



Recession, work-time and work-life balance: class inequalities in the UK

Work-Life Balance, Fairness and Social Justice during Recession and Austerity.

University of Manchester, 11 April 2014

Tracey Warren, University of Nottingham

Work-life and time

1. Too many hours
2. Too few
3. Class inequalities

Project

- 'British Academy' funded sociological research project (2011-13 BR100093).
- Analysis of BHPS (15,000 respondents) and US (100,000) data

Class- the first middle class recession?



95 Percent Of The Jobs Lost During The Recession Were Middle Class Jobs

By Michael Snyder, on May 1st, 2012



Who is the biggest loser in the ongoing decline of the U.S. economy? Is it the wealthy? No, the stock market has been soaring lately and their incomes are actually going up. Is it the poor? Well, the poor are definitely hurting very badly, but when you don't have much to begin with you don't have much to lose. Unfortunately, it is

the middle class that has lost the most during this economic downturn.

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Dan Hyde

Death tax trap: the allowance frozen for 33 years



Wayne Evans

Beware the dangers of turning to cash



Richard Dyson

HMRC is addicted to property

Middle class finances hardest hit by recession

Middle class finances were hit hardest by the recession, new figures indicate, as the value of savings and investments was eroded.



"Squeezed middle" named word of the year

Ed Miliband's phrase beats "Arab spring" and "phone hacking" to the honour.

BY GEORGE EATON | PUBLISHED 23 NOVEMBER, 2011 - 10:35

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It might have been relentlessly mocked by the Westminster village but Ed

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The squeezed middle deserves far better

David Cameron has to come up with an agenda that will see those suffering from that "protracted squeeze" benefit from the recovery



Who exactly are Ed Miliband's squeezed middle class?

Research suggests membership depends on personal perceptions as well as incomes

Angela Monaghan

The Guardian, Tuesday 14 January 2014 23.36 GMT

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Are you stuck in the Squeezed Middle? Why we're feeling the pinch like never before

By ROSIE MILLIARD

PUBLISHED: 00:01, 9 March 2014 | UPDATED: 00:02, 9 March 2014

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Middle-class families are feeling the pinch like never before as they struggle to cling on to normal standards of living while their financial security takes a hit. Rosie Millard looks at what the future holds



Work-time and the crisis

1. Paid work-time reduction?

- a. Unemployment
- b. Work-time underemployment e.g.
 - Part-time replaces full-time jobs
 - Cuts in over-time
 - Cuts in usual hours
 - 'economic short-time workers'

1. Work-time expansion?

- a. Longer hours for those who remain in work
- b. Paid and/or unpaid work-time expansion
- c. 'Housework'

Paid work-time since 2008

Aggregate fall in hours 2008-9
(e.g. Grimshaw and Rafferty 2012)

Work-time underemployment feature of UK in the crisis
Bell and Blanchflower (2013)
Michel Lallement (2011)

Too many hours in WLB

Veblen 1899: long hours of paid work v. free time

Linder 1970: 'time squeezed' societies

Schor's 1991 over-worked American

WLB

WLB literatures

Suzan Lewis et al. (2007: 361)

the core group in 'WL discourses' are 'relatively affluent professional and white collar workers – both men and women – especially in the knowledge economy, who have difficulty in finding time for personal life because of the all encompassing nature of many contemporary forms of work'.

e.g. Dex and Bond (2005: 635)

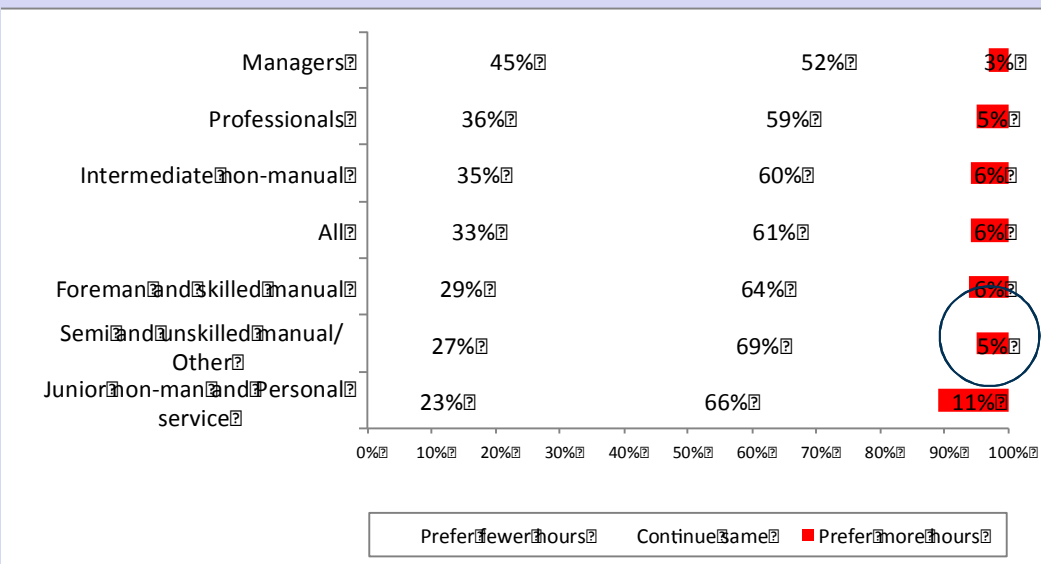
"If the government wishes to affect the work–life balance of employees in Britain, the single most important change needed is to reduce long weekly working hours, and especially in the higher grade occupations".

Long hours workers in the UK?

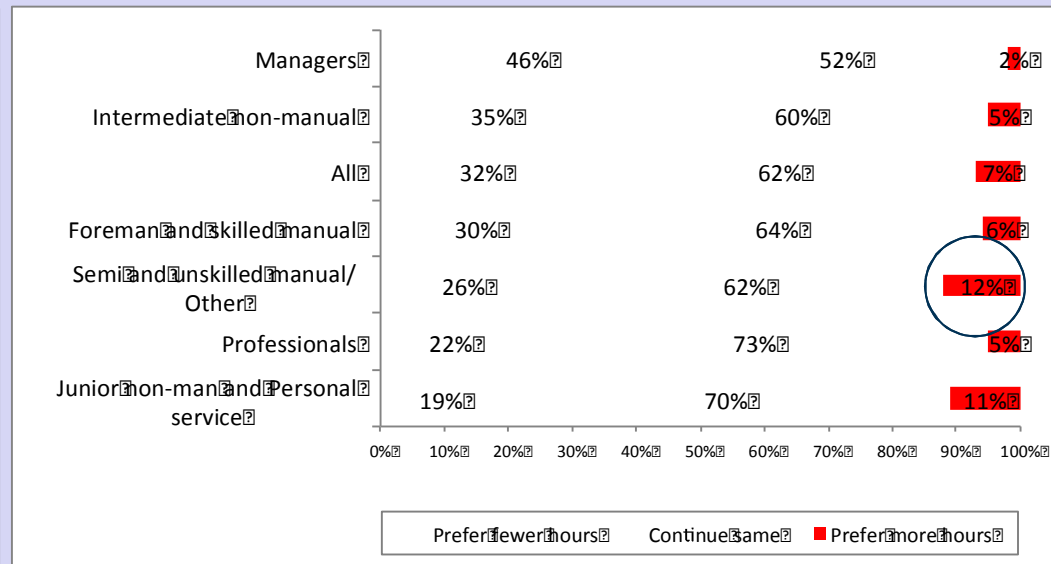
- Men (mostly)
- Top *and* bottom of the occupational hierarchy
- Men at the top more likely to express preferences for working fewer hours pre recession.

- ? Who works 'Too many' hours?
- ? Who works 'Too few'?: low but rising

Figure 1. Hours preferences. Male employees (18-64)
2005-6



2008-9



Source: BHPS

Too few hours in WL research?

Economic roots of 'WL imbalance'

Warren, Pascall and Fox (2009) UK study: an **economic fear** of working 'too few' hours amongst working class men

But relative absence of 'too few' in WLB

e.g. the *Establishment Survey on Working Time and Work-Life Balance*: exploring the most favourable work-time initiatives for better WLB.

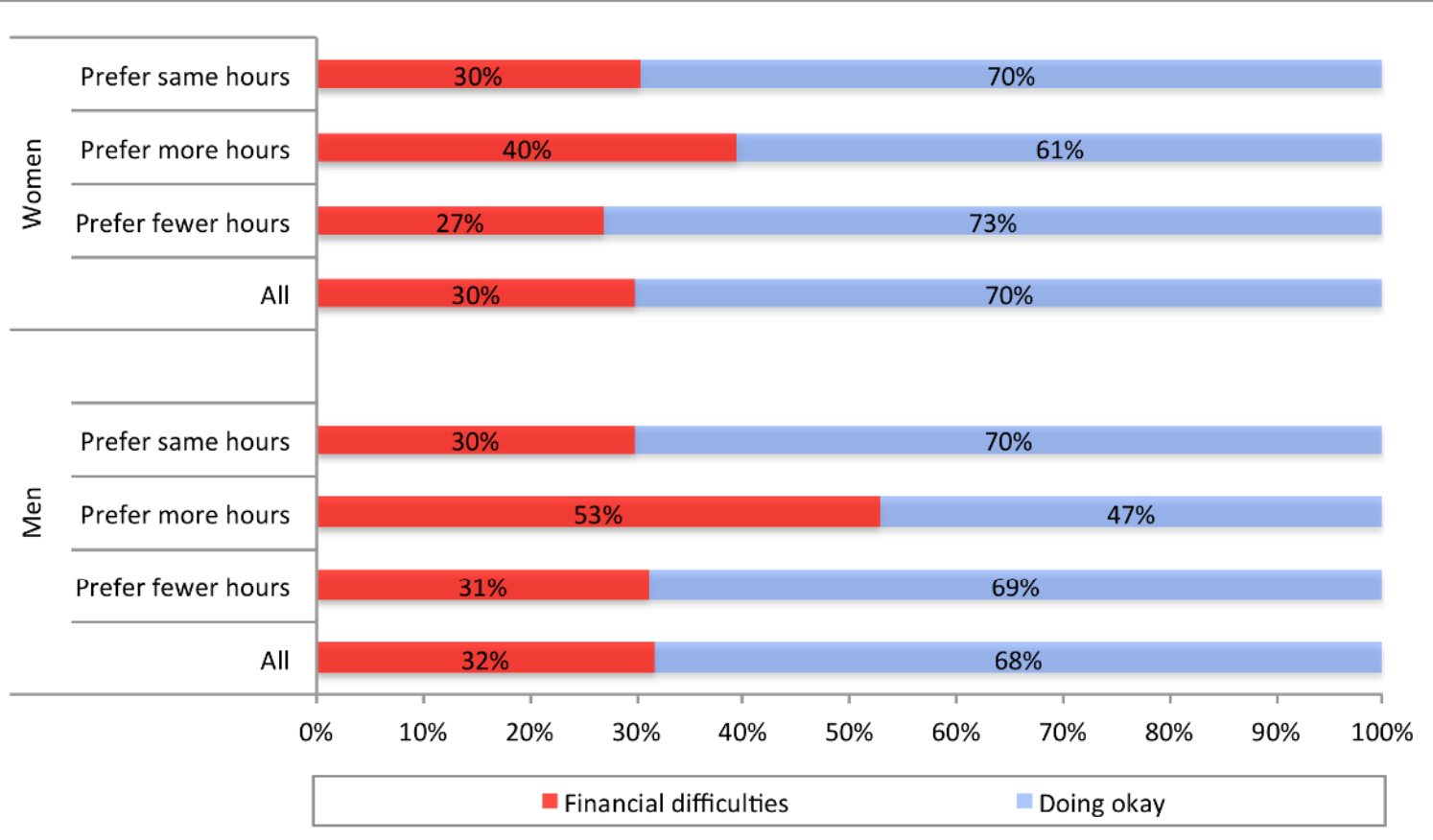
Absent category: Being able to work more hours.

Working class studies

e.g. Bev Skeggs (2011): the ever present spectre of precarity/**economic insecurity** (not affluence) has shaped the lives of the working-class in Britain

- 'Yeah, not worrying if there'll be enough food on the table, it controlled my life and me mams before me, like avoiding the rent man. It may not sound like much now, but my God it intervened in every minute of your life. We struggled to just get by. I don't think other people understand that'.
- 'I personally cannot imagine what it must feel like to live without worrying all the time, to afford everything, not thinking if the car breaks down I'm really bugged. In my life if one thing went wrong it could set off a chain reaction and many other things would follow. It's like living on a knife-edge, just hoping things aren't going to go wrong' (Skeggs and Loveday 2012: 482).

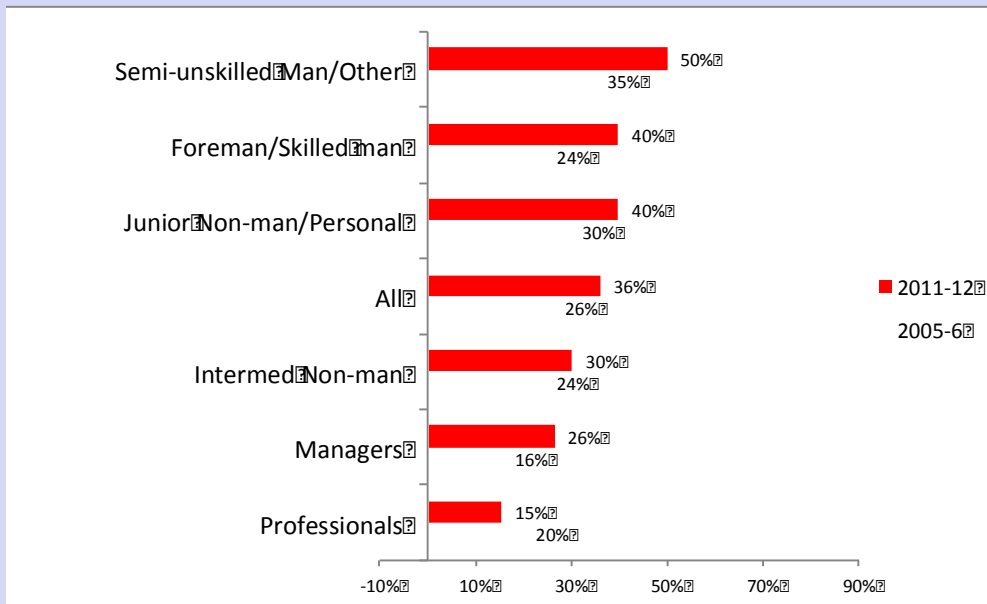
Proportion of employees (aged 18-64) in financial difficulties by hours preferences. 2008-9.



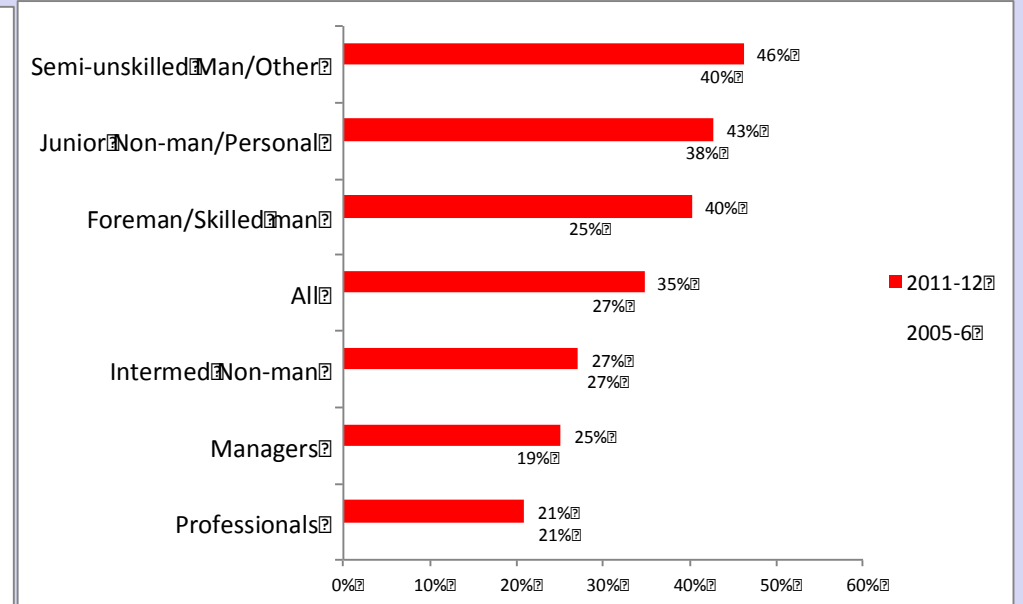
Source: BHPS Wave R

Before/after recession began: proportions in 'financial difficulty' (employees aged 18-64).

a. Women



b. Men



Source: 2005-6 (BHPS Wave D) and 2011-12 (US Wave C)

*How well would you say you yourself are managing financially these days?

Conclusion

- Recessionary impact on labour market work-time in the UK
 - Work-time underemployment
- Temporal core to WLB debates: and 'too many' hours prioritised
 - Class, and gender?
- Economic absence in 'WL' debates
 - Barbara Ehrenreich (1990) the middle class 'star in' and 'write the scripts' for academic debate and mainstream politics.
 - being able to 'disregard money' is one of the key attributes that differentiates the middle from the working class (Skeggs 2011).
 - Financial security should be fundamental to any understanding of what a 'balanced work-life' might look like.

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