost!



Barbara Germann
barbara.germann@fhnw.ch

Prof. Dr. Dörte Resch
doerte.resch@fhnw.ch

Connect with me on LinkedIn

Literature

Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations. Gender and Society, 4(2), 139–158. http://www.jstor.org/stable/189609

Backes-Gellner, U., Oswald, Y., & Tuor Sartore, S. (2014). Part-Time Employment—Boon to Women but Bane to Men? New Insights on Employer-Provided Training. Kyklos, 67(4), 463-481. https://doi.org/10.1111/kykl.12063

Balthasar, A., & Müller, F. (2018). Gender equality and evidence-based policy making: Experiences from social transfer and tax policy reforms. In B. Liebig, K. Gottschall, & B. Sauer (Eds.), Gender Equality in Context: Policies and Practices in Switzerland (1st ed., pp. 87–108). Verlag Barbara Budrich. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvbj7k3q.7

Becker, S. O., Fernandes, A., & Weichselbaumer, D. (2019). Discrimination in hiring based on potential and realized fertility: Evidence from a large-scale field experiment. Labour Economics, 59, 139-152. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2019.04.009

Beham, B., Drobnič, S., Präg, P., Baierl, A., & Eckner, J. (2018). Part-time work and gender inequality in Europe: a comparative analysis of satisfaction with work–life balance. European Societies, 21(3), 378–402. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2018.1473627

Bornatici, C., Gauthier, J.A. & Le Goff, J.M. (2020). Changing Attitudes Towards Gender Equality in Switzerland (2000–2017): Period, Cohort and Life-Course Effects. Swiss Journal of Sociology, 46(3), 2020. 559-585. https://doi.org/10.2478/sjs-2020-0027

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Chung, H. (2020). Gender, flexibility stigma and the perceived negative consequences of flexible working in the UK. Social Indicators Research, 151(2), 521–545. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-018-2036-7

Devicienti, F., Grinza, E., Manello, A., & Vannoni, D. (2019). What Are the Benefits of Having More Female Leaders? Evidence from the Use of Part-Time Work in Italy. ILR Review, 72(4), 897-926. https://doi.org/10.1177/0019793918800287

Fuwa, M. (2021). Women Managers' Impact on Use of Family-friendly Measures among Their Subordinates in Japanese Firms. Work, Employment and Society, 35(4), 716-734. https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017020987409

Literature

Klein, K. J., Berman, L. M., & Dickson, M. W. (2000). May I work part-time? An exploration of predicted employer responses to employee requests for part-time work. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 57(1), 85–101. https://doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.1999.1729

Kopp, D. (2022). Are recruiters reluctant to hire part-time working men? Evidence from online labor market data. KOF Working Papers, 508. https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000586460

Liebig, B., Gottschall, K., & Sauer, B. (Eds.). (2018). Gender Equality in Context: Policies and Practices in Switzerland (1st ed.). Verlag Barbara Budrich. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvbj7k3q

Makarova, E., Herzog, W. (2015). Gender Roles Within the Family: A Study Across Three Language Regions of Switzerland. In: Safdar, S., Kosakowska-Berezecka, N. (eds) Psychology of Gender Through the Lens of Culture. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-14005-6_12

Maxwell, G. A. (2005). Checks and balances: the role of managers in work–life balance policies and practices. Journal of Retailing and Consumer services, 12(3), 179-189.

McCarthy, A., Darcy, C., & Grady, G. (2010). Work-life balance policy and practice: Understanding line manager attitudes and behaviors. Human Resource Management Review, 20(2), 158-167. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2009.12.001

Pedulla, D. S. (2016). Penalized or Protected? Gender and the Consequences of Nonstandard and Mismatched Employment Histories. American Sociological Review, 81(2), 262-289. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122416630982

Peper, B., Dikkers, J., Vinkenburg, C., van Engen, M. (2011). Causes and Consequences of the Utilization of Work-Life Policies by Professionals: “Unconditional Supervisor Support Required”. In: Kaiser, S., Ringlstetter, M., Eikhof, D., Pina e Cunha, M. (eds) Creating Balance?. Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-16199-5_13

van Osch, Y., & Schaveling, J. (2017). The Effects of Part-Time Employment and Gender on Organizational Career Growth. Journal of Career Development, 47(3), 328-343. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845317728359

Williams, J. (2000). Unbending Gender: Why Family and Work Conflict and What to Do About It. Oxford Academic