

**German Fathers and Their Preference
to Reduce Working Hours to
Care for Their Children**

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DFG Research Center (SFB) “From Heterogeneities to Inequalities”

Whether fat or thin, male or female, young or old – people are different. Alongside their physical features, they also differ in terms of nationality and ethnicity; in their cultural preferences, lifestyles, attitudes, orientations, and philosophies; in their competencies, qualifications, and traits; and in their professions. But how do such heterogeneities lead to social inequalities? What are the social mechanisms that underlie this process? These are the questions pursued by the DFG Research Center (Sonderforschungsbereich (SFB)) “From Heterogeneities to Inequalities” at Bielefeld University, which was approved by the German Research Foundation (DFG) as “SFB 882” on May 25, 2011.

In the social sciences, research on inequality is dispersed across different research fields such as education, the labor market, equality, migration, health, or gender. One goal of the SFB is to integrate these fields, searching for common mechanisms in the emergence of inequality that can be compiled into a typology. More than fifty senior and junior researchers and the Bielefeld University Library are involved in the SFB. Along with sociologists, it brings together scholars from the Bielefeld University faculties of Business Administration and Economics, Educational Science, Health Science, and Law, as well as from the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) in Berlin and the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg. In addition to carrying out research, the SFB is concerned to nurture new academic talent, and therefore provides doctoral training in its own integrated Research Training Group. A data infrastructure project has also been launched to archive, prepare, and disseminate the data gathered.

Research Project B3 “Interactions Between Capabilities in Work and Private Life: A Study of Employees in Different Work Organizations”

This research project primarily addresses “capabilities” in working and private life and the interrelations between them. Adapting Sen’s approach, capabilities are the ability to achieve one’s life goals. The project adopts a comprehensive view that identifies multidimensional states of inequality. Crucial is the recognition that pursuing one’s interests in one life domain may even constrain goal attainment in other life domains. The same personal circumstances and employment conditions may be perceived and evaluated differently against the background of heterogeneous life goals. The concept of employment relationships allows us to gain an overview of a wide range of different gratifications and different demands and stresses, against the background of different psychological contracts. On the level of employees, we therefore firstly study the heterogeneity of different employment relationships in companies situated in various business sectors. Secondly, we assess these employees in terms of their embedment in various forms and phases of life. Thus, also the situation and views of a partner will be considered.

In a next step this project examines how heterogeneities (e.g. gender, age, life style preferences, education) become social inequalities with a particular focus on the role of the organizational context. As possible mechanisms different individual interests within companies and private bonds being negotiated in different ways are investigated. Health also plays a role in these interdependencies influencing the prospects for successful multiple engagement in both life domains. It is a “hard” indicator of maladjustment.

In this project detailed studies of employees and characteristics of their companies are carried out. Companies play a dual role, first as negotiation partners and second as opportunity structures. Various actors within the companies and companies’ institutional and sector-specific context are considered.

Proceeding from a sample of 100 work organizations, an extended linked employer-employee design will be used to study an average of 65 employees in each organization. If employees have life partners, they will also be surveyed with a short version of the instrument. By combining these data with information from the same employees and their companies from the German Institute for Employment Research (IAB), we can achieve a unique density of information for large case numbers. The longitudinal design initiated during the first funding period allows distinguishing causal effects more clearly and to adequately study processes of discrimination and self-selection.

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German Fathers and Their Preference to Reduce Working Hours to Care for Their Children

The Relevance of the Family and Work Context

Abstract

This article studies the relevance of the workplace and family context as well as the experience of conflicts between the work and family domain for fathers' preference to reduce working hours to care for their children. Previous research was not able to disentangle whether the preference to reduce working hours is related to fathers' caring involvement or to other reasons. Integrating insights from work-family research and arguments on the relevance of the social context for preference formation we formulate need-based and opportunity-based arguments. Findings on data from the German study "Employment Relationships as Social Exchange" (beata), indicate that the experience of a work-family conflict as well as time-based workplace demands increase the likelihood of fathers' to hold the preference to reduce working hours, supporting need-based arguments. Our findings further call attention to the importance of the family-friendliness of the organisational culture for fathers' opportunity to develop the preference to reduce working hours to be more involved in caring tasks.

Keywords: fathers; working hours; preferences; family context; work context; demands and resources

1. Introduction

There is a large body of research showing that employed parents often struggle with the integration of work and family since demands at home and at work can be incompatible in some respect (e.g. Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Van Daalen et al., 2006; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Frone, 2003; Schieman et al. 2009). Reducing working hours is one common strategy of mothers to combine responsibilities of both life spheres (e.g. Van der Lippe, 2001; Rosenfeld & Birkelund, 1995). However, fathers rarely work reduced hours; they are even more likely to work long hours. In Germany, more than 50 percent of fathers work more than 40 hours a week (IfD Allensbach, 2010). This leads to the question whether fathers have the preference to work full-time and are able to arrange work and family responsibilities in a satisfying way. Otherwise fathers might also struggle with the integration of work and family life but have fewer opportunities to reduce working hours to care for children in comparison to mothers. For fathers it might be less acceptable to reduce their working hours for care responsibilities due to the prevailing idea that men are mainly responsible for the financial situation of the family (Fagan & Walthery, 2011; Becker, 1981). The difference between actual working hours and the ones fathers' want to work requires the focus on fathers' preferred working hours as well as on obstacles they face. Recent research has indeed shown that there is a disparity between actual and preferred working hours and that men increasingly want to reduce their working hours (Clarkberg & Moen, 2001; Hobson & Fahlén, 2009; Pleck, 1993; Pollmann-Schult, 2008, 2009; Thornthwaite, 2004). Bielenski and Wagner (2004) found for Europe that more than half of all employed men hold the preference to reduce their working hours. Reynolds and Aletraris (2006) analyzed the mismatch between preferred and actually working hours by using Australian survey data and found evidence for men's wish to reduce working hours. For the Netherlands, Van Echtelt, Glebbeek and Lindenberg (2006) showed that about 60 percent of employees wish to work fewer hours than their actual ones.

However, previous research was not able to investigate if the wish to reduce working hours is related to fathers' work-family situation and the preference to have more time to care for their children (MacInnes, 2005; Pollmann-Schult, 2008; Hobson & Fahlén, 2009). Based on theories of work-family conflict as well as resources and demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Greenhaus & Beutel, 1985) we develop "need-based" hypotheses suggesting that

difficulties with the integration of work and care lead to a higher probability for fathers' preferring a reduction of working hours to spend more time with their children. This wish is also likely to be dependent on resources and demands in the work and the family domain. On the other hand, we also consider "opportunity-based" arguments suggesting that preferences will be formed or adapted based on available opportunities or real-life situations individuals' experience (Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener, 2003; Shultz & Lepper, 1996; Hobson & Fahlén 2009; Sen, 1992, 1999). Based on this argumentation it can be assumed that fathers' preference of reducing working hours to care for their children can further depend on whether a reduction in working hours is an available opportunity in the work and family domain as well as on available alternatives for the integration of work and fatherhood.

Following from this, we pose the research question: *In what ways do the family and workplace context and the current experience with the integration of work and care influence fathers' preferences to reduce working hours to care for their children?* With this question, we contribute to previous research in the following ways. First, we investigate the work-family situation of fathers as there is less known about fathers' preferences to spend more time with their children compared to mothers. Second, we specify the desired reduction of working hours of fathers, taking into account only fathers who want to reduce their working hours in order to care for their children. Previous research was not able to investigate whether the desire to reduce working hours is related to the work-family situation or to other reasons for reducing working hours (Clarkberg & Moen, 2001; Hobson & Fahlén, 2009; Pollmann-Schult, 2008, 2009). Third, we integrate two theoretical perspectives - "need-based" and "opportunity-based" arguments - exploring their applicability for the explanation of fathers' preference to reduce working hours to care for their children in different work and family contexts in Germany.

For this research, we make use of data from the German study "Employment Relationships as Social Exchange" (beata). The advantage of this data is that it includes information on working hours preferences, which are specified for the reason of the preferred reduction. Moreover, it comprises information of employees in different work organisations which allows investigating the relevance of the workplace context for fathers' preference to reduce working hours due to family responsibilities. Next to this, the situation of German fathers is

especially interesting as traditional gender norms on care and income responsibilities of men and women are still prevalent (Blossfeld & Drobnič, 2001).

2. Theory and recent research

The preference to reduce working hours due to caring responsibilities reflects a specific strategy to integrate work and care as indicated by work-life research (Becker & Moen, 1999). It illustrates that the current way to arrange work and care is not successful e.g. because of a perceived conflict between work and care obligations. In addition, the current integration of work and care could be perceived as dissatisfying e.g. when fathers want to be more involved in caring in comparison to the current situation. Qualitative research on family-adaptive strategies has indeed identified a reduction in working hours as one option to better integrate work and care (Becker & Moen, 1999). We summarize this as “need-based” explanations of fathers’ preference to reduce working hours.

However, not holding the preference to reduce working hours does not necessarily imply a successful integration of work and care or that fathers are satisfied with the amount of time they spent with their children. Following arguments on preference formation, preferences will be formed or adapted based on individuals’ opportunities or the real-life situations individuals’ experience (Lucas et al., 2003; Shultz & Lepper, 1996). The preference to reduce working hours can further depend on whether a reduction in working hours is an available opportunity for the integration of work and care as well as on existing alternatives. This is in line with Sen’s (1992, 1999) capabilities approach, which points to differences in capabilities to lead the life one values and the relevance of the social context for preference formation. Hobson and Fahlén (2009) used Sen’s approach to explain how the social context shapes fathers’ preferences to reduce working hours. We summarize this as “opportunity-based” explanations of fathers’ preference to reduce working hours to care for their children.

To explain differences in fathers’ likelihood to prefer a reduction in working hours due to caring responsibilities we consider the experience of a work-family conflict, the division of labour within couples as well as workplace demands and resources which are likely to be relevant for need-based and opportunity-based processes as will be illustrated in the following part.

2.1 Work-family conflict approach

Work-family conflict is defined as “a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect” (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985: 77). A high level of effort and engagement in the work domain could therefore cause conflicts of meeting responsibilities in the family domain (Allen et al., 2001; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Thomas & Ganster, 1995; Voydanoff, 2004; Kinman & Jones, 2008). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) distinguish between different types of conflict. A time-based conflict occurs when time pressure in one role makes it difficult to fulfil expectations from the other domain. Strain-based conflict means the exposure to stress in one domain, which has an effect on the ability to perform in the other domain. As time and energy needed in the work domain can inhibit the fulfilment of caring obligations of fathers’ in the family domain (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), a reduction in working hours is a likely preference as it allows to meet caring obligations at home. Following these need-based arguments we hypothesize: *The higher the amount of work- family conflict the higher the likelihood of fathers’ desire to reduce working hours to have more time to care for their children (H1).*

2.2 Family context

In line with the argumentation of Hobson and Fahlén (2009), it can be assumed that the coordination process within partnerships involves a division between work and household labour which has implications for fathers’ opportunities to consider a reduction in working hours. Theories on gender role models (Blossfeld & Drobnič, 2001; Sainsbury, 1994) as well as on cultural role models (Pfau-Effinger, 2009) suggest that norms and values about the division of labour in couple households have an influence on the labour supply behaviour of women and men. More “traditional” gender norms are assumed to lead to a division of labour where the male partner specializes on the labour market and the female partner at home. This implies that “traditional” gender norms can constrain fathers’ opportunities to hold the preference to reduce working hours based on expectations that the male partner has a greater share of the responsibility for the financial situation of the family and less responsibility for caring tasks (Bielby & Bielby, 1989; Coltrane, 2004). Moreover, according to economic theories the possibility to reduce working hours is also dependent on the financial situation of

the family. Economic theory suggests that the division of labour is likely based on maximizing economic benefit of the family (e.g. Becker, 1981; Mincer & Polachek, 1974). As Germany has one of the largest gender wage gaps and most women still earn less than men do, mothers often decide to do the major part of household and caring tasks whereas fathers decide to spend most of their time in the labour market (Blau & Kahn, 2007; Brines, 1994; Buding & England, 2001). Therefore, a “traditional” division of labour can also indicate financial restrictions to the opportunity to hold the preference to reduce working hours of fathers, whereas a more egalitarian division of labour indicates financial opportunities to consider a reduction (Pollmann-Schult, 2008). Based on both arguments, need-based and opportunity-based, one can hypothesise: *In couples where fathers have specialized in working in the labour market and the female partner in caring in the household, fathers are less likely to hold the preference to reduce their working hours to care for their children (H2).*

2.3 Workplace context - Demands

In the work domain demands are also likely to be important for fathers’ desire to work fewer hours. Work-family conflict arguments (e.g. Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Voydanoff, 2004; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and empirical research on the likelihood of a work-life conflict and the satisfaction with the integration of work and private life (e.g. Abendroth & Den Dulk, 2011; Byron, 2005) stress the relevance of workplace demands such as long working hours for the experience of a work-family conflict. Similarly, implicit employer expectations on availability and flexibility were found to matter (Böhm & Diewald, 2012). However, holding the preference to reduce working hours due to high demands at work does not necessarily imply the experience of a work-family conflict. Even if there is no conflict between work and care obligations fathers can have the general desire to be more involved in caring with the help of a reduction in working hours. This is especially likely when their involvement in caring tasks is little due to high demands at work. Therefore, one can expect that fathers who work in highly demanding workplaces are more likely to prefer to reduce their working hours irrespectively of an experienced conflict between work and family life. Pointing to need-based arguments we hypothesize: *Fathers who experience highly demanding workplaces (e.g. indicated by long working hours, work stress, assumed employer expectations of*

flexibility in working time and of putting the job first) are more likely to hold the preference to reduce their working hours to have more time to care for their children (H3A).

Research on working time regimes and work norms further stress the prevalence of the ideal worker norm with continuous full time employment where family responsibilities cannot be voiced (Hobson & Fahlén, 2009; Kelly, Ammons, Chermack & Moen., 2010; Moen, 2011; Rubery, Smith, & Fagan, 1998). High demands at work, such as work stress and long working hours would not allow for a reduction in working hours, as work responsibilities would be more difficult to fulfill in shorter periods. Therefore, it can be argued that it would not be possible to think about a reduction of working hours when high work demands are experienced. In addition, implicit demands, such as expectations of putting the job first, are likely to have the same effects. These implicit expectations are especially likely to be experienced by fathers, as employers seem to expect that male employees who want to advance their careers must be present at all times without interruptions or reduced working hours (Fagan & Walthery, 2011; Jurczyk & Lange, 2009; Moen, 2003; Possinger, 2013). Men who request time off to have more time for private and family activities often face resentment from their colleagues or supervisors (Jurczyk & Lange, 2009). This may lead to the consequence that fathers think that they would not have the chance to reduce their working hours. We therefore assume an inability to consider a reduction in working hours, due to highly demanding workplaces in line with opportunity-based arguments. Contrasting to hypothesis H3A we hypothesize: *Fathers who experience highly demanding workplaces (e.g. indicated by long working hours, work stress, assumed employer expectations of flexibility in working time and of putting the job first) are less likely to hold the preference to reduce their working hours to have more time to care for their children (H3B).*

2.4 Workplace context - Resources

In addition, the resources and demands approach also stresses the relevance of resources at work, which can prevent or buffer the negative consequences of work demands for the integration of work and family life (Bakker & Demerouti, 2006). For example, flexible working hours and greater autonomy over one's schedule allow for greater flexibility in responding to unpredictable demands at home, decreasing the likelihood of a time-based work-family conflict (e.g. Allen, Shockley & Poteat, 2008; Böhm & Diewald, 2012). Thus, it

can be assumed that the need to reduce working hours is less urgent when resources at the workplace prevent from a work-family conflict as they offer alternative possibilities for the integration of work and care. This is also in line with the findings of Hobson and Fahlén (2009), which show that fathers' with low work autonomy and flexibility are more likely to prefer to reduce working hours in comparison to those with a high autonomy and flexibility. In addition, research has found that the family friendliness of the organisational culture has a significant influence on the experience of a work-family conflict (Voydanoff, 2004; Allen, 2001; Thompson, Beauvais & Lyness, 1999; Lewis & Cooper, 1987). Thus, we hypothesise the following: *Fathers who experience family-friendly workplaces (e.g. indicated by flexible working hours, job autonomy, and a family-friendly work culture) are less likely to hold the preference to reduce their working hours to have more time to care for their children (H4A).*

Next to workplace demands, also workplace resources are assumed to be important for fathers' preference to reduce working hours based on opportunity-based arguments. A family-friendly work culture which has been identified for some workplaces can imply that fathers have better opportunities to achieve a reduction in working hours to have more time to care for their children as it indicates that family obligations can be voiced within the company (Haas, Allard, & Hwang, 2002; Hobson & Fahlén, 2009; Hobson, 2011). Such family-friendly organisational cultures can thus give fathers a sense that it is accepted to wish a reduction in working hours to have more time to care for their children. Workplace resources such as flexible working and job autonomy can also indicate this family-friendliness. We hypothesize: *Fathers who experience family-friendly workplaces (e.g. indicated by flexible working hours, job autonomy, and a family-friendly work culture) are more likely to hold the preference to reduce their working hours to have more time to care for their children (H4B).*

3. Data and Operationalisation

3.1 Data Set and Dependent Variable

We investigate the relevance of the experience of a work-family conflict and of the family and workplace context for fathers' preference to reduce working hours to have more time to care for their children by using data from the project "Employment Relationships as Social Exchange" (beata). These data provide detailed information about the relationship between work and private life for West German employees located in six work organisations in different branches of the private and public business sectors and their partners. The data were obtained through cross-sectional surveys conducted between 2008 and 2010. They cover employees aged 18-55¹ of the six work organisations: three universities with approximately 2,500 employees each, two steel mills with more than 10,000 employees and one savings bank with approximately 2,000 employees. By using a stratified random sample with a response rate about 25 percent, we interviewed 1701 employees, 1257 in universities, 242 in steel industry and 202 in the saving bank. We stratified the sample by sex, age and employment level to have enough cases for analyses for the most relevant groups².

The selected sample includes employed fathers as we focus on fathers' preference to reduce working hours due to family responsibilities (N=452). We excluded participants who did not give answers to the question about actual working hours and preferred hours (n = 69). Moreover, we did not use fathers who did not give valid information about the main reason for their desire to reduce their working hours (n = 46). Lastly, we deleted respondents with a child 16 years or older (n = 64) as these children need less care. Furthermore we did not use respondents who did not provide information about a possible intimate partnership (n = 21), and those who wanted to reduce their working hours for reasons other than to have more time to care for their children (n = 41)³. This resulted in a final sample of 211 employed fathers.

¹ For professors and executives, the range goes up to 65 years.

² Data comprise almost 50 percent female respondents (48.3%) and oversample highly qualified employees.

³ From these 41 employees 24 wanted reduce their working hours in order to reduce the demands induced by work, 3 to be able to cope better with household demands, 9 to have more spare time, 1 to have more time to work more for another employment and 4 in order to "other reasons".

3.2 Dependent variable

We measured the preference to reduce working hours due to family responsibilities on the basis of three questions⁴: First, employees were asked the number of their actual working hours. Second, they were asked about their preferred number of working hours, bearing in mind that their income would change in tandem with this preferred number of hours. If the preferred amount of actual working hours was at minimum two hours less than their stated amount, respondents were additionally asked the following question: “What is the main reason for your desire to reduce your working hours?” Respondents could give one of this answers: (1) “Because I want to reduce my work-strains”, (2) “To have more time to care for my children”, (3) “Because I need more time for a person in need of care”, (4) “To cope better with daily housework”, (5) “Because spare time is more important to me than money” and (6) “To have more time for a sideline job”. In addition, respondents could provide an open answer. Our sample comprises 101 male employed fathers prefer to reduce their working hours to care for their children and 110 employed fathers who do not at all hold the preference to reduce their working hours. This distribution confirms the findings of other studies. Studies that are representative for the German workforce identified a quite similar amount of employees, who want to reduce their actual working hours, ranging from 47 percent in 2003 (Bauer, Groß, Lehmann, & Munz, 2004, p. 64) to 54 percent in 2008 (Grözinger, Matiaske, & Tobsch, 2008, p.10). Of those who want to reduce working hours 20 fathers prefer to work part time (less than 35 hours weekly). Thus, the majority (n = 81) wants to work reduced hours, but more than 35 hours. We see that the average amount of a preferred reduction is by about 9.63 hours.

3.3 Independent Variables

3.3.1 Work-family conflict

To assess work-family conflict (wfc) we use the short version of the work-life conflict scale constructed by Carlson, Kacmar, and Williams (2000), as suggested by Matthiews, Kath, and Barnes-Farrell (2011). The scale consists of one item for time-based, one for strain-based and

⁴ The first two questions are an established measurement, which are also used in the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) and from the ISO-Institute (Bauer, Groß, Lehmann, & Munz, 2004) as well as in the European Social Survey used in the study of Hobson and Fahlén (2009).

one for behaviour-based work-to-life conflicts. We excluded the latter dimension because its empirical evidence is challenged (see Keeny, Boyd, Sinha, Westring, & Ryan, 2013, p.224). Thus our wfc scale shows the frequency of experiencing time-based and strain-based wfc from (0) never to (8) very frequently. Time-based conflict is measured by the item „the time I must devote to my job keeps me from participating equally in household responsibilities and activities”. The item for strain-based conflict reads as „when I get home from work I am often too frazzled to participate in family activities/responsibilities”.

3.3.2 Family Context

Division of labour

In line with our second hypothesis, we categorised the household situation based on two variables. To measure *division of childcare*, we used the question, “Who performs the following tasks – you, your partner or both?” Possible responses were (1) “mainly me”, (2) “mainly my partner”, (3) “both equally” and (4) “not required”. We categorised respondents into (1) partner undertakes most of the childcare, and (2) both participate equally or the male partner takes the main responsibility for childcare. We measured the *working status and working time of partner* based on three categories. The first (1) was “not employed”, which included all respondents with an unemployed partner. The other categories comprised all employees whose partner worked and distinguishes between a part time job (<35 hours) and a full time job (“35 hours or more” weekly).

3.3.3 Workplace Context

Demanding workplaces

We considered several workplace demands. We used information on implicit demands such as the assumed *importance of flexibility of working hours* within the respective working organisation and the assumed *employer expectations of putting the job first*. To measure the former, we used the item “need to be flexible with working hours”, which is introduced by the question, “In your opinion, how important are the following behavioural patterns and skills for employees in your position or in a comparable position in the organisation with which you are employed?” Employees could rate importance on a five-point continuum ranging from (1)

“very important” to (5) “completely unimportant”. We reversed the polarity of given answers so that the variable used to measure the need to be flexible with working hours ranged from (1) “completely unimportant” to (5) “very important”. To measure employers’ expectations that employees give job responsibilities a higher priority than private responsibilities, we used a measurement that based on the FSOP-scale constructed by Allen (2001). Respondents were asked to rate the truthfulness of the following statement: “In this organisation, employees are expected to put their jobs ahead of family matters”. The polarity of choice represented by the five-point continuum from (1) “absolutely true” to (5) “absolutely not true” was reversed, resulting in a variable measuring expectations of putting the job ahead of family matters. This variable ranged from (1) “absolutely not true” to (5) “absolutely true”. To measure explicit demands we used information on working hours and work pressure. *Actual working hours* measures an employee’s actual working time per week (metrically, in hours worked). To measure *working pressure*, we used the question: “How often do you feel time pressure or pressure to perform in your job?” Possible responses on a five-point scale ranged from (1) “never” to (5) “very frequently”.

3.3.4 Family-friendly workplaces

To consider the family-friendliness of the work organisation we first used information on workplace resources for the integration of work and care, namely the degree of *working time flexibility* and *job autonomy*. Respondents rated the opportunities to adjust their working times to meet non-work demands on a six-point continuum ranging from (1) “very good” to (6) “I do not have this opportunity”. We reversed the order of the answer choices so that our indicator measured working time flexibility from (1) “low” to (6) “high”. Based on the measurement of Breugh (1985) *autonomy over time schedule* was measured by the item “I am allowed to decide how to go about getting my job done”, with answers ranging from (1) “strongly disagree” to (5) “strongly agree”. The measurement of *supportive work culture* is derived from the work-family culture scale created by Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness (1999). Respondents were asked the following items: (1) “In this organisation, employees who participate in available work family programs are viewed as less serious about their careers than those who do not participate in these programs”; (2) “In this organisation, employees are encouraged to make arrangements to balance work and life”; and (3) “In this

organisation, employees receive a lot of support to meet occupational as well as private responsibilities”. The employees could rate the truthfulness of each of these items on a five-point continuum ranging from (0) “absolutely true” to (4) “absolutely not true”. We reversed the polarity of items (2) and (3) and constructed an additive index for these items. We divided this scale by 3 so that it measures working culture on a scale ranging from 0 “family unfriendly” to 4 “family friendly”.

3.3.5 Control Variables

We further considered the *age of the youngest child*, *professional position* and the *income* status of fathers as possible predictors of fathers’ preferences to work reduced hours. *Age of the youngest child* grouped the age of the youngest child into three categories, to capture the different age-groups of children in public childcare or school: “under 3 years” (nursery), “3 to <12 years” (kindergarten and elementary school), and “12 years and older” (secondary level). To determine professional position, we measured the job level, at which employees are employed. This approach was necessary, because within the organisations of the private sector of our sample advanced internal vocational training plays a greater role to fill higher positions than educational training institutionalized by the public. We distinguish between low and medium- and highly qualified employees. Low and medium-qualified indicates a job position that requires vocational training but no university degree; highly qualified indicates a job position that requires a university degree. A father’s *income* was measured with information on the logarithm of the gross monthly income. It is an important control variable as the question on a reduction in working hours also implies that the income would change accordingly. Moreover, the income implies possibilities to outsource caring tasks and can indicate a high career orientation. In addition, we consider the *economic sector* distinguishing between the private and public sector as it is likely that it has an influence on fathers’ ability to develop the preference to reduce working hours, as the public sector is more likely to offer a better integration of work and family compared to the private sector. Table 1 and table 2 provide the descriptive for all independent variables.

Table 1: Sample distribution of categorised variables differentiated by fathers' desire to reduce their working hours to have more time to care for their children

	Total		Wish to reduce working hours (%* ²)	
	N	%* ¹	No	Yes
Control variables				
Age of the youngest child				
under 3 years	65	30.8	46.1	53.9
3 to < 12 years	113	53.6	54.0	46.0
12 years and older	33	15.6	57.6	42.4
Professional position				
(Semi-) qualified	73	34.6	75.3	24.7
Highly qualified	138	65.4	39.9	60.1
Business sector				
Private sector	74	35.1	59.5	40.5
Public sector	137	64.9	48.2	51.8
Family context				
Working status and working time of partner				
Not employed	80	37.9	47.5	42.5
up to 35 hours	90	42.7	56.7	43.3
35 hours and more	41	19.4	51.2	48.8
Division of childcare				
The female partner does most of the childcare	156	73.9	50.0	50.0
Partners share more equally childcare tasks	55	26.1	58.2	41.8
Total	211	100.0	110	101

Source: BEATA-data (own analyses)

Note: *¹ Column percentage; *² Row percentage

Table 2: Sample distribution of metric/ordinal variables differentiated by fathers' desire to reduce their working hours to have more time to care for their children

	Total	Wish to reduce working hours	
		No	Yes
	Mean (standard deviation)	Mean (standard deviation)	Mean (standard deviation)
Control variables			
Logarithm of gross monthly income	8.30 (0.54)	8.22 (0.54)	8.39 (0.53)
Work-family conflict			
	3.42 (1.49)	3.14 (1.50)	3.72 (1.43)
Workplace demands			
Importance of flexibility of working hours	3.84 (1.06)	3.81 (1.12)	3.88 (1.00)
Expectations of putting the job first	2.87 (1.24)	2.61 (1.26)	3.15 (1.15)
Working hours	45.11 (11.21)	40.97 (11.16)	49.62 (9.44)
Working pressure	3.63 (0.84)	3.58 (0.89)	3.67 (0.79)
Workplace resources			
Working time flexibility	4.53 (1.02)	4.71 (1.01)	4.34 (0.99)
Autonomy over time schedule	3.95 (1.06)	3.94 (1.07)	3.96 (1.07)
Supportive work culture	1.95 (0.97)	1.91 (0.99)	1.99 (0.98)
Total (N)	211	110	101

Source: BEATA-data (own analysis)

3.4 Methods

Our analyses are based on a binary logistic regression model in which the independent variables are incorporated stepwise. We address the clustering of individuals within work organisations using robust standard errors. To avoid losing cases due to missing data for one or more of the variables used, we imputed missing values on the independent variables using multiple imputation via chained equations (Royston & White, 2011). We imputed the income for 15 cases, the expectation of putting the job first for 37 cases, the importance of time flexibility for 5 cases and the work culture for 13 cases.

In the first model of our analyses, we include the control variables and work-family conflict. In the second model, we capture the division of labour within the family context by including information on the labour market participation of the spouse and the division of childcare. In the subsequent two models, the control variables and information on demanding and family friendly workplaces are added.

4. Results

Table 3 presents the results of our analyses on fathers' preferences to reduce their working hours to have more time to care for their children. In model 1, we include the indicator on the experience of a work-family conflict and the control variables. Our results imply that fathers who experience a conflict between work and family life are more likely to desire a reduction in working hours to care for their children. This is in line with the need-based hypothesis 1.

Model 2 further includes information on the working status of the female partner as well as on the division of childcare. The results provide no evidence for hypothesis 2 on the relevance of the division of labour within the household for fathers' preference to reduce working hours to care for their children.

In model 3 we added different workplace demands to the estimation. The results show that expectations of putting the job first and long working hours increase fathers' preference to reduce their working hours due to caring responsibilities. These results on time-based work demands support the need-based hypothesis H3A, which argued that fathers who experience highly demanding workplaces are more likely to hold the preference to reduce their working hours to have more time to care for their children.

However, those fathers' who experience heavy work pressures are less likely to desire to reduce their working hours. This finding on a strain-based work demand is in line with the opportunity-based argument of hypothesis 3B suggesting that fathers who experience highly demanding workplaces are less likely to hold the preference to reduce their working hours to have more time to care for their children. The importance of flexibility of working time points in a similar direction but is not significant.

In model 4, we include the indicators for family-friendly workplaces, which also seem to be of importance for fathers' preference to reduce working hours when we consider the increase in the explained variance. We see that flexible working time affects the desire to reduce working hours negatively. If fathers can use flextime, the desire to reduce working hours is less than it would be if employees lack this option. The effect of job autonomy points in the same direction but is not significant. These findings are in line with the need-based hypothesis H4A, which proposed that fathers who experience family-friendly workplaces are less likely to hold the preference to reduce their working hours to have more time to care for their children. Moreover, the results show that the experience of a family-friendly workplace is

related to the experience of a work-family conflict as indicated in the disappearance of the significance of work-family conflict in the last model. This provides further evidence for the need-based arguments.

However, the effect of a supportive work culture is significant and positive. When employees feel supported by their employer, they seem to be more likely to be able to consider a reduction in working hours to care for their children. This result supports hypothesis H4B regarding the relevance opportunities for preference formation suggesting that fathers who experience family-friendly workplaces are more likely to hold the preference to reduce their working hours to have more time to care for their children.

Table 3: Fathers' desire to reduce working hours to have more time to care for their children (binary logistic regressions, odds ratios)

	M1	M2	M3	M4
Work-family conflict	1.26***	1.24**	1.19**	1.10
Family context				
Working status and working time of partner				
Not employed	--	.98	1.14	1.21
up to 35 hours	--	.83	.84	.90
35 hours and more	--	1	1	1
Division of childcare				
The female partner does most of the childcare	--	1	1	1
Partners share more equally childcare tasks	--	.86	1.32	1.49
Workplace demands				
Importance of flexibility of working hours	--	--	.99	.96
Expectations of putting the job first	--	--	1.37*	1.55**
Working hours	--	--	1.10**	1.10**
Working pressure	--	--	.69**	.65**
Workplace resources				
Working time flexibility	--	--	--	.75*
Autonomy over time schedule	--	--	--	.78
Supportive work culture	--	--	--	1.40**
Control variables				
Age of the youngest child				
under 3 years	1	1	1	1
3 to <12 years	.94	.98	1.05	.93
12 years and older	.75	.78	.86	.78
Professional position				
(Semi-)qualified	1	1	1	1
Highly qualified	3.91**	3.93**	2.77**	3.45**
Logarithm of gross monthly income				
1.06	1.02	.51	.48*	
Business sector				
Private sector	1	1	1	1
Public sector	1.22	1.23	.70	.64
Pseudo R² (mean over 10 imputations)	.105	.107	.195	.223
N	211	211	211	211

Source: BEATA-data (own analysis) * p<0.1 ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01

5. Discussion

This study is among the first to analyse fathers' desire to reduce working hours explicitly addressing caring responsibilities at home. Applying work-family conflict, resources and demands approaches (Bakker & Demerouti, 2006) as well as theoretical arguments on the relevance of capabilities and opportunities for preference formation (Lichtenstein & Slovic, 2006; Sen, 1999; Hobson & Fahlen, 2009) we formulated and explored need-based and opportunity-based arguments for fathers' preference to reduce working hours to care for their children.

Our results provide first evidence that both need-based as well as opportunity-based arguments help to explain fathers' preferences to reduce working hours to care for their children. In line with need-based arguments, the experience of a work-family conflict seems to increase the likelihood of fathers to prefer to reduce working hours. This is in line with qualitative research on strategies integrating work and care (Becker & Moen, 1999). Moreover, need-based arguments are supported when we consider time-related demands in the workplace such as long working hours and the expectation to put the job first. The expectations of putting the job first is indirectly a time-related demand as family responsibilities need to be postponed when work responsibilities arise. Concerning workplaces resources, it seems that flexible working time is an alternative strategy to integrate work and care, making a reduction in working hours less necessary.

Opportunity-based arguments were supported when we considered the strain-based demand work pressure and the family-friendliness of the work culture. One possible explanation is that work-strain cannot be eliminated by a reduction in working hours. Such a reduction would rather increase work-related stress as job tasks would need to be done in shorter periods of time. This finding implies that fathers with high workplace stress are unable to develop a desire to spend more time with their children, in line with opportunities arguments (Lichtenstein & Slovic, 2006; Sen, 1999). Moreover, a family-friendly working culture seems to allow developing the preference to reduce working hours to care for children. One argument is that it would be more accepted and more easily realised in a supportive work culture (e.g. Anxo, Fagan, McCann, Lee, & Messenger, 2004). This is in line with Hobson and Fahlén (2009) who found that working time regimes matter for fathers' ability to consider a reduction in working hours. These findings call attention to the important role of employers,

supervisors and colleagues in achieving a higher involvement of men in caring tasks. However, there is still a long way towards a greater acceptance of fathers' preferences to reduce working hours and to play a larger role as attentive parent.

That the influence of demanding workplaces and family-friendly workplaces provide evidence for both - need-based and opportunity-based arguments - asks to further develop arguments under which circumstances need-based or opportunity-based processes dominate and to find measurements to further disentangle both. It is possible that due to highly demanding workplaces fathers experience a work-family conflict but do not prefer to reduce working hours because it is not an available opportunity in their work organisation. On the other hand it is possible that when conflicts between work and family life are severe and strong due to highly demanding work circumstances such as long working hours need-based influences outweigh opportunity-based influences. Finding a positive effect of a family-friendly work culture but not of job autonomy and flexible working implies that the latter do not necessarily indicate a family-friendly work organisation. This is also in line with existing research suggesting that workplace resources are beneficial when the organisational culture is family-friendly (e.g. Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999).

Our results further indicate that the family context is not that important for fathers' preference to reduce working hours for family reasons. This might be related to the fact that our sample included a high amount of couples in a male breadwinner family model with an unemployed housewife. However, also the study of Blau and Kahn (2007) did not reveal that the income of the female partner plays an important role for father's extent of labour market supply.

Our research holds several limitations. The analysis is based on a small number of cases and is not representative for the whole German economy. Therefore, the results need to be validated in future research. Moreover, our research did not allow investigating the relevance of the family and workplace context for the realization of working hour preferences due to the lack of longitudinal data. However, as an explorative study it points to relevance of both need-based and opportunity-based arguments and that is necessary to further disentangle both. Moreover, this study shows that it is important to investigate fathers' preferences to reduce working hours and to specify the reason of the preferred reduction. In addition, further insights for the debate on active fatherhood e.g. on restrictions fathers' face are provided. It further opens the question on possibilities for organisational change e.g. if family-friendly

work environments allow fathers to voice their preferences it might be one possibility to encourage active fatherhood if this is a social or political goal. Finally, this study suggests that fathers' especially want to reduce their overwork to have more time to care for their children which has implications for working time regulations.

This research provides recommendations for further research. In the future, it would be useful to examine longitudinal data on fathers' desire to reduce their working hours to investigate whether and under which circumstances fathers' realize their preferences. Moreover, the collection of linked employer-employee data from more work organisations would help to disentangle within- and between-workplace variation in fathers' desire to reduce their working hours to care for their children. Finally, a data collection of fathers' preferences to reduce working hours specified for the reason to care for children in other countries would allow to investigate whether the relevance of the experience of a work-family conflict, and the workplace and family context vary between countries.

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