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Chapter 4

Nonstandard work schedules and partnership quality: Quantitative and qualitative findings²

This article questions existing findings and provides new evidence about the consequences of nonstandard work schedules on partnership quality. Using quantitative couple data from the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS) (N = 3,016) and semi-structured qualitative interviews (N = 34), we found that, for women, schedules with varying hours resulted in greater relationship dissatisfaction than for men. Men with young children who worked varying hours had less relationship conflict and spent more time with children. Parents used nonstandard schedules for tag-team parenting or to maintain perceptions of full-time motherhood. The lack of negative effects, particularly for night shifts, suggests that previous findings – largely U.S. ones – are not universal and may be attributed to wider cultural, industrial relations, and economic contexts.

4.1 Introduction

The diffusion of nonstandard work schedules in industrialized countries has brought diverse challenges to family relationships (Presser et al., 2008). Nonstandard schedules refer to nonstandard employment hours (outside of fixed 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. schedules, including evenings, nights, rotating shifts) and nonstandard employment days (Saturday or Sunday or both) (Presser, 2003). Individuals with nonstandard schedules are at work when the majority of society, as well as their family and social network, are not.

The majority of existing research has showed overwhelmingly negative affects of nonstandard work schedules (Perry-Jenkins et al., 2007; Weiss & Liss, 1988; White & Keith, 1990), including higher levels of divorce, less

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time together as a couple, and lower relationship satisfaction. Nonstandard schedules have been found to exert a strain on relationships due to a lack of companionship and unequal participation in household duties (Hertz & Charlton, 1989), or role overload (Perry-Jenkins et al., 2007), which can lead to guilt, anger, loneliness, and depression (Matthews, Conger, & Wickrama, 1996). Such schedules have also been linked to higher levels of stress and sleeping and physical disorders (Schulz et al., 2004). Exhausted individuals are emotionally unavailable and potentially insensitive to other family members.

One question emerges from this body of literature, which is largely from the United States. Do the studies to date reflect a universal impact of nonstandard work? The United States is a unique case because of the pervasiveness of nonstandard schedules (Presser, 2003), comparatively weak employment protection, and a higher divorce rate. Some Western European countries resist a 24/7 economy, with no trend of increasing nonstandard schedules (Breedveld, 1998; Hamermesh, 1996). The comparatively restrictive employment regulations, the protection of workers, higher wages, and strict opening hours across most of Europe mean that the categorization of nonstandard schedules as bad jobs or as nonnegotiable job conditions (Perry-Jenkins et al., 2007), may be less valid there.

Using a multi-method approach, we question existing findings and provide new evidence by examining the impact of nonstandard schedules on partnership quality, which we define as the level of relationship conflict and dissatisfaction. Using a quantitative survey of the NKPS (Dykstra et al., 2004), we engaged in a couple-level analysis ($N = 2,820$) to examine how the impact of nonstandard schedules on partnership quality varies as a function of couples' work schedules, personal characteristics, and relationship and family characteristics, as well as the association among those factors. We also used qualitative interviews ($N = 34$) to supplement and fill in gaps from the quantitative data and to understand certain effects and explore individual perceptions and strategies that couples develop.

4.2 Nonstandard schedules in The Netherlands

The share of nonstandard work schedules has not significantly increased over time in The Netherlands, which has led most Dutch experts to maintain that The Netherlands is not at risk of entering the 24-hour economy (Breedveld, 2006; Tijdens, 1998). Depending on the definition of *nonstandard*, the prevalence of nonstandard schedules in The Netherlands varies from between 11% and 14% in nonstandard shifts (Breedveld, 1998, 2006) to around 30% in both nonstandard shifts and days (Presser et al., 2008). Although The Netherlands is among the European countries with the highest prevalence of nonstandard schedules (Presser et al., 2008), levels there are still less than that of 40% in the United States (Presser, 2003). As in the United States (Presser, 2003), nonstandard schedules in The Netherlands are concentrated in particular areas (e.g., nurses, waiters and waitresses, cashiers, police) and often lower level occupations (e.g., elementary jobs). Higher levels of weekend work can be found among professionals and managers (Mills, 2004; Presser, 2003), largely men who work overtime.

Several aspects differentiate The Netherlands from countries such as the United States, including regulated business hours, more inclusive and compensatory protective legislation for workers, and a high number of part-time female workers. As with its neighbors like Germany, The Netherlands has relatively strict work schedule regulations (Jacobs, 2004). For example, it was only in 1996 that regulations were introduced to permit certain stores (primarily grocery stores) to remain open after 6 p.m. (Fouarge & Baaijens, 2004), and in 1997 European law allowed shopkeepers to open one Sunday each month.

A history of strong labor unions and collective agreements that protect all workers (including nonunion and part-time employees) in addition to a supportive welfare state mean that workers with nonstandard schedules have strong protection and compensation (Jacobs, 2004). In fact, the Working Time Law (*Arbeidstijdenwet*) of 1996 was specifically aimed to protect employees against allegedly unhealthy work schedules and inadequate rest periods between working periods (Fouarge & Baaijens, 2004). Many nonstandard schedules in The Netherlands are part-time jobs for which workers receive similar labor market protection and benefits of full-time workers (Fouarge & Baaijens, 2009), which makes such work an

attractive choice, especially for women. In the United States, work schedule regulations are considerably more modest (Gornick & Meyers, 2003), and there is a lack of protective measures for workers with nonstandard schedules (Hamermesh, 1996).

The Netherlands is also a nation with a strong cultural norm of mothers staying at home or working limited hours. Although this argument holds for many countries, what sets The Netherlands apart from other European countries is that this norm is largely realized. In fact, in 2003, of the 64% of Dutch women who were employed, 75% were part-time workers, which is considerably higher than the European average of 25% (OECD, 2006). Elementary school children generally have one to two afternoons free per week and often return home for lunch each day. This reinforces parents' need to be available to their children. There are also strong norms about formalized day care. In a large national study, Portegijs, Cloin, Ooms, and Eggink (2006) found that 61% of households with children younger than 12 used no informal or formal child care, with 75% reporting that when day care was required, it should be for only 1 or 2 days a week, which is also the national average. In line with previous research (Deutsch, 1999), Dutch parents bestow high importance on parental care, particularly for infants, but they also appear to follow through with that.

4.3 Nonstandard schedules and partnership quality

Working nonstandard schedules is often related to higher levels of stress, tiredness, and sleeping problems (Fenwick & Tausig, 2001), which may have a negative impact on relationship quality, which we measure in this study by the level of relationship conflict and dissatisfaction. Employees with nonstandard schedules face intense time demands of employment and the family domain (Voydanoff, 2004).

A seminal study by Mott, Mann, McLoughlin, and Warwick (1965) found that shift work reduced partnership happiness and ability to coordinate family activities, thus causing strain and conflict. White and Keith (1990) established that family arguments increased when at least one family member worked a non – day shift. In a study of male air force security guards, Hertz and Charlton (1989) demonstrated that husbands exhibited

feelings of frustration, guilt, and neglect over their shifts, whereas their wives viewed the shifts as interfering with companionship and were disillusioned with married life. Under such circumstances, it may be that interaction assumes a pattern of one partner demanding more engagement and the other exhibiting avoidance through withdrawal, thus resulting in relationship dissatisfaction (Roberts, 2000).

Hostile exchanges may also arise as a result of a physically exhausted and frustrated partner, which is a strong predictor of partnership dissatisfaction and divorce (DeMaris, 2000). Longitudinal studies have confirmed this causal link, showing that hostile, negative, or indifferent behavior both erodes marital satisfaction and increases the chances of dissolution (Matthews et al., 1996; Roberts, 2000). This leads to the first hypothesis: *nonstandard schedules reduce the level of partnership quality*.

We also anticipate a gender-specific effect of nonstandard schedules. Wight, Raley, and Bianchi (2008) showed that when one partner works nonstandard shifts, a couple's time together often does not overlap. That lack of overlapping could pose a problem for relationships, particularly in a context such as The Netherlands. This is because The Netherlands is predominately a male-breadwinner society, where women are responsible for the bulk of household duties, such as child care and meals (Mills, Mencarini, Tanturri, & Begall, 2008). Women who work evening or night shifts go against the norm because they leave their partner alone to "fend for himself," prepare his own meals, and engage in the primary care of children (e.g., preparing meals, bathing, bedtime). Because women who work nonstandard schedules often place their male partners in a role that is generally atypical for Dutch men, we anticipate that they will experience higher levels of conflict and dissatisfaction. Thus, the second hypothesis is that *women who work nonstandard schedules will experience a more negative impact on partnership quality than will men*.

4.3.1 Impact of the type of nonstandard schedule

Previous research has established that different types of nonstandard schedules have diverse consequences on individual, family, and social life (White & Keith, 1990) as well as health (Fenwick & Tausig, 2001). In particular, night shifts have more negative effects (Davis et al., 2008) because they disrupt the biorhythms and "socio-rhythms" of workers, who

may become out of sync with their family, friends, institutional arrangements, and leisure activities. Perhaps the most disruptive type of schedule is one in which hours vary and are unpredictable, which makes it difficult to make appointments or binding commitments. Weekend work may also be disruptive, but it has been shown to affect families in a more modest way (Presser, 2003). Thus, the third hypothesis is that *the negative effect of evening, night, and varying schedules on partnership quality is stronger than the effect of weekend schedules.*

4.3.2 The role of partner support

We propose that nonstandard schedules not only have negative repercussions but also can create synergy between multiple roles. This builds on the work of Voydanoff (2004), who argues that “resources associated with one role enhance or make easier participation in the other role”. It also echoes Presser’s (1984) research on the reciprocal relationship between family characteristics, which affect schedules, and schedules that affect family relationships (Presser, 1986). Nonstandard schedules can be a resource to enhance participation and satisfaction in both paid employment and family roles, but this is possible only with partner support, which has been shown to have a significant link with marital functioning. Higher levels of partner support can reduce the potential role of conflict for those in nonstandard schedules, which leads to the fourth hypothesis: *higher levels of partner support will diminish the negative effect of a respondent’s and partner’s nonstandard schedules on partnership quality.*

We also anticipated a gender-specific effect and a more complicated moderation effect (in the form of a three-way interaction). We expected that both gender and partner support moderated the effect of nonstandard schedules and that, in turn, gender moderated the effect of partner support. The fifth hypothesis is that *the effect of partner support on the relationship between a respondent’s and a partner’s nonstandard schedules and partnership quality will vary by gender, which will be stronger for women than men.* In other words, women who work nonstandard schedules and have more support from their partner will experience a less negative effect (i.e., better relationship quality) than will men in the same situation.

4.3.3 Presence of young children

Nonstandard schedules are often related to the managing of child care (Le Binah & Martin, 2004), with women scheduling work hours around the family (Presser, 1986) and couples engaging in tag-team parenting. Most studies show higher levels of stress, guilt, and depression among parents, particularly mothers (Davis et al., 2008; Joshi & Bogen, 2007; Perry-Jenkins et al., 2007; Strazdins et al., 2006). Other studies find either no effect or even a positive effect of nonstandard schedules on parents' relationships (Barnett et al., 2008; Han & Waldfogel, 2007). Women's nonstandard schedules have also been shown to increase fathers' involvement in child care (Le Binah & Martin, 2004; Wight et al., 2008) and improve the monitoring of adolescents (Han & Waldfogel, 2007).

The broader literature shows that, although young children increase the stability of relationships, they decrease overall relationship quality (Waite & Lillard, 1991). Tag-team parenting may add a further strain by increasing time spent alone with children at the expense of other activities, such as sleep, leisure time, and couple time (Wight et al., 2008). On the basis of that research, an initial hypothesis is that individuals with very young children will experience a more negative impact of nonstandard schedules on their relationships than will those with older children. As discussed previously in relation to the second hypothesis, when women work nonstandard schedules, it often means that they leave their partner alone to care for the children. Given that this is relatively unconventional in the Dutch context, we predict that *the negative impact of young children on the relationship between nonstandard schedules and partnership quality will vary by gender, which will be stronger for women than men.*

The majority of studies mentioned here included additional controls, including partner's age, education, socioeconomic status, duration of partnership, and number of children, which we also control for in our analysis.

4.4 Data and method

4.4.1 Quantitative data

The quantitative data are taken from the first wave of the NKPS collected in 2002 – 2004, which is representative of the Dutch population (Dykstra et al., 2004). The NKPS contains a large amount of life history information, including information on nonstandard work schedules and partner relationships. The data were collected from a random sample of individuals in private households in The Netherlands, aged 18 to 79. A total of 8,161 respondents were interviewed face-to-face. If applicable, their partners were also asked to fill in a questionnaire, which included detailed information on work schedules and partnership quality.

Our sample was restricted to co-residential couples for which at least one of the partners was in paid employment. Of main respondents, 71.7% reported that they had a partner with whom they shared the same household – 92.2% ($N = 4,762$) of those respondents and 76% ($N = 3,944$) of their partners filled out the questionnaire. There was a slight underrepresentation of partners reporting poor relationship quality (Dykstra et al., 2004), but because of high response levels, we did not anticipate serious bias. Of main respondents who reported having a co-residential partner, we excluded 14.8% ($N = 765$ couples) because they did not meet sample criteria (i.e., both not employed), and 26.8% ($N = 1,383$) because of missing questionnaires and incomplete labor market status information (about 1% of all cases). This left us with an effective sample of 3,016 couples for the analysis.

Of all main respondents in the sample, 1,311 (43.7%) were men and 1,701 (56.3%) were women. We did not observe any significant, sample-biased gender differences among the main socioeconomic (age, education, socioeconomic status), family (presence of children, number of children, age of youngest child), and partnership (perceived partnership conflict and dissatisfaction, duration of partnership, partner) characteristics. There were significant gender differences in the labor market participation rates of men and women and in their working schedules (see the “Results” section), which is in line with the broader labor market context. Among men, 8% reported that they did not work (0 – 12 hours a week), 14% worked part-time (13 – 35 hours a week), and the remaining 78% reported

working full-time. Among women, 31% were not employed, 29% were employed part-time, and 19% worked full-time (36 or more hours a week).

4.4.2 Qualitative data

The qualitative data were taken from an NKPS mini-panel, “The impact of nonstandard working schedules on partnership quality and stability” (Mills & Hutter, 2007). Using a purposive sampling strategy (Marshall & Rossman, 1999), we had the unique opportunity to draw a sample from the first wave of the NKPS quantitative survey. Selection was based on both the dependent variables (conflict and dissatisfaction) and key independent variables (gender, type of work schedule, and presence and age of children). We chose cases to represent variation across variables (i.e., persons with both high and low levels of conflict and dissatisfaction) and in proportion to their levels in the quantitative survey to reflect the larger sample. In an attempt to reduce a selection effect of interviewing only resilient couples, we also selected several respondents who both had worked nonstandard schedules and had divorced.

Data consisted of semi-structured interviews with 34 individuals, and, where within couples, at least 1 of the respondents was engaged in nonstandard schedules. The sample included 18 men and 16 women, with an average age of 38. Most respondents were married or in an unmarried cohabiting relationship, and there were several divorced respondents. Of respondents, 28 of the 34 were in partnerships, either married or cohabiting, and we were able to interview both partners. In the remainder of cases, respondents either were divorced or we were unable to interview the partner. Around 20% had no children, with the largest proportion having children under the age of 12. Around one third were employed in night shifts, followed by standard times (generally a partner who worked nonstandard schedules), varying or rotating shifts, and homemakers. The majority (35%) were employed in medical and health-related occupations, followed by manufacturing and manual labor jobs (18%) and restaurant or hotel-related occupations (12%). The remainder included several workers in professional or administrative occupations, police officers, retail sales workers, and an artist.

Interviews took place from February to June 2006 in respondents' homes, and each individual was interviewed separately. Each interview

lasted typically 1.5 hours and was digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim, complete with observations of the household. The semi-structured format made interviews comparable. Because of different circumstances, we used different interview formats for respondents working nonstandard schedules and their partner (who might or might not have been employed). Questions were based on gaps, or causality questions, that arose from previous research and the quantitative analyses. Respondents were asked detailed questions about employment, disadvantages and advantages of nonstandard schedules, strategies, their vision of a good relationship, their own relationship, their relationship history and process, and conflicts or tensions in the relationship. The qualitative interviews were conducted three years after the quantitative survey, which added a decidedly longitudinal nature and allowed us to interview individuals who had left or changed their type of nonstandard schedules, dissolved their previous relationship, or reevaluated previous relationship perceptions.

4.4.3 Measures

The level of partnership conflict and partnership dissatisfaction operationalizes the concept of partnership quality. We examined both measures because they measure different partnership dynamics but are still related (with a correlation of .45), and we controlled for them in each of the models. Partnership conflict measures the level of negative behavior and reciprocity in relationships via a four-item scale ($\alpha = 0.70$) on frequency of heated discussions, incessant reproaches, withdrawal from talking, and whether arguments get out of hand. Partnership dissatisfaction is a broader measure with a four-item scale ($\alpha = 0.95$) that asks not about negative relationship behavior but more generally about whether the partnership is a good one, makes one happy, is strong, and is stable. Beyond those quantitative measures, the qualitative data explored the nature and anatomy of conflicts and expectations and perceptions of partnership quality.

Partner support. Partner support was measured using a five-item scale ($\alpha = 0.84$) of level of support received from the partner in terms of career decisions, worries and health problems, leisure and social contacts, and practical and personal matters.

Work hours and schedules. Nonstandard schedules are constructed from the working hours of the week prior to data collection. We use the common definition of *nonstandard*, in which at least half the hours worked most days in the prior week fell between specific hours of the day (Presser, 2003). When most of the hours fell between 4 p.m. and 12 p.m., we categorized the schedule as a fixed evening schedule. We classified workers who carried out most of their work between 12 a.m. and 8 a.m. as working in fixed night schedules. When there was no clear pattern in working times, we classified respondents as working varying hours. When the majority of hours fell between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., we regarded the person as working a fixed day schedule. Unfortunately, our quantitative data did not allow us to differentiate the category of nonstandard schedules workers who work (weekly) rotating shifts, but the qualitative interviews allow us to explore this aspect further.

Presser (2003) demonstrated that it is essential to differentiate between not only the hours worked during the day but also employment during the week versus the weekend. We created an additional category of those who worked in fixed day schedules and on weekend days. The category of fixed day schedule workers therefore includes only those who work exclusively on weekdays. An advantage of this strict definition is that it allowed us to look at the effect of fixed nonstandard schedules. A disadvantage, however, is that we may have underestimated overtime. Overtime in The Netherlands is less extensive and mostly captured by controlling for weekend work and the number of hours in employment.

Number of paid employment hours. Nonstandard schedules are often related to reduced employment hours. For that reason, we included part-time employment as employment for 13 – 35 hours a week. We measured no or limited paid employment as working 0 – 12 hours a week and full-time employment as 36 or more hours a week.

Presence and age of children. We also included presence and age of children in the model in the form of a continuous variable that measures the age of the youngest child living the household. We also controlled for individuals who had no children and the number of children.

Control variables. The controls included in the models are partners' mean age and education (in years), socioeconomic status (measured on the International Socio-Economic Index) (see Ganzeboom et al., 1992),

duration of the current partnership, total number of children, partnership dissatisfaction (in the model about conflict), and conflict (in the model of dissatisfaction).

4.4.4 Analytical techniques

Most respondents reported low levels of partnership dissatisfaction and conflict, which resulted in dependent variables with limited variability and a highly left skew. For that reason, we used an ordered logit regression model rather than a binary one to avoid losing information. Another advantage is that the model is not sensitive to variable distributions in the way that many other regression models are (Long, 1997). We also checked for the parallel regression assumption, which our models did not violate. Using the couple data, we ran separate models for men and women to measure the impact of the explanatory variables separately on partnership conflict and dissatisfaction. To test for differences between men and women, we ran additional models that interacted each variable with gender (more precisely women) to determine whether there was a significant difference between women's effects and men's effects. Table 4.2 shows whether the difference was significant (in the column "Diff."); detailed interaction estimates are available on request.

The qualitative analyses combined narrative and correspondence analysis to visualize relationships between individual characteristics and responses. The narrative analysis involved close readings of the text by first defining general categories (e.g., negative impact of schedules) and then investigating the relationship between categories with respondent characteristics (e.g., gender) (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This detailed reading allowed us to isolate narratives that exemplify certain points or associations.

We then developed formal coding procedures using three separate coders. Each coder first independently created a coding scheme. We then met to discuss and create a comprehensive scheme. Interviews followed a semi-structured format, which resulted in coding that emerged along the interview lines and did not markedly differ between coders. The data were then coded in the program Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) Miner (Peladeau, 2007), where it was also possible to check for inter-rater reliability between coders, which was high. In the next stage of analysis, we

engaged in the summarizing technique of correspondence analysis. Correspondence analysis is a descriptive technique representing the relationship between the rows (e.g., the type of shift) and columns (e.g., negative impact of nonstandard schedules on relationship) of a two-way contingency table in a joint plot, often referred to as a correspondence map. For example, we examined the relationship between the type of shift by the positive or negative impacts on one's relationship and the age of children by the reason to work nonstandard schedules. This analytical approach, developed by Benzecri (1973), reduces the complexity of the coded categories and shows their association and clustering in a visual matrix, which enhances the interpretation of data (figures available on request).

4.5 Results

4.5.1 Prevalence of nonstandard schedules among couples

Table 4.1 presents the share of nonstandard schedules by gender among couples. The predominant schedule for Dutch men was a standard full-time schedule. One quarter of men were engaged in nonstandard schedules, and 18.5% worked fixed days combined with weekend work, whereas around 6% worked in nonstandard shifts (fixed evening, night, or varying schedules). Among women, the share of nonstandard schedules was 17.2%, which we attribute to the fact that almost one third of all Dutch women are not in paid employment. When we considered only economically active women, the share of nonstandard schedules was similar among men and women. A clear gender difference was the high share of women's fixed day, part-time work for fewer than 5 days a week (37%), and around 14% of women worked in full-time, standard schedules.

Of couples, 36.2% had at least one partner in nonstandard schedules. The prevalent combination was men working in a fixed day schedule and on weekends with a partner who was not in paid employment (6.2%) or was working part-time with a fixed day schedule (6.0%). Another frequent combination was men who worked full-time standard schedules with a partner who worked fixed day schedules together with weekend work (4.4%) or in nonstandard shifts (3.3%). Women have a clear role in households with nonstandard schedules, especially in evening, night, and

varying hours of employment. In 5.2% of all couples, both partners engaged in nonstandard schedules.

Table 4.1 Description of employment and nonstandard schedules among Dutch couples

	Women					Total, Men
	Non-standard shifts ^a	Fixed day, weekend day	Fixed day, 5 days	Fixed day, <5 days	Not employed	
Men						
Nonstandard shifts ^a	0.6	0.5	1.2	1.4	2.1	5.7
Fixed day, weekend day	1.1	3.0	2.1	6.0	6.2	18.5
Fixed day, 5 days	3.3	4.4	7.6	19.2	18.7	53.2
Fixed day, <5 days	0.9	1.2	1.8	7.2	4.7	15.7
Not employed	1.1	1.1	1.5	3.1	—	6.8
Total, women	7.1	10.1	14.2	37.0	31.6	100.0

Source: NKPS 2002-4; Authors' calculations.

Note: Sample: couples, where at least one of partners is working. N = 3,016. ^aNonstandard shifts include the categories fixed evening shift, fixed night shift and hours vary.

4.5.2 Nonstandard schedules and partnership quality

Table 4.2 shows the results of the regression analysis for partnership conflict (left-hand columns) and partnership dissatisfaction (right-hand columns) (the "Diff." column shows whether there was a significant gender difference). We had expected that nonstandard schedules would reduce partnership quality and that the negative effect would be stronger for women than for men. A related hypothesis predicted that the negative effect of evening, night, and varying schedules on partnership quality would be stronger than the effect of weekend schedules would be.

Hypothesis 1 received mixed support in that only women working in schedules with varying hours had lower relationship quality. A surprising finding was that, though working varying hours significantly increased

relationship dissatisfaction for women, it decreased relationship conflict for men.

Hypothesis 2 gathered some support. When we first examined the main effects only (not shown), we found that women in a fixed evening shift and working in the weekend had significantly higher levels of relationship conflict than did those in regular day shifts. This fit with our expectation that women's absence during peak child care times generated conflict. When we controlled for the interactions of age of children and partner support by the respondent's and partner's schedule, the main effects became only marginally significant. Only varying hours had a stronger negative effect for women and a stronger positive effect for men, which provides mixed support for Hypothesis 3. Weekend work also had a negative effect on men's satisfaction when they received less partner support, a result we return to shortly.

We then turned to the qualitative interviews to understand why nonstandard schedules, and particularly night shifts, did not appear to have the negative impact on partnership quality, as had been found in previous research. The first explanation was that working regulations, conditions, and subsequent perceptions of nonstandard schedules for Dutch workers were not overwhelmingly negative. Those who worked for the police and medical services, for instance, discussed extensive training and counseling about the impact of nonstandard schedules on family life. Respondents mentioned agreements such as the five-shift schedule; the senior regulation, under which workers older than 55 years no longer are required to work night shifts; labor regulations; and higher pay. The five-shift schedule—rotating shifts between morning, afternoon, evening, and night shifts, followed by 4 days off—was a prominent topic of discussion. A factory worker at an energy plant described how the introduction of the five-shift schedule brought clarity and regularity to the extent that he could calculate his schedule until the day that he plans to retire in March 2033. Pay was also important:

“[Shift work] is perfect for me. In terms of income, freedom, the days that you have free. I find it ideal. . . . In the nightshifts it is all calculated in. Your wage is adjusted. Because we are in the five-shift system, we get a 90% bonus. Someone in the three-shift system gets I think around 20%” (Male, process operator in a laboratory).

A police officer maintained that the increased work regulations he experienced over the past few decades were so protective that it impinged on his work:

“A big problem is that the new work regulation law strangles us. It says very strictly that you can only work so many shifts and that you must have so many free hours. Before we just had that you worked 10 days on and 10 days off. Actually quite ideal, perfect, because in those 10 days you could finish your work. Now you usually have 3 or 4 days for your research, which you can never finish.”

In comparison to previous accounts of such jobs in the U.S. literature, Dutch workers described some night and rotating shifts as physically challenging, but they rarely—if at all—mentioned bad working conditions or poor economic benefits.

From the correspondence analysis, we were also able to isolate groups of night-shift workers: the love-it-or-leave-it groups (i.e., left or loved working such schedules) and the involuntarily trapped groups. The love-it-or-leave-it group provides a second explanation for the non-effect of nonstandard schedules. It may be a selection effect related to who remained or left certain types of nonstandard schedules by the time of the interview. The qualitative interviews revealed more intricate work histories with considerable variation in different shifts and days over time. Those who abhorred the night shift often found a way to leave it and engage in more varied shift work, to work evenings only, or to minimize such shifts. Such respondents worked night shifts and actively worked to leave them because of health, sleep, and psychological problems, as well as dissatisfaction with the high levels of irritability among their family members. A female nurse who switched from rotating shifts to only evening and day shifts after 19 years describes the night shift this way:

“If you have never done it, it is difficult to describe, but you always have a point during the night shift, I always say, that you have the idea that you are dying.”

The qualitative interviews supported our hypothesis that night shifts have a negative impact, and they provided a better understanding of the weak effect of such shifts. It may be that individuals leave them before partnership conflict or dissatisfaction emerges.

There were also workers, however, who loved nonstandard schedules, actively pursued such schedules, and related employment during such shifts to relaxed work conditions and freedom. A male factory worker commented:

“During the night, the day and contract staff is all gone. You are just there with your colleagues with no interruptions and no hassle. That is beautiful. . . . You have the freedom to do what you like, no hassle.”

These workers often focused on the advantages of having more autonomy, being free during times when others work, and avoiding traffic jams and busy shops. They also reported more positive outcomes of nonstandard schedules, such as being able to help more in the household and engage in more activities with their children and partner. This group therefore could contribute to the lack of negative effects of night shifts that we found.

The last group appeared to be involuntarily trapped in night shifts, a complaint that we heard from lower educated and manual workers who had fewer alternative employment options. A male Turkish factory worker who had worked different types of nonstandard schedules for more than 21 years described the night shifts and shift work as something he wanted to escape but had difficulty doing so because of the economic benefits:

“The night shift breaks a person. Really, I have older colleagues who work three different rotating shifts, but they can’t bear the night shifts. That’s why I say to my son, get your diplomas and study hard so that you don’t have to work in shifts to earn a decent wage.”

Correspondence analyses (available on request) showed a clustering of responses for night-shift workers related to health problems, tiredness, and irritability. Those who worked varying hours reported a time crunch that resulted in more stress, limited leisure activities and time for friends, and less time with their partner and children.

Table 4.2 Summary of ordered logistic regression analysis for variables predicting the perception of partnership conflict and dissatisfaction with the partnership for men and women

	Partnership conflict							Partnership dissatisfaction						
	Men			Women				Men			Women			
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>e^B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>e^B</i>	<i>Dif</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>e^B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>e^B</i>	<i>Dif</i>
Respondent's employment														
<i>Not/limited employed</i>	.64	0.35	1.89	-.12	.20	.88	*	-.49	.41	.61	-.01	.23	.99	
<i>Part-time employed</i>	.37*	0.16	1.45	-.13	.14	.88	***	-.11	.18	.90	.06	.16	1.06	
Respondent's schedule														
<i>Fixed evening shift</i>	.45	0.49	1.57	.51	.37	1.66		-.08	.54	.92	-.61	.44	.54	
<i>Fixed night shift</i>	-.98	1.64	.37	-.14	.66	.87		2.38	2.73	10.85	-.29	.81	.75	
<i>Hours vary</i>	-1.85**	0.72	.16	-.03	.44	.98	**	1.26	.77	3.54	.81*	.48	2.25	
<i>Weekend employment</i>	.06	0.20	1.07	-.10	.22	.91		.15	.23	1.16	-.04	.27	.96	
Partner's employment														
<i>Not/limited employed</i>	.12	0.23	1.13	.98**	.32	2.65	**	-.25	.27	.78	-.40	.37	.67	
<i>Part-time employed</i>	.15	0.15	1.16	-.03	.15	.98		-.09	.18	.91	.01	.17	1.01	
Partner's schedule														
<i>Fixed evening shift</i>	-.19	0.41	.83	-.46	.36	.63		.27	.47	1.31	-.10	.43	.91	
<i>Fixed night shift</i>	-.03	0.85	.97	.71	.59	2.03		-.75	.99	.47	.28	.64	1.32	
<i>Hours vary</i>	.29	0.50	1.33	-.24	.51	.79		-.53	.58	.59	.00	.59	1.00	
<i>Weekend employment</i>	-.14	0.26	.87	.17	.18	1.19		.00	.29	1.00	-.38	.21	.69	
Age of youngest child	-.02	0.01	.98	-.03**	.01	.97		-.02	.01	.98	.00	.01	1.00	
Partner's support	-.28	0.19	.76	-.23	.15	.79		-2.40**	.21	.09	-.33***	.17	.10	
Age child*Resp. schedule														
<i>Age*not employed</i>	-.03	0.02	.97	.01	.01	1.01		.03	.02	1.03	-.02	.01	.98	*
<i>Age*evening shift</i>	-.01	0.04	.99	.00	.03	1.00		.05	.04	1.05	.02	.04	1.02	
<i>Age*night shift</i>	.12	0.10	1.13	.03	.05	1.03		-.25	.22	.78	-.04	.06	.96	
<i>Age*varying shift</i>	.17***	0.05	1.18	-.04	.04	.96	***	-.11*	.05	.90	-.02	.04	.98	
<i>Age*weekend days</i>	-.01	0.01	.99	.01	.02	1.01		.02	.01	1.02	-.01	.02	.99	

Table 4.2 Continued

	Partnership conflict						Partnership dissatisfaction							
	Men			Women			Men			Women				
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>e^B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>e^B</i>	<i>Dif</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>e^B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>e^B</i>	<i>Dif</i>
Age child *Partn. schedule														
Age*not employed	-.01	0.01	.99	-.03*	.02	.97		-.01	.01	1.00	.02	.02	1.02	
Age*evening shift	.00	0.03	1.00	.01	.03	1.01		.02	.04	1.02	.04	.03	1.04	
Age*night shift	.01	0.05	1.01	-.03	.06	.97		.01	.05	1.01	-.04	.07	.96	
Age*varying shift	-.03	0.03	.97	.09	.05	1.09	*	.05	.04	1.05	-.01	.05	.99	
Age*weekend days	.00	0.02	1.00	.00	.01	1.00		.01	.02	1.01	.01	.01	1.01	
Support*Resp. schedule														
Support*not/limited employed	.15	0.41	1.16	-.11	.20	.89		-.12	.46	.89	.29	.23	1.33	
Support*evening shift	.31	0.84	1.36	-.72	.55	.49		.92	.87	2.50	-.30	.66	.74	
Support*night shift	-.45	1.85	.64	-.68	.77	.51		.55	3.33	1.73	.24	.96	1.28	
Support*vary shift	.64	0.77	1.90	-.35	.72	.71		-.67	.92	.51	.18	.78	1.19	
Support*weekend shift	-.10	0.28	.90	.28	.31	1.33		.71*	.30	2.04	-.42	.37	.66	*
Support*Partn. schedule														
Support*not/limited employed	.45	0.25	1.56	-.07	.37	.93		-.09	.30	.92	-.24	.42	.78	
Support*evening shift	-.54	0.75	.58	.28	.52	1.32		-.23	.84	.80	.00	.59	1.00	
Support*night shift	-.31	1.29	.73	.06	.73	1.06		1.60	1.46	4.94	-.29	.88	.75	
Support*varying shift	.66	0.67	1.94	.27	.71	1.30		.14	.77	1.15	-.38	.81	.68	
Support*weekend shift	-.16	0.37	.86	-.03	.22	.97		.06	.41	1.06	.20	.26	1.22	
χ^2	325.5			457.9				561.1			926.8			
<i>Df</i>	40			40				40			40			

Source: NKPS 2002-4; Authors' calculations.

Note: Sample selection: co-residential partners where at least one of the partners is working min. 12 hours a week. Controls are partners' mean age, mean education, socioeconomic status, duration of current partnership, partnership dissatisfaction (in the model about conflict) and conflict (in the model of dissatisfaction), no children (omitted from the table). *e^B* = exponentiated *B*. *Dif* - indicates the statistical significance in differences between the coefficients in the models for men and women of respective item/row. Thresholds omitted from the table. Employment and schedule type coded as dummies. For both men and women, employment reference is full-time employment (more than 36 hours a week); schedule reference is working fixed day shifts in weekdays only. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01. ****p* < .00

Contrary to the physical complaints of night-shift workers, those with shift work and varying schedules focused almost exclusively on logistical issues related to arranging child care and activities, particularly when schedules varied from week to week. A female home care worker whose husband is a factory shift worker commented:

“If I had to start at 7 a.m. and my husband had to start at 6 a.m. in Deventer, I needed to bring [my child] to the neighbors at 6 a.m. and then needed to ask. ‘Will you make sure that she gets to school at 8:30?’ And if your child is sick? What do you do then? That was just very difficult.”

A third potential reason for the lack of a strong negative impact of nonstandard schedules is that couples and families develop effective communication and coordination strategies. Couples often used a joint message board, shared a family agenda, or left voice messages and sent text messages. A nurse with rotating shifts characterized her relationship as an “answering machine relationship,” a strategy the couple developed to coordinate and hear each other’s voices each day. Respondents often made clear appointments with each other to purposely ensure that they spent time together. One couple, both of whom worked nonstandard schedules, found this particularly important after they realized after several months that they had both been feeding the fish. Others suggested that, because they spent less time together, they actually cherished their time together more. Such couples positioned freedom as a central feature of a good relationship.

4.5.3 The role of partner support

Two additional expectations were that high levels of partner support would diminish the negative effect of nonstandard schedules on partnership quality, which would have a stronger effect for women. When partner support was high, the levels of both conflict and dissatisfaction decreased, which provides support for the initial hypothesis. We also obtained support for our second expectation. Turning to the interactions at the bottom of Table 4.2, we observed that the level of partner support varied by the respondent’s and the partner’s schedule. There was a significant, negative impact on relationship dissatisfaction only when men worked during the

weekend. Here, we also found a significant difference between men and women (see “Diff.” column, Table 4.2). For women, the positive support effect (in terms of the sign of the effect) was even stronger when they worked on the weekend, which was opposite for men. Further scrutiny of the quantitative data showed that men’s weekend work was often related to overtime or shift work with substantially more hours, whereas women’s weekend work was fewer hours and arranged around her partner and family.

The interviewees echoed the importance of partner support. A man who had been divorced since the time of the first survey related weekend work and a general lack of understanding and support to the demise of his marriage:

“I had a relationship where my wife was always home, she didn’t work and she always said ‘You have to work again, again a late shift,’ and then the weekend of course. Spending a nice weekend together . . . no, you needed to work again. . . . There was a lack of understanding that was difficult at times.”

Men who were the main breadwinners also referred to problems with weekend work. One restaurant worker who works 7 days a week said,

“The children hate that I have to work in the weekends. But that’s part of it. My wife also hates it, especially if I have the afternoon shift in the weekend.”

High levels of partner support not only increased partnership quality but also weakened the potentially negative effects of nonstandard schedules.

4.5.4 Presence of young children

The final set of hypotheses predicted that individuals with young children would experience a more negative impact of nonstandard schedules than those with older children, and that this would be stronger for women. Looking first at the main effects in Table 4.2, we found that the age of the youngest child had a significant, negative effect on relationship conflict for women. In other words, women experienced more relationship conflict when children were very young, and there was no significant main effect for men.

The interaction effects of the age of the youngest child and the respondent's schedule provided mixed support for our general expectation and more support for our gender hypothesis. Women had significantly higher levels of partnership dissatisfaction when they had young children and worked schedules with varying hours. Conversely, when children were young, men experienced less relationship conflict when they worked varying shifts. The effect of the age of children and the respondent's schedule significantly differed between men and women, which provides support – at least for varying schedules – of our second expectation. This is a more complex finding than the original hypothesis, which predicted that the effect would be stronger for women. The effect was strong for both men and women but in different directions and for different reasons.

The qualitative interviews provided a nuanced understanding of how the age of children affected couples, why they engaged in tag-team parenting, and how doing so affected their own relationship. First, couples reported using nonstandard schedules as one of the only feasible means of work – family reconciliation. One female nurse stated:

“I don't think that it is possible to combine care and regularity.”

A police officer called the combination of regular work times and child care an “insane, chaotic option.” A correspondence analysis (not shown) showed that those with young children reported using nonstandard schedules as a way to spend more time with children; avoid institutionalized day care; and for men, to actively engage in child care.

A second finding was the recurrent narrative of employed mothers who had a strong desire to be perceived as a full-time care-giving mother. A female nurse and mother of two deliberately chose night shifts to avoid her children remaining at school over the lunch hour and participating in any after-school care, and to maintain the perception of being a good at-home mother:

“An advantage is that I see the children over the entire day, regardless of the fact that I work . . . at night there is no conflict since they are sleeping while I work. During the day I am still there in a different way, even if I am sleeping. . . . It is absolutely wonderful because at the school they ask if I even work because I am always at school you know?”

A third prominent narrative of men (and their partners) was that men with young children reported working varied or flexible hours to engage in more care duties, primarily bringing their children to school or other activities. This was related to the previous finding that men who worked varying hours reported reduced partnership conflict. When women worked nonstandard schedules, men (and their partners) discussed how fathers engaged in more household and care-giving activities. One woman with rotating shifts and two young children reported:

“He doesn’t mind helping in the house at all. He generally does the ironing; it is ideal. . . If I work the night shift, then I do absolutely nothing, then he does everything, the washing, the ironing. He doesn’t mind; he actually loves the weekends when he gets to be alone with the boys.”

We found a final salient difference in the reasons associated with working nonstandard schedules between those with and without children. Whereas parents almost exclusively mentioned care-giving duties, individuals with no or older children referred to personal reasons such as freedom, flexibility, and the desire to avoid busy roads and shops. Busy shops and traffic jams are a real issue in The Netherlands, which has one of the highest population densities in Europe (397 persons per square kilometer compared to 33 persons per square kilometer in the United States). The fact that most shops are only open during standard daytime hours results in extreme peaks of busy periods on Saturdays and between 5 p.m. and 6 p.m.

4.6 Discussion

This study applied a mixed-method approach to examine the impact of nonstandard schedules on partnership quality (level of conflict and dissatisfaction) on partnerships in The Netherlands. The first key finding was that only schedules with varying hours had a clear impact on relationship quality. Contrary to previous findings (Davis et al., 2008; Perry-Jenkins et al., 2007; Strazdins et al., 2006; Weiss & Liss, 1988; White

& Keith, 1990), there was not only an absence of any overwhelmingly negative effect of nonstandard schedules but also a positive effect of such schedules for men. The results lend support to more recent findings that show a weak impact or even a positive effect of nonstandard schedules on relationships (Barnett et al., 2008; Han & Waldfogel, 2007).

A second major finding was that schedules with varying hours had a negative impact on women's relationship quality and a positive impact on men's relationship quality. Such schedules increased relationship dissatisfaction for women but decreased the level of conflict in relationships for men. We controlled for the number of hours, which means that men's varied hours appeared to be due not to overwork but to a strategic choice to build more flexibility into a schedule and engage in tag-team parenting, a finding which our in-depth interviews support. As opposed to previous studies that have focused on women adapting their schedules around other family members (e.g., Presser, 1986), Dutch men with young children appear to work flexible hours to help with child care and other household duties. Many studies have focused exclusively on mothers' or women's schedules (e.g., Barnett et al., 2008; Presser, 1986) and have not examined detailed types of nonstandard shifts (e.g., Davis et al., 2008), thus potentially missing the types of findings we have here.

This is related to our third main finding: The divergent, gendered impact of schedules with varying hours is tied to the presence of young children. When men with young children had more varying hours, there was a significant reduction in relationship conflict. Parents reported adapting their schedules to engage in tag-team parenting to ensure that one parent was home with the children. Fathers who adapted their schedules and those who had partners who worked nonstandard schedules reported being more involved in child care, which supports previous findings (Le Binah & Martin, 2004; Wight et al., 2008). Women, however, were less satisfied in their relationships when they had young children and engaged in varied hours, which could be related to higher levels of stress and guilt (Joshi & Bogen, 2007; Perry-Jenkins et al., 2007; Strazdins et al., 2006). Considering the strong narrative in the interviews from mothers about their desire to be perceived as full-time mothers and the resilient norms about limited institutionalized care for infants, women may be more

dissatisfied with their relationships when they feel forced to work unpredictable schedules.

This is related to the final major finding of this study: Partner support is a key factor in enabling individuals to work nonstandard schedules and maintain good relationships. Men who received less partner support and worked during weekends experienced more dissatisfaction in their relationship. On the contrary, women received more support and were more satisfied with their relationships when they worked on the weekend. This is related not only to partner support but also to the fact that men's weekend work is often attributed to overwork or shift work, whereas women's weekend employment consists of fewer hours, likely is voluntary, and is preplanned around family schedules.

Future research might extend this study by using longitudinal data. This would allow us to examine how nonstandard schedules and the level and impact of such schedules on partnership quality fluctuate over time. Other extensions might examine longer-term relationship outcomes, such as dissolution of nonmarital cohabiting unions or divorce, or the impact of nonstandard schedules on other areas of life, including children's educational attainment or parent – child interaction and interaction with family and friends. Recent studies on time-use data (Wight et al., 2008) offer promising innovations in these directions.

This study has made several key contributions. First, by using a nationally representative quantitative survey and an in-depth qualitative approach, we were able to obtain a more nuanced approach to answering our hypotheses. Previous qualitative studies have often examined specific occupations (e.g., nurses, security guards), generally among shift workers, which has led to more restrictive conclusions (e.g., Hertz & Charlton, 1989; Wooddell et al., 1994). The large number of representative quantitative studies can answer what is occurring, but they often grapple with the why and how of nonstandard schedules' impact on families.

Second, we tested whether the largely negative impact of nonstandard schedules on family life, found almost exclusively in the United States, is universal or highly dependent on institutional context. As has previous literature, we established that certain types of nonstandard schedules (varying schedules) are detrimental to relationship quality, and that this effect was stronger for women. We also demonstrated that varied

schedules in combination with having young children could be detrimental to women's partnership quality (Perry-Jenkins et al., 2007). In the absence of partner support, men's weekend work negatively affected relationship quality (Davis et al., 2008). Another similarity was that nonstandard schedules meant that men spent more time with children (Le Binah & Martin, 2004; Wight et al., 2008).

Yet there were many other findings that did not hold in the European context and resulted in new insights. First, there was no significant, negative effect of evening or night shifts on partnership quality. This is likely because of the more favorable working conditions and labor market regulations in The Netherlands and more stringent opening hours, which means that only a limited amount of services are offered around the clock. The high number of nonstandard jobs in the personal service industry (Presser, 2003) and the 24/7 economy is apparently not universal. Interviews also revealed that people who did not like night or rotating shifts actively left them (and had the protection and option to do so), whereas others who liked the freedom and flexibility of such schedules sought them out, leaving a generally satisfied group. Manual and less educated workers had clearly negative views of night and rotating shifts; they felt trapped though relatively highly paid and protected. Collective wage agreements and employment protection legislation in the Dutch context often meant that workers in nonstandard schedules were well paid. The more negative results in the United States may result from a context in which workers have less employment protection and in which more lower-paid service jobs have nonstandard schedules. This has also led to a broader focus on studying the impact of nonstandard schedules on low-income families (e.g., Joshi & Bogen, 2007), who have different options and use different coping mechanisms. It is therefore important for future research to examine the self-selection of workers who choose to participate in nonstandard schedules. This likely varies between countries and may influence results.

There appear to be some universal effects of nonstandard schedules, such as a negative impact on mothers with young children and the use of nonstandard schedules for tag-team parenting. But some findings did not hold, such as the lack of any negative effect of night shifts or the positive effect of varied hours on men's relationships, which signals that many of

the “universal” effects of such schedules may not hold outside of the United States. Thus, culture, poor working conditions, unequal opportunities, and a lack of employment protection – rather than nonstandard schedules – may hurt couples’ relationships and families.

