

**Flexicurity from the Individual's Work/Life Balance Perspective -  
- Coping with the flaws in European Child- and Elder Care Provision**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Flexicurity has received increased attention in recent years due to its ability to unite often incompatible interests and concerns in the labour market. However, focus has mainly been on various forms of numerical flexibility, income support and active labour market and educational policy. Other forms of flexibility and security such as the availability of affordable child and elder care and flexible working time arrangements, which appear crucial for individual employees, mainly women's, work/life balance, are rarely examined in most flexicurity studies. This paper calls for a more nuanced concept of flexicurity, which takes the individual's work/life balance perspective into consideration based on a comparative analysis of the work and care situations of working parents and carers for older people in Denmark, Finland, Portugal and the UK. It argues that the constraints employees' face in their daily lives due to caring responsibilities have significant implications for their flexibility and employability in the labour market.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Flexicurity has become a buzzword in recent years due to its ability to unite often incompatible interests and concerns in the labour market (Bredgaard et al., 2007). It describes different combinations of flexibility and security in the labour market, where focus mainly is on various forms of numerical flexibility, income support and active labour market and educational policy. Other forms of flexibility and security such as the availability of affordable child and elder care and working time arrangements, which appear crucial for individual employees, mainly women's, work/life balance, are often neglected in most flexicurity studies. Hence, Wilthagen and colleagues stress the importance of such parameters in their matrix for different forms and combinations of flexibility and security (Wilthagen and Tros, 2004: 171).

This paper calls for a more nuanced concept of flexicurity, which takes the individual's work/life balance perspective into consideration based on a comparative analysis of the work and care situations of working parents and carers for older people in Denmark, Finland, Portugal and the UK. It will argue that the constraints employees' face in their daily lives due to caring responsibilities have significant implications for their flexibility and employability in the labour market. It is particularly employees combining paid work with elder care rather than working parents who appear to struggle, although many parents also find it difficult to reconcile work and childrearing across Europe. Inflexible working time arrangements and in particular insufficient child- and elder care services seem, in line with much work/life balance literature, to account for employees' work/life balance problems and in some instances force them to reduce their weekly working hours, seek new employment or prevent them from improving their skills. The effects of different forms of flexibility and security often vary from one family to another. For example some forms of working time flexibility are perceived as a resource by some employees, whilst constituting a constraint for another. Therefore, the complex nature and demands of individual employees' work and care arrangements calls for flexible and adequate welfare services and workplace policies which are able to accommodate employees' individual needs to ease their reconciliation of work and caring responsibilities as well as enable them to meet employers' rising demands for a flexible and highly skilled workforce.

In the following, contemporary studies and theory on flexicurity and work/life balance are first briefly reviewed. We then briefly review the main characteristics of European welfare states and the combination of flexicurity in the selected four countries before presenting the methodology and data-sets used. Afterwards we explore how different combinations of working time flexibility and combination security seem to influence the work and care strategies chosen by British Danish, Finnish and Portuguese employees in relatively similar work and care situations as they work while caring for a dependent adult and/or child(ren) under the age of 12.

## **FLEXICURITY -INCLUDING THE WORK/LIFE BALANCE PERSPECTIVE**

Flexicurity concerns the balances between flexibility and security in the labour market and assumes that these two often contradictory concepts can be united as they in some instances appear complementary and even mutually supportive (Obadić, 2009: 5). The main thesis is that economic growth and competitiveness depends on high levels of flexibility in the labour market combined with high levels of security. Security in terms of for example high levels of unemployment benefits and further training are a precondition for sustaining high levels of flexibility, whilst a flexible labour market allows countries to afford high levels of security (Muffels et al, 2008: 9). When analysing the combinations of flexibility and security in the labour market, commentators often draw on Wilthagen and Tros' (2004: 171) flexicurity matrix, which treat different forms of flexibility and security policies as trade offs – defined as plus – and zero-sum outcomes - between employers and employees and distinguish between four distinct types of both flexibility (external and internal, functional and wage flexibility) and security (job-, employment-, income- and combination-security (Leschke et al, 2007: 339; Ilsøe, 2008: 68). Hence, the two concepts are considered multi-dimensional.

The different types of flexibility and security have been defined and combined in different ways, and the different constellations have to a varying degree been subject to analysis. Most flexicurity studies concentrate on the interplay between various forms of numerical flexibility, income support, active labour market and educational policy, using large scale quantitative data-sets to capture the economic situation at macro level (Viebrock and Clasen, 2009). Combination security, which refers to individual employees' work/life balance, is rarely the main focus for such studies. The few studies including combination security, in terms of employees' work/life balance, mainly focus on working time flexibility such as leave schemes, flexible working hours and non-standard employment contracts - often over the life course and seldom against the background of qualitative comparative based studies with individual employees (Muffels et al, 2008; Chung, 2007: 255; Klammer, 2007: 317). Other forms of combination security, including employees' work-life balance difficulties, the impact of child and elder care provision, the flexibility and the security elements they deem important when reconciling work and care-giving, are rarely examined in a flexicurity context. For example, the role of the public sector is often excluded, unless social security concerns income support, active labour market or educational policy. Hence, the public sector is of great importance to employees, particularly women's, reconciliation of work and family life and thereby the flexibility they can offer across Europe (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Lewis, 1992). Likewise, the role of the family, particularly employees' care responsibilities, are seldom part of the flexicurity debate, although such responsibilities often restrict employees' flexibility and availability in the labour market (Muffels et al., 2008:14). Therefore, when exploring what flexicurity is from the individual's work-life balance perspective, this requires a framework for analysis, which moves beyond the macro-orientated variables and encompasses the various forms of flexibility and security influencing individual employees' work and care strategies and thereby implicitly enable them to meet employers' rising demands for a flexible and highly skilled workforce.

To capture how different combinations of working time flexibility and child and elder care services affect individuals' work-life balance, it may prove fruitful to draw on the extensive work-life balance literature. Indeed, much comparative and country-based work-life balance research have systematically analysed employees' work/life balance, primarily the interplay between welfare state provision and women's labour market participation – typically involving country- based large scale quantitative analyses (Sundström, 1999: 194; Esping-Andersen, 1999). These studies offer different theoretical frameworks, which among others, emphasise the importance of national child and elder care facilities and working time arrangements at company level for employees' work-life balance. They also show a close link between employment and care-giving (Spiess and Schneider, 2003:

45). Drawing on such studies and theoretical accounts may advance our understanding of the importance of employees' work-life balance, particularly the role of care-giving and child and elder care provision, in a flexicurity context.

### ***Combination Security and Working Time Flexibility– A Trade Off***

Wilthagen and Tros (2004: 171) concept of combination security and the notion within much work-life balance literature that employees' work-life balance strategies can be understood in terms of the intersection of social practices, the cultural system, the social policy and labour market system, makes it possible to combine the theoretical accounts regarding working time and care services identified in the work-life balance literature with the flexicurity hypothesis (see for instance Perrons, 1995: 100-1; Pfau-Effinger, 1999: 62; Blossfeld and Drobnig, 2001: 30). Indeed, flexicurity can be seen as interplay between social practices and the social policy and labour market systems; whilst child and elder care services reflect different types of combination security and employees' working time arrangements can be perceived as different forms of working time flexibility. Applied to the flexicurity thesis, national child and elder care facilities can be considered a pre-condition for a flexible labour market, since these care services release workers from their care-giving responsibilities and enable them to meet employers' rising demands for a flexible and highly skilled workforce. Likewise, flexible working time arrangements enable not only employers to adjust their workforce according to market and production demands they also allow employees to a varying degree to organise their working hours around care-giving and thereby enhance their employability, flexibility and possibilities for career advancement during periods of care-giving (Muffels et al., 2008: 9; Chung, 2007). Working time arrangements and national child and elder care provision are therefore considered types of flexibility and combination security which are beneficial for both employers and employees, although flexicurity studies often perceive flexibility as an employer interest; whilst security mainly apply to employee- forgetting that these forms of flexibility and security may also accommodate the needs of their counterpart (Chung, 2007: 246; Leschke et al, 2007: 341).

### ***National Child and Elder Care Facilities***

Institutions play a significant role in the flexicurity thesis, where they built bridges to smoothened the transition of employees between different life stages such as enabling them to combine waged work with care-giving during periods of childrearing or elder care responsibilities (Muffels et al., 2008: 10). In this context, the work-life balance literature stress the importance of a well- developed child- and elder care infrastructure to enable women and men to enter paid work as they are released from their caring responsibilities (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Lewis, 1992; Perrons, 1995: 106). For example, Lane (1993: 276) argues that the welfare state can influence employees indirectly through its ideology and more directly through its different care, family and labour market policies, since these aspects affect the choices workers with care responsibilities make within the labour market and the household. Literature on working parents and carers for older people also show that the availability of formal care sources proves crucial for these employees work-life balance, but argue that formal care is often only one factor among many. Hence, informal care and lower employment rates among parents and carers for older people are seen to be more prevalent in countries with poorly developed elder and childcare services compared to countries with extensive formal care provision (Spiess and Schneider, 2003: 57; Yeandle, et al., 2002: 31; Wrohlich, 2005: 17). Therefore, individual countries welfare settlement – particularly their national child and elder care facilities- seem to affect parents and other carers' work-life balance, although different studies on working parents suggest that nowhere across Europe is formal care adequate to cover care needs (Larsen, 2005: 99). These studies, along with others, also imply that inadequate child and elder care services, including inflexible opening hours prove, crucial for the type of flexibility employees can offer and in some instance even hinder them to access waged work, since they have to arrange their work schedule around the opening hours of the care services rather than the other way around (Wrohlich, 2005: 17; Twigg and Atkin, 1996: 44). Therefore, inadequate child and elder care services may hinder parents and carers for older people to combine care-giving with full-time work and thereby indirectly affect the operation of the labour market, their employment security and income levels- parameters which are crucial in a flexicurity context (Muffels et al., 2008: 10).

### ***Working Time Flexibility***

Working time flexibility is often considered a leeway for employers to adjust their workforce to market demands and production needs (Muffels, et al, 2008: 9). Hence, much work-life balance research also implies that working time flexibility is a crucial parameter for enabling employees with care-giving responsibilities to continue in paid work and the way they reconcile work and care-giving (Pickard, 2004: 12). Indeed, different studies suggest that it is the workplace attitude, particularly the attitude of working parents and carers' managers and colleagues that has a crucial implication on carers' ability to stay in paid work (Yeandle et al, 2002: 24-5; Pickard, 2004: 6; Brandth and Kvande, 2006: 156-7). Parents and carers for older peoples' working schedule and type of work also influence their work and care arrangements. Working parents with long hours of work, inflexible or irregular working times as well as having to rely heavily on other colleagues in carrying out working tasks can lead to conflict of their multiple roles (Presser, 2006: 43). In addition, employees with irregular working schedules which include shift work or weekend work more often rely on informal care sources than employees with regular working hours or long working hours (Presser, 2006: 47; Sundström and Duvander, 1999: 6). However, working reduced hours may also have negative implications for working parents and carers for older people in other security aspects as income declines and finding time for further training may be more difficult, indicating a trade off between working time flexibility and forms of security other than combination security (Muffels et al, 2008: 3)

The effects of working time flexibility and national child and care arrangements on individual employees work/life balance may vary considerably from one family to another, as they depend on the influences of social practices (employees actual work and care arrangement), the gender system, labour market and social policy system (Trifiletti et al, 2001: 7). It is the interplay between social practices and the labour market and social policy systems, which is the main focus of this paper. The focus is on how Danish, British, Finnish and Portuguese employees negotiate their respective strategies for reconciling work and care and how these strategies are affected by working time arrangements and national child and elder care facilities e.g. different constellations of working time flexibility and combination security. In the following, the main features of the European welfare settlements and their flexicurity arrangements are first presented to give an idea of the institutional settings within which European employees combine work and care-giving before presenting the methods and used data-sets for the comparative analysis.

### **Main features of European Welfare Settlements and their Flexicurity Arrangements**

Denmark, Finland, Portugal and the UK represent countries with different constellations of flexibility and security. According to Esping-Andersen's welfare modelling, Denmark and Finland with their relatively high levels of public child and elder care and universal family services belong to the Nordic welfare model; whilst they in a flexicurity context often are considered countries with high mobility and flexibility in the labour market, low employment protection regulation, high activation policies and benefits. The UK represent the liberal welfare model as the provision of care services is left to the market and family benefits are targets at the poorest and most vulnerable families. Their employment protection legislation, benefits and activation policies are also relatively low, but are combined with high mobility and flexibility. Portugal with its reliance on family support and its limited child and elder care is often classified as the Corporatist or Southern welfare state model, whilst their employment protection is relatively strong, but combined with low benefits, low activation policies and a relatively inflexible labour market (Muffels et al, 2008: 11; Esping-Andersen, 1999: 85). When Esping-Andersen's welfare models are combined with the main features of the different flexicurity arrangements, four distinct welfare settlements with a different constellation of flexibility and security emerge in Denmark, Finland, Portugal and the UK. Applied to the child and elder care services and the working time arrangements, including parents and carers for older people's employment rate, in the four countries, recent data seem to some extent to support this classification.

Access to child and elder care vary in Denmark, Finland, Portugal and the UK, where a relatively large proportion of children attend formal care, whilst the number of older people receiving formal care is significantly lower in all four countries (see table 1).

**Table 1: Child and Elder Care coverage as a percentage of Pre-school Children and 65/67+ year old in Denmark, Finland Portugal and the UK**

	Institutional care for older people aged 65+	Home Care for older people aged 65+	Children 0-3 years old		Children 3- Mandatory School Age	
			Coverage:	Full-time places	Coverage	Full-time Places
	-	-				
<b>Denmark</b>	8	20.8	56	56	93	93
<b>Finland</b>	7.2	11	21	20	70	59
<b>Portugal</b>	3.6	2.6	19	:	75	:
<b>UK</b>	3	5	34	25*	60	43

Source: Rostgaard, 2004: 59-60; table 3.3; Nielsen and Goul Andersen (2005: table 7.2); Sousa and Figueredo, 2004: 17; Quaresma et al., 2004: 5 Wall, 2001a: 10; Wall et al, 2001b:5). Note: \*Children's participation in day nurseries are reported as 0-4 year olds. The data from the UK is from 2001. The data on full-time places is from 2000. Note: The Danish statistics are for people aged 67+.

The provision of home care to those aged 65+ and childcare for children at different ages is significantly higher in Denmark compared to Finland, Portugal and the UK. The relatively low attendance of particularly British, Finnish and Portuguese children under the age of three in full-time day-care, along with the relatively low elder care coverage in particularly Portugal and the UK, indicates that the bulk of care-giving falls on the family and may have implications for parents and carers for older people's employment patterns. This is even more so, as other studies suggest that most older people receive a mix of formal and informal care, as around 40 per cent of Danish older people aged 75+, 9 per cent of British older people aged 65+ and even fewer in Finland and Portugal rely exclusively on formal elder care (Coma- Herrera et al, 2003: table 3; Rostgaard, 2004: 120; Sousa and Figueredo, 2004: 18; Kröger et al, 2003: 36). The workers involved in care-giving, particularly carers for older people, may be less available and flexible as formal care by far appear to cover the care needs of children and even less so older people in all four countries. Different levels of combination security may therefore be crucial for the flexibility these workers can offer their employer and their possibility to continue in paid work during periods of care-giving.

Also the availability of different working time arrangements at the workplace including employees number of weekly working hours, their access to flexible working, part-time work and paid short-term leave may affect parents and carers for older people's ability to reconcile work with care-giving and thereby implicitly their work-life balance. Danish, Finnish and Portuguese parents have rights to paid short-term leave. British parents only have rights to unpaid leave. This also applies to Danish, Finnish and Portuguese carers for older people. Access to part-time work and flexible working hours is a right for Finnish and Portuguese parents with children under the age of 9 and 12 respectively, whilst British parents have the rights to request flexible working and part-time work and Danish parents access flexible working time and part-time work are arranged through local agreements between the employer and the individual or groups of employees at the workplace. The rights of carers for older people are slightly different. Only in the UK do carers for older people have a right to request flexible working and part-time work. However, Finnish and Portuguese carers for older people do not have legal rights to flexible working time and in Denmark carers for older people's access part-time work and flexible working hours is organised through local agreements at company level. Table 2 shows the availability of these options to British, Danish, Finnish and Portuguese employees.

**Table 2: Working time options available to employees in Denmark, Finland, Portugal and the UK in per cent in 2006.**

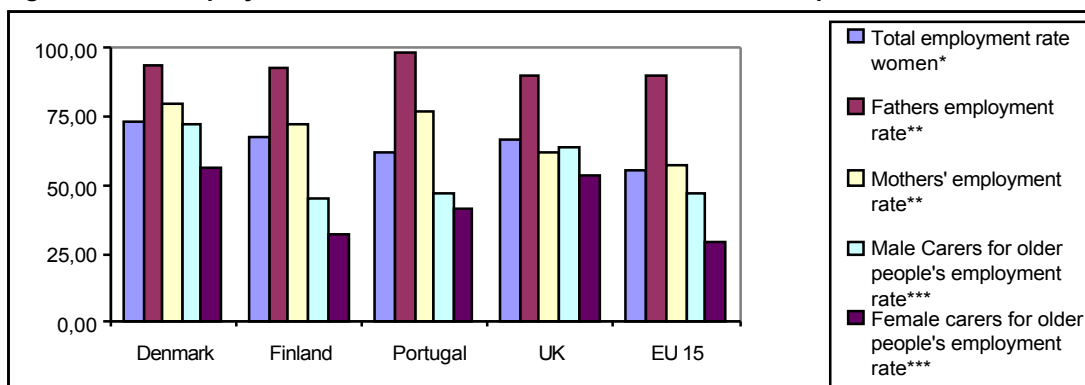
	Average weekly working hours	Short-term leave	Part-time work	Flexible working*
<b>Denmark</b>	40,4	:	80	60
<b>Finland</b>	40,3	:	71	71
<b>Portugal</b>	41,6	:	17	25
<b>The UK</b>	43	:	85	57

Source: Eurostat, 2006; Mureis et al, 2006: 16. \*flexible working hours (defined as possibility to vary the start and end of daily work, accumulate hours and accumulate hours for longer periods of leave).

Flexible working and part-time work is less available in Portugal compared to Denmark, Finland and the UK, where slightly more British companies offer employees the option to work part-time and flexible working are more widely available in Finland. This indicates (along with the other working time arrangements and the child and elder care coverage) that the four countries through the law, care services and company policies to a varying degree assist working parents and carers for older people.

The implications of care-giving on parents and carers for older people's employment patterns are not always straight forward. Recent figures imply that around a third of all European employees and jobseekers mainly aged 20-49, combine waged work and childrearing and 6 to 10 per cent, primarily middle aged women (45-65), assume care responsibilities for a dependent adult whilst working (Fagan et al., 2001: 15; Viitanen, 2005: 8). Figure 1 shows the work patterns of parents and carers for older people in Denmark, Finland, Portugal and UK.

**Figure 1: The Employment Rate of Parents and Carers for Older People**



Source: \*Eurostat (2007a); \*\*Eurostat (2005a), Eurostat (2002a): Tables A.20, A21; ECHP 1998 data.

Note: Mother and Fathers for children under the age of 12; Carers for older people are people aged 50-64 and caring for an older person or a dependent adult.

Men's employment record is hardly affected by childcare responsibilities anywhere, but periods of having and raising children impact women's participation in paid work everywhere. By contrast both men and women's employment appear to be affected by caring responsibilities for an older person, although also the age of these workers and early retirement schemes may influence their decision to leave the labour market. Nevertheless, large differences seem to exist in the impact of caring for children and older people across Europe. Mothers in the Nordic countries and Portugal often work full-time despite the differences in coverage level of care services in these countries, whilst British mothers often work part-time. However, Finnish and Portuguese carers for older people seem more likely to leave the labour market during periods of elder care responsibilities, whilst their Danish counterparts often continue in full-time employment and British carers for older people work part-time (Eurostat, 2002: tables A20; A21; 2005).

The different employment patterns for carers for older people and parents suggest that carers for older people seem more likely to struggle to reconcile work with care responsibilities, although also a large group of parents, mainly mothers, reduce their workload or leave the labour market during periods of childrearing. Hence, the decision by carers for older people to leave paid work may also be due to other factors such as their age, early retirement schemes etc. Nevertheless, the general statistics imply a negative link between care-giving and employment. They also suggest that high levels of combination security in terms of child and elder care services and high levels of working time flexibility may have a positive influence on parents and carers for older people employability and flexibility in the labour market. Indeed, the comparatively high employment rate of Danish mother and carers for older people combined with the comparative high child and elder care coverage and extensive working time flexibility suggest such a close link. Likewise, the relatively extensive Finnish and Portuguese childcare services and low levels of formal elder care may account for the relatively high employment rate of mothers and low employment rate of carers for older people in these two countries, respectively. Hence, flexible working time options are less

widely available in Portugal despite parents' rights to flexible working hours. Also the statistics from the UK suggest that high levels of flexible working time options when child- and elder care provision is low may ease mothers and carers for older people's work-life balance and thereby enable them to continue in paid work. The extent to which the comparatively low employment rate of carers for older people may be due to the hardship of combining work and elder care, and particularly inadequate elder care services and working time arrangements is, along with the childcare services and working time arrangements available to parents, examined in the following. The analysis draws on the methods and data-set presented below.

## **METHODS AND DATA-SET USED**

The analysis of European employees is based on 158 interviews with single parents and couples with child and elder care responsibilities in relatively similar work and care situations conducted in Finland, Portugal and the UK as part of the SOCCARE project as well as secondary data on Danish families. (add in with the data used for Denmark) The interviewees were selected through the quota-sampling technique, where personal contacts to carers, older people and lone parent organisations were used to gain access to the families. They are therefore a selected sample fitting predetermined characteristics in terms of the children's ages, older people needing care, and the number of hours these employees worked. As a result, their work and care arrangements represent to some extent a function of this sampling strategy. However, their work and care arrangements are not without meaning, as they, through the interviewees' accounts, do not appear to be accidental, but reflect the realities these British, Finnish and Portuguese employees experience when reconciling work and care responsibilities. The same also applies to the secondary data on Danish parents and carers for older people which include large scale quantitative and qualitative data-sets. I particularly draw on four studies by the Confederation of Salaried Employees and Civil Servants in Denmark – FTF (2006), Deding et al (2006) and Lewinter (2008). The two former studies look at the work-life balance of working parents with children under 12 based on survey data with 5000 and 2000 randomly selected employees. The study by Lewinter examines among others carers for older people's work-life balance, drawing a mix of survey data with 4000 questionnaires and 50 in-depth interviews.

To compare the work/care arrangements of the selected working carers for older people and children, it was necessary to select and include employees in similar work and care situations from the four countries. In contrast to most contemporary research on working parents and carers for older people, this analysis does not use the nationality of these employees as the selection criteria. Instead, their work and care responsibilities are used as the common denominators to avoid that I implicitly assume that employees' work-life balance differ according to their nationality. Furthermore, only employees caring for at least one child under the age of 12 and/or a dependent adult person were included, excluding families with care responsibilities for older children. The data does therefore not include an equal number of employees from each country and an equal number of employees with child and/or elder care responsibility. This does, however, not pose a problem for the conclusions drawn, since the purpose of this comparative analysis is to give a feel of how these two groups of carers' experiences of combining work and care rather than to uncover the frequency with which these accounts are common across Europe.

Out of the SOCCARE data-set of 435 interviews with European families, 158 families matched the selection criteria. These employees combined paid work with different forms and intensity of care-giving. They included parents caring for their children, parents providing care for an older relative, often their parents or in laws; whilst others assumed only eldercare responsibilities or combined elder care with care-giving for their grandchildren and nieces. Table 3 gives an overview of the type of care provided by the British, Finnish and Portuguese employees selected.

**Table 3: Main Characteristics of the Selected Employees according to Nationality in actual numbers**

	Working Parents	Working carers for older people			Total
	Own child	Older person/Adult	Older person/own child(ren)	Older person/not own child(ren)	
Finland	46	7	2	2*	57
Portugal	44	3	7	:	54
The UK	33	2**	9***	3****	47
<b>Total</b>	123	12	18	5	158

Note: \*grandchildren \*\* one family is spouse care \*\*\* two families are spouse care \*\*\*\*two families care for their grandchildren and one family care for their niece.

The secondary material on Danish employees with child and elder care responsibilities indicated that around 77 per cent of carers for older people combined paid work with eldercare activities mainly for their parents and in laws and another 37 per cent of the employees provided elder care to their neighbour, their spouse or other relatives (Lewinter, 2008; Struck et al., 2005: 6). These employees' experiences of combining work and care-giving will be analysed based on the analytical framework presented earlier. The analysis is structured around how these families perceive their work and care arrangement and the type of care they provide

### THE EXPERIENCES OF COMBINING WORK AND CARE-GIVING

Combining paid work and care was a real puzzle for most parents and carers for older people, and it was often subject to much planning and re-negotiations within the families. Therefore, the working and caring arrangements were often fragile and tended to vary from week to week depending on the parents and carers' work schedule. If sudden changes occurred, such as a changed work schedule, the older person or child fell ill, a reorganisation of the current care arrangement was often needed.

*'You have to constantly fit timetables together. We constantly have some small scale negotiations going on and for that we have a calendar on the wall at home where we sign up our forthcoming duties so that the other can fit her or his comings and goings around it. If my husband is away from home on a certain day I cannot be. Usually everything works out and I manage to organise my work in a way that also suits my husband's schedule'* (FINMC3).

The result of these sometimes fragile and unstable caring arrangements was that many carers struggled to combine work and care. In fact, most carers for older people and parents reported great difficulties and were not as satisfied with their current work and care arrangements as suggested by recent research regarding employees' satisfaction with their work-life balance (Kauppinen 2001: 3). The difficulties in reconciling work and care were also reflected by the interviewees' complaints about high stress levels, lack of time for themselves, their children or partners:

*'It's too much. I have noticed that I'm not too good in the head lately, and now with this pneumonia problem I have been very low, really very low. Sometimes I even say "with all this on top of me one day I will go crazy"... It is true, because my head is really tired, sometimes I cannot think straight... I take supplements, things for the brain and all'* (PMCD8).

*'I cannot handle this anymore'* (UKM C1 1).

*'Sometimes he says in a very sad tone that we never have (common) time and that I arrange my meetings for times when he is at home on purpose'* (FINM C13).

It is not only the parents and carers for older people who complain about their work and care situations. Some interviewees also reported that their children were unhappy with the current arrangements:

*'I was too often away from home. Our daughter almost started to shun me and was just daddy's girl'* (FINM C2).



Such statements about more time with the family and high stress levels are also common phenomena among Danish working parents. A recent Danish quantitative study revealed that 79 per cent of Danish working parents and 34 per cent of Danish employees in general want to spend more time at home, with their children or other family (FTF, 2006: 4). Other British, Finnish and Danish research also shows that working parents and carers for older people often complain about high stress levels and feel guilty that they do not spend enough time with their family and are unable to relax (Phillipset al., 2002:8; Kuuppelomâki et al, 2004: 698; Deding et al, 2006).

British, Finnish and Portuguese carers for older people/adults were more likely than working parents to experience difficulties in juggling work and care commitments irrespective of their nationality. Nearly all the British, Finnish and Portuguese carers for older people interviewed experienced difficulties whilst around half of the interviewed parents from each of the selected countries reported that their work/care arrangement worked well. That elder care responsibilities in particular seem difficult to reconcile with waged work is also reflected by the remarks of British, Finnish and Portuguese employees caring for both children and a dependent relative. These employees stated that it was mainly the elder care rather than childcare demands that drained them, indicating that caring for an older person whilst working is much harder. That caring for a heavily dependent person is particularly exhausting is also reflected by several British, Finnish and Portuguese working carers for older people's fear of further deterioration of the older person's health, as this would add further strain on their arrangement. However, the situation appear to be slightly different in Denmark, where recent studies imply that Danish carers for older people reportedly feel their work and care arrangement work well, whilst many Danish working parents often struggle to combine work and care-giving (Deding et al, 2006: 70; Lewinter, 2008).

The experiences of care-giving in terms of how the sampled parents and carers for older people perceive their work-life balance seem to share some common features across the four countries, where many parents and carers for older people – the latter with the exception of Denmark - appear to struggle when reconciling work and care-giving. However, the problems these employees experience differ to a varying degree across the four countries although the interviews and secondary material from Denmark also reveal that getting children or older people ready in the morning, fetching them at specific times and organising child and elder care during evenings and weekends are common daily problems nearly all interviewed parents and carers for older people face (Deding et al., 2006; Lewinter, 2008). The availability of care services and working time arrangements appeared to have crucial implications for these employees' daily work-life balance; particularly whether they struggled in their current work and care situations or felt that it worked well.

## **CHILD AND ELDERCARE SERVICES**

The sampled employees relied on a variety of care providers ranging from informal carers like relatives and friends to private and publicly funded nurseries and eldercare services, voluntary care institutions as well as private and public schools. Relatively few British, Finnish and Portuguese working parents and carers for older people managed to cover their caring needs by relying only on one type of care and often supplemented formal care with informal care. Recent Danish research findings also show that parents and carers for older people often supplement formal care with help from family and friends to cover the care gaps in services (Lewinter, 2008; Struck et al 2005: 4; Deding et al., 2006: 25). This suggests that nowhere is formal care services able to cover parents and carers for older people's care needs, even in countries such as Finland and Denmark known for their universal child and elder care services. These care gaps seemed to influence not only the interviewed employees' work-life balance, but also their work and care strategies as well as their availability and flexibility in the labour market.

British, Finnish and Portuguese interviewees stated that inadequate and inflexible child and elder care were an important reason as to why they often found it hard to combine work with child or elder care. For example, many British, Finnish and Portuguese parents relying entirely on formal public care reported that they faced difficulties as the opening hours of these childcare facilities often did not meet their care needs. By contrast, many British, Finnish and Portuguese parents using private

care found that this type of care eased their work and care arrangement and had indeed been chosen for these reasons as they offered full-time care which to a varying degree matched the parents' working schedule. Indeed, inflexible and short opening hours of day-care or schools was a constant problem for the interviewed parents in Finland, Portugal and the UK. A normal school day often ends at 2.30 in Portugal and Finland and 3.0 to 3.30 in the UK or sometimes even earlier for younger children, which hardly match parents' work-day, as it typically ends at five o'clock or even later. In addition, childcare across the three countries tend to close at five o'clock, a complaint of many British, Finnish and Portuguese parents interviewed, as they often were unable to fetch their children due to work commitments:

*'My work day ends around 4 pm and I pick M (the child) up between 4-5 pm or he has to be picked up because the day-care centre closes. When I have to work until 6 pm, I have to ask somebody else to pick M up'. (FinSP12)*

The inflexibility of childcare services also makes it difficult for Danish parents to combine work and care and inflexible opening hours are a frequent complaint raised by Danish parents (Deding et al., 2006: 78-9). However, country differences also seem to exist, as afternoon care often is available for most Danish children at school age, whilst this rarely is the case in Finland, Portugal and the UK. Some British, Finnish and Portuguese parents have therefore opted for alternative solutions to cover their care needs (see below). Likewise, some Portuguese parents, mainly those using public nurseries and schools, have to fetch their children at lunch time and experience very irregular opening hours, as these care facilities close for two hours during lunch hours, and public schools often operate with two shifts to fit in more children. Neither Danish nor Finnish and British parents reportedly experienced such daily problems, indicating that the type of childcare care problems vary across the four countries. In addition, only Finnish parents were able to rely on childcare facilities when children were ill and had, similar to Danish parents, access 24 hour nurseries (Deding et al, 2006; FTF, 2006).

Also the levels of elder care services the interviewed working carers for older people receive vary across the four countries. It appeared from the interviews and secondary material that elder care services do not operate during evening weekends holidays and sometimes in the late afternoon in Portugal, whilst this is not the case in Denmark, Finland and the UK. However, the care services the British, Finnish and Portuguese carers for older people received were often limited to few weekly or daily visits and some, mainly British and Portuguese carers, managed without any or limited formal care, even if the older person was heavily dependent. Research reveal that 90 per cent of Danish carers for older people receive formal care in terms of help with practical tasks and all heavily dependent older people are entitled to care that cover theirs and their carers care needs (Lewinter, 2008; Struck et al, 2005). The interviews and secondary material from Denmark also reveal that particularly British and Finnish carers for older people complain that no independent help existed for them as carers. Hence, inflexible eldercare packages that often fail to meet the carers or the older person's specific needs were complaints stated by nearly all interviewed British, Portuguese and Finnish carers for older people whilst a recent Danish study reveal that around 25 per cent of Danish carers have similar problems (Struck et al, 2005: 4). According to the British, Finnish and Portuguese carers, inadequate and inflexible elder care services were an important reason as to why they often found it extremely hard to combine work and eldercare, whilst universal elder care services is an important reason why Danish carers for older people feel their work and care arrangement work well and they can combine elder care with full-time work (Lewinter, 2008).

The importance of adequate elder care services for the work-life balance of carers for older people is also reflected by the fact that mainly British, Finnish and Portuguese carers for older people providing light care or receiving formal care covering all the older persons care needs were satisfied with their work-life balance. Indeed, these findings, along with the experiences of working parents, suggest that high levels of combination security are crucial for employees' work-life balance, which is also reflected in the strategies chosen by Danish, British, Finnish and Portuguese parents and carers for older people to cover the formal care gaps.

Reciprocal care exchange with friends, reliance on help from relatives and in the case of lone parents their ex-partner, private child- and elder care, employment of nanny or a domestic worker were strategies used by some British, Finnish and Portuguese parents and carers for older people

to cover the care gaps in services. However, private care, including the recruitment of a maid or nanny, was mainly care options used by high income parents and carers for older people, indicating that these families can afford to buy multiple private and public care services. Some average and low income British, Finnish and Portuguese parents and carers for older people had also been forced to opt for expensive private care or employ a domestic employee to solve their problems, even if this meant that their financial budget was stretched- a problem. High care fees had also forced some British and Portuguese interviewees to rely on informal care due to economic constraints:

*'My mother offered and there is also the money aspect, because a crèche nowadays, a good crèche would be an extra outlay which isn't exactly convenient right now.'* (PMC2)

*'Look if we could afford it then we would certainly have hired someone full-time (to care for the maternal grand mother' (PMCD9).*

Many Finnish and Danish parents and carers for older people also rely on family and friends to cover their care gaps. However, this type of care is often limited to fetching and bringing children and older people to and from childcare or hospital appointments and in emergency situations, although some Finnish carers for older people, similar to their British and Portuguese counterparts and parents, regularly rely on informal care to cover care gaps during their workday, evenings and weekends (Lewinter, 2008; Deding et al., 2006: 25). Self-care was also used by some British, Finnish and Portuguese carers for older people and less so by Finnish and Portuguese parents and hardly any British parents interviewed, even when the older person was heavily dependent or their children relatively young (6-8 years). An extreme example was a Portuguese lone mother, who left the care of her small children aged 10, seven and three to her 12 year old daughter while she was working (PM FSP15). However, most sampled parents and carers for older people, similar to Danish parents and less so carers for older people, tried to fit their working schedule around the opening hours of the schools, the different care facilities for children and older people rather than the other way around (Deding et al, 2006; Lewinter, 2008). For example:

*'My working hours are strongly determined by the care. We even say in our workplace that while we do have flexible working hours, the day-care centres don't. In a sense, it is the day-care that determines the length of your workday more than your employer'* (FINM C2).

*'It's been more manageable with the children at school, the regular hours. I have been organising myself around that.'* (UKMFDB2)

These quotes, along with the interviews, indicate that inadequate child and elder care services affect the flexibility of employees with care responsibilities, as they in some instances are forced to leave work early, reorganise their work schedule when formal care is unavailable and they cannot rely on their informal network. That some British, Finnish and Portuguese employees, particularly those with work commitments during evenings and weekends, stated that they found it extremely hard and stressful to combine work with care-giving at such times due to lack of child and elder services. In some instances it was only the ability to rely on their extended family and friends that enabled these employees to balance paid work with care. For example:

*'My Mum has just come in like an angel, without her it would be very, very difficult, I think it would be impossible. As an example this Wednesday, I go into London, and I have to stay overnight because I'm teaching first thing in the morning. Tom (her husband) is taking his class to London and won't be back until 10. You just couldn't get anyone to take childcare from 7 in the morning until 10 at night, unless you've got a Mum (UKMC7)*

Not all British, Finnish and Portuguese parents and carers for older people were able to organise their workhours around the opening hours of formal child care or rely on their extended family and friends and had in some instances been forced to reduce working hours to manage care responsibilities. Others work and care arrangements were at a breaking point due to recent changes in the availability of childcare or the cared for person's deteriorating health. Some British, Finnish

and Portuguese carers for older people reported that they recently had reduced their weekly working hours, increasingly involved friends and/or family, or enrolled the older person into a residential home, as they were unable to cope with the new care situation due to the older person's deteriorating health. Likewise, some British, Finnish and Portuguese parents also stated that their child(ren) no longer could attend their full-time day-care and that this added extra strains on their work and care arrangements, since afternoon school care often was unavailable or they now had to fetch the children from different locations. They had therefore to leave work earlier or reduce work hours, if they wanted to balance paid work with care-giving. British, Finnish and Portuguese employees with child and elder care responsibilities also stated such problems, as they often needed to co-ordinate childcare with their eldercare, where the day-care centres for older people often were placed far from the day-care the children attended. For example:

*I would love to go back to work-full time, but I'm not paying an extortionate amount for child care and I have to know that my gran is looked after. I can't even work nights as someone has to be in the house with her. I couldn't do it (UKSP12)*

*'Part-time work limits the flexibility and the range of class work (her job) I can do, but I must remember that I'm lucky to have the job, people are queuing up for work that will fit with their children's school hours' (UKMFSP20).*

Others, particularly British and Portuguese parents, felt that compulsory schooling in some instances eased their work and care arrangement and had allowed them to increase their weekly working hours. This implies that the availability of child and elder care services and thereby implicitly high levels of combination security have significant implications for these employees' availability and flexibility in the labour market. Other work-life balance research also stress the importance of child and elder care services for the employability of parents and carers for older people, but these studies also emphasise the side-effects of parents and carers for older people who reduce their working time or leave paid work during periods of care-giving. Indeed, these employees tend to get their income reduced, risk missing opportunities for promotion and further training, loose pension rights, face difficulties in re-entering the labour market (Anderson, 2004: 106; Crompton, 2006: 108). This also appeared to be the case among some employees participating in this study. For example, some British lone mothers experienced that if they left work they no longer had a guaranteed childcare place and were therefore unable to start a new job with a relatively short notice. Likewise, several Finnish, British and Portuguese parents and carers for older people stated that their financial situation had worsened after they reduced their workload and their opportunities for career advancement were at a standstill. However, few British and Finnish parents had also used the opportunity of childrearing to reduce their working hours and combine such care responsibilities with further training courses whilst working reduced hours. Therefore, in a broader flexicurity perspective care-giving also appear to have long-term implications for these workers' employability and employment security.

## **WORKING TIME ARRANGEMENTS**

The interviewed parents and carers for older people weekly working hours varied from a few hours per week to over 70 hours and they had to varying degrees access to time-off in emergency situations and flexible working hours. The most common work pattern was 35-48 hours in Portugal, Finland and the UK, although some interviewees worked more than others, often women, worked part-time while their partner tended to work longer hours. Danish parents often work between 35 and 42 hours a week, whilst information on the weekly number of working hours of Danish carers for older people is unavailable. Hence, general statistics suggest that the majority work full-time (Deding et al, 2006; Eurostat, 2002).

Many British, Finnish and Portuguese parents and carers for older people with long working hours found it difficult to reconcile work and care-giving, but others also felt that their work and care arrangement worked well even if they had very long hours. In addition, some British, Finnish and Portuguese parents and carers for older people had, however, decided to reduce their weekly working hours to manage care responsibilities as they found it difficult to match their own and their partners' timetables with care-giving:

*'I started to say I can't handle this anymore... I was too often away from home... after I made the decision (to shorten the working hours) this gave my husband the possibility to have something more' (FINMC2).*

That one parent had reduced their work hours or decided to work less weekly hours than their partner meant according to the interviewed British, Finnish and Portuguese employees that their work and care arrangements now worked well. This also often allowed their partner to focus on his/her career. For example, one British couple had decided that it was the time of the father to advance his career, whilst the mother, who until recently had been less actively involved in childcare, would reduce working hours and take on the main care responsibility (UKMC11). This also suggests that parents and carers for older people's weekly working hours have some effect on both their work-life balance and their possibilities for career advancement. Also the parents and carers' working schedule tends to dictate their work and care strategies and to varying degree their work-life balance.

At least one parent or carer for older people worked irregular hours in nearly half of the families. The type of irregular hours ranged from weekend, evening, travel related and shift work. Some working parents and carers for older people also worked regular hours and others had flexible working hours. Relatively few Portuguese carers had flexible working hours and Finnish and Portuguese lone parents tended to work regular hours to fit their working hours around opening hours of childcare facilities. Some British, Finnish and Portuguese carers for older people also reported that they primarily worked irregular hours to get both ends to meet, indicating that the interviewees often choose a working schedule that meet the care gaps in formal care. Some parents, British lone parents in particular, had in some instances changed to less skilled jobs to allow them to juggle work and care-giving. Indeed, this appears to support the notion of the flexicurity thesis used in this paper, where care-giving and particularly low levels of combination security have significant implications for employees' flexibility and thereby employers access to a highly skilled workforce.

Working irregular hours often meant that the selected parents and carers of older people faced difficulties in combining work and care commitments. However, different British, Finnish and Portuguese parents and carers for older people felt that regular, flexible working hours or irregular hours either added constraints or eased their work and care arrangements. For example, flexible working hours eased most British parents' work-life balance, whilst this was not always the case for Portuguese and Finnish parents, as their work commitment often meant that they worked long hours. However, some British, Portuguese and Finnish families also reported that the flexibility enabled them to combine work and care-giving:

*'Had I not been able to work during the evening and organise my work according to family needs, it would not be possible for me to collect my granddaughter or take my son and mother for hospital appointments.'* (UKMCDB22).

*'I don't come in at 9.30 like other people. I come in at 10.30/11.00. I asked for permission to do this, because I leave my grandmother dressed and ready. Then I don't take any lunch hour or restrict it to half an hour.'* (PMC3)

This suggests that one type of working schedule may ease one employees' work-life balance, whilst constituting a constraint for others, indicating the importance of relatively flexible working time arrangements at the workplace. Flexible working time arrangements also often allowed the interviewed British, Finnish and Portuguese employees to balance work and care-giving responsibilities as they seemed to compensate for the inflexibility of child and elder care services. This also implies that flexible working time arrangements are not only beneficial to employers as stated in much flexicurity literature (Leschke et al., 2007).

Employees' working schedule also influenced to a varying degree their work and care strategies. For example, many British, Finnish and Portuguese parents and carers for older people living as couples often engaged equally in child/eldercare during evenings and weekends, whilst their

involvement varied during the week. Some parents and carers for older people irrespectively of their nationality also left the care tasks solely to the woman during evenings and weekends as the husband often worked at these times in these families. The few exceptions were a two or three Finnish and Portuguese couples with elder and childcare responsibilities. In fact a common characteristic among the interviewed British, Finnish and Portuguese parents and carers for older people was that the parent or carer with the most suitable timetable was often responsible for getting the children or the older person ready in the morning and fetching and bringing them to and from day-care, school or medical appointments. Therefore, in a few families with child and elder care responsibilities, the male partner was solely responsible for these caring tasks, as their female partner had already left for work or was unable to fetch the children or older person due to work commitments. In other families, the morning and transportation tasks were left to the woman often because her work day started later or she was able to leave work earlier.

Co-ordinating the caring of children and older people according to the parents working schedule is also an essential aspect in families where carers are working evening and weekends. The same applies to their handling of emergency situations e.g. an ill child or dependent adult. Mainly parents or carers for older people with the most flexible working schedule, the most generous entitlements to leave work and/or whose work can most easily be replaced take time off when children are ill or the older person suddenly needs acute help. Therefore, some parents and carers for older people left it to the male partner to take time off from work, as he has the most generous leave entitlements or can more easily reorganise his work. Among couples where the mother takes time off from work, fathers feel they cannot leave work due to their employer, their type of employment or simply because they feel that this is not their responsibility. Other research also shows that fathers and male carers more often than women across Europe appear to meet negative attitudes at work from both colleagues and line managers when they ask for reduced working hours or leave (Brandth and Kvande, 2006: 156-7; Pickard, 2004: 6). However, not only fathers felt the pressure from their employer when having to take time off in acute situations despite their legal rights. Many mothers and carers for older people also reported that their employer had limited or no understanding of their needs for time off and in some instances had forced them to change job. This was mentioned particularly by British mothers. However, some Finnish and Portuguese mothers also reported that they were unable to use their different leave entitlements due to the nature of their work or non-supportive employers. Several interviewees also stated that their employers were more supportive of families with children than carers for older people. As a result, many of these employees found it difficult to leave work in emergency situations. For example:

*'I have not had any problems giving a lift to my father during the workday, although I have noticed that if someone else has done the same, people have not liked that. But if a child gets ill people understand that very well. It was the same at my former workplace, if a child gets ill nobody can say anything.'* (FINM CDB16).

Despite this, some British, Finnish and Portuguese employees also reported that it was the flexibility of their workplace which enabled them to combine care with paid work, as they could organise their work hours around their care activities, indicating the importance of high levels of working time flexibility for these employees' work-life balance. Most Danish working parents and carers for older people also feel to varying degrees that their employers are relatively supportive and show understanding for their situation although some, similar to the sampled families, feel they are unable to leave work with short notice due to the nature of their work or less supportive employers (Deding et al, 2006: 104; Lewinter, 2008). Other work-life balance studies also suggest that parents and carers for older people's working schedule is detrimental to their work and care strategies facilities, indicating the importance of flexible working time arrangements and thereby implicitly high levels of working time flexibility in the labour market (Pleck, 1993; Arksey et al, 2005: 48).

## **CONCLUSION**

The empirical findings imply that it is often the flexibility of the workplace, and thereby implicitly high levels of flexibility that enable parents and carers for older people to combine work and care-giving due to the often inflexible and inadequate child and elder care. Employers and employees seem

therefore indirectly to pay for the trade off between combination security and working time flexibility. The comparative analysis also suggested that particularly British, Finnish and Portuguese carers for older people rather than parents struggled to combine work and care-giving, although also many British, Finnish and Portuguese parents faced difficulties. Secondary material shows, however that the situation is slightly different in Denmark where Danish parents appeared more likely to struggle whilst most carers for older people were satisfied with their current work and care situation.

The difficulties the interviewed Finnish, British and Portuguese working carers for older people experience also suggest that the comparatively low employment rate of carers for older people in the general statistics may be due to the hardship of combining work and elder care. Indeed, many employees interviewed experienced similar problems regardless of their country of origin, and their arrangements are among others impacted by working time arrangements and care services. Parents and carers for older people's working schedule and the availability of affordable care services seemed crucial for the way these families organised and perceived their work and care arrangement in all four countries. Some factors such as irregular working hours were seen as a resource in some families whilst constituted a constraint in another. However, in general irregular and long working hours and insufficient care services meant that some employees' struggled to combine work and care. Other employees without such characteristics often found that their work and care arrangement worked well in all four countries.

The findings also seem to demonstrate that working carers for older people often find it more difficult to reconcile work and family life than working parents due to lower levels of supportive care policies available to them in Finland, Portugal and the UK, whilst the availability of universal elder care services appear to ease Danish carers for older people's work-life balance. This also indicate, along with the general statistics that high levels of combination security (in terms of adequate and affordable child and elder care) combined with high levels of working time flexibility appear detrimental for the interviewed parents and carers for older people's work-life balance and thereby implicitly availability and flexibility in the labour market. Indeed, the flexibility of these employees' work commitments and their ability to rely on informal care were often crucial parameters if they wanted to combine work with care-giving, as formal care services particularly elder care was short in supply particularly in Finland, Portugal and the UK. As a result, the complex nature and demands of the interviewed parents and carers for older people's work and care arrangements call for flexible care services and workplace policies to meet working parents and carers for older people's different needs.

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