

Working hours, autonomy, and subjectively perceived tension between work and life, a multi-level approach

Heejung Chung

Department of Sociology, Tilburg University
P1.183, Postbus 90153
5000LE Tilburg, the Netherlands
+31 13 466 8390
h.chung@uvt.nl

(word count: 296)

As work and family structures change, one of the key problems individuals face today is how to balance work with other life and family responsibilities. Many individuals are faced with the challenges of undertaking family and household responsibilities while taking up gainful employment at the same time, in addition to taking time for individual's leisure activities. Individuals thus face what is so called a "time squeeze". Several interesting questions arise from this time tension between work and life. Firstly, the extent to which the time tension is due to the absolute amount of time spent on each activity. Thus, if the tension can be explained by the absolute amount of hours spent at work and family, household responsibilities, or if it is more of a subjective issue of how individuals perceive the hours spent. Second aspect of interest is whether a worker's autonomy at work decreases the impact of (long) working hours on individual's perceived tension in work-life balance. We can also think of a cross-national variance in this relationship, where in some countries absolute hours spent and work autonomy have a larger impact on work-life balance tensions, whereas in other countries the impact is less. Thirdly, there is a question of whether different national contexts, such different institutions and socio-economic situations, impact the amount of tension felt by individuals. In this paper we use of a multi-level model. Through it, we can examine the reason behind the cross-national variance in the percentage of individuals perceiving work-life balance tensions, after taking various individual characteristics into account. In addition, we can examine the cross-national variance in the impact of hours and work autonomy on work-life balance tensions of individuals. The data used for this paper is the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) for the year 2007.