

German fathers and their preferences for shorter working hours for family reasons

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ABSTRACT

This study is among the first to analyze fathers' preference for shorter working hours specifying that the preference is related to the wish to spend more time with the family. Assuming that preferences are context-dependent, this article explores the relevance of the family and workplace context for preference formation. We develop need-based and capability-based arguments to contrast the job demands–resources approach and the capabilities approach in work–family research. Using a sample of 632 fathers from the German LEEP-B3 data with a representative linked employer–employee design for large work organizations we conclude that fathers' preferences for shorter working hours are indeed context-dependent and that there is more evidence for need-based arguments than opportunity based arguments. Our results indicate that fathers with young children and fathers with high work demands are more likely to desire shorter working hours, whereas a reduction in working hours appears to be unnecessary for fathers who can satisfactorily reconcile work and family life through support from their supervisors. In contrast to capability-based arguments the perception of a highly demanding work culture was not found to decrease but increase the likelihood to desire to work shorter hours.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude est l'une des premières à analyser les préférences des pères en termes de réduction du temps de travail comme étant liées au souhait de se consacrer davantage à leur famille. Partant du présupposé que les préférences varient en fonction du contexte, cet article examine le rôle joué par le contexte familial et professionnel dans la formation de ces préférences.

Afin de comparer le modèle exigences-ressources et l'approche des capacités dans l'étude du rapport entre travail et famille, nous avons développé à la fois des arguments fondés sur les besoins et sur les capacités.

Pour ceci, nous avons utilisé un échantillon de 632 pères tiré des données de l'enquête allemande LEEP-B3 réalisée sur la base d'un protocole de recherche reliant les données représentatives d'employeurs à celles d'employés au sein de grandes entreprises. L'étude montre que les préférences des pères pour une réduction de leur temps de travail dépendent effectivement du contexte et que les arguments fondés sur les besoins semblent prévaloir sur

KEYWORDS

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MOTS-CLÉS

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ceux fondés sur les opportunités. Nos résultats indiquent que les pères d'enfants en bas âge ainsi que les pères confrontés à de fortes exigences professionnelles sont plus susceptibles de souhaiter une réduction de leur temps de travail, tandis que celle-ci n'est pas considérée comme nécessaire par les pères capables de concilier vie professionnelle et vie familiale de manière satisfaisante grâce au soutien de leurs supérieurs. Contrairement aux arguments fondés sur les capacités, nous avons constaté que le sentiment d'appartenir à une culture professionnelle extrêmement exigeante n'entraîne pas une baisse, mais plutôt une augmentation de la probabilité que les pères souhaitent réduire leur temps de travail.

A considerable body of research has shown that many employed parents struggle to reconcile their work and family lives owing to the incompatible demands imposed by these two domains (e.g. Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Schieman, Glavin, & Milkie, 2009). Whereas mothers commonly reduce their working hours to combine the responsibilities of both these life spheres (e.g. Rosenfeld & Birkelund, 1995; van der Lippe, 2001), fathers rarely choose to work fewer hours; in fact, they are more likely to work even longer hours – a finding common to all European countries (e.g. Fagan, 2004; Lewis, Campbell, & Huerta, 2008). In Germany, more than half the fathers work more than 40 hours a week (IfD, 2010), thus eliciting the following questions: Do fathers prefer to work long hours and are they able to reconcile their work and family responsibilities in a satisfying way? Or do fathers struggle to combine work and family life and have fewer opportunities than mothers do to reduce their working hours?

Because the model of the male breadwinner is still the norm, the decision to work fewer hours continues to be a less acceptable option for fathers (Fagan & Walthery, 2011; Stier & Lewin-Epstein, 2003). Recent research has revealed a disparity between the actual and the preferred number of working hours, and, in general, more and more men wish to work fewer hours (Abendroth, Pausch, & Böhm, 2014; Hobson & Fahlén, 2009; Pollmann-Schult, 2008, 2009; Thornthwaite, 2004). According to Bielenski and Wagner (2004), more than half of all employed men in Europe would prefer to reduce the number of hours they work. For example, men in the United Kingdom (MacInnes, 2005) and in the Netherlands (van Echtelt, Glebbeek, & Lindenberg, 2006) increasingly desire such a reduction.

In our research, we focus on fathers' preference for shorter working hours, even when this decrease would affect their income, as well as on how the family and work contexts shape this preference. Based on the job demands–resources approach (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), we develop three *need-based hypotheses*, suggesting that fathers who experience high demands both in the family (e.g. having young children) and in the workplace (e.g. working overtime) are more likely to desire shorter working hours for family reasons. Going beyond individual demands and resources in the family and on the job, we further investigate the relevance of the broader work and family context. We develop two *capability-based hypotheses*, suggesting that preferences are formed or adapted based on available opportunities (Hobson & Fahlén, 2009; Sen, 1992, 1999). We assume that a father's preference for shorter working hours for family reasons would depend on whether this option is available in their particular family or work context – specifically, the gendered

division of labor, the financial situation of the family, and the workplace culture. Therefore, we pose the following research question: *How do the family and workplace contexts (e.g. resources and demands in the work and family domains, financial responsibilities in the family, and workplace culture) influence fathers' preferences for shorter working hours in order to spend more time with their families?*

Our study contributes to previous research in three ways: First, we focus on fathers who desire shorter working hours in order to spend more time with their families; unlike previous studies, we investigate the specific reasons for this preference (Clarkberg & Moen, 2001; Hobson & Fahlén, 2009; Pollmann-Schult, 2008, 2009). Second, we develop need-based and capability-based arguments to contrast the job demands–resources approach (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) and the capabilities approach which are common in work–family research (Hobson, 2011; Hobson & Fahlén, 2009). Third, we make use of a linked employer–employee study (LEEP-B3) that is built around a representative sample of 100 large German work organizations and a random sample of 6454 of their employees (Diewald et al., 2014). The situation of *German* fathers is particularly interesting to analyze, because the traditional gender norms still prevail with respect to childcare and the respective income responsibilities of men and women (Blossfeld & Drobnič, 2001; Drobnič & Guillén Rodríguez, 2011). Moreover, when compared with other countries, Germany has one of the largest gender-based wage gaps, and its tax system supports the male-breadwinner model of the family (Blau & Kahn, 2007; Budig & England, 2001).

Theory and recent research on preference formation

The preference theory developed by Hakim (2000, 2002) is based on the assumption that different groups have different work–family preferences. According to this theory, women are categorized into three groups with respect to their preferences towards their involvement in work and family life: *home-centered*, *work-centered*, and *adaptive*. One can also assume that fathers have different preferences towards their involvement in work and family responsibilities and that not all fathers are ‘work-centered’. However, this theory has often been criticized, because it argues that different groups have static preferences with regard to their involvement in employment and family tasks (Crompton & Lyonette, 2010; Ginn et al., 1996). In line with the critics of Hakim's view, we consider work–family preferences to be context-dependent, and we therefore chose to investigate how the workplace and family contexts shape fathers' preferences for shorter working hours.

The preference for fewer working hours to devote more time to one's family reflects a specific strategy for combining work and family, as indicated by the results of work–life research (Becker & Moen, 1999). Because the approaches currently used to reconcile work and family have not been successful, alternative strategies (such as a reduction in working hours) are needed to achieve a work–family balance. Until now, this solution was most often chosen by mothers; however, fathers today are also attempting to combine work and family life, yet they face problems in doing so (Hobson & Fahlén, 2009; Pollmann-Schult, 2008, 2009; Thornthwaite, 2004).

The job demands–resources approach described by Bakker and Demerouti (2007) and the work–family conflict approach proposed by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) suggest

that demands and resources in the domains of work and of family influence an employee's risk of experiencing stress and strain that spill over from one life domain to the other, resulting in a conflict between work and family life. Both approaches imply that overly demanding family or workplace conditions probably go hand in hand with a desire for shorter working hours. When fathers are faced with excessive demands – for example, caring for a young child at home or having a stressful job – they may find themselves less able to integrate the roles required in both life spheres if they are working long hours. We consider this situation to be a 'need-based' explanation of a father's preference for shorter working hours.

However, we assume that fathers' preference for shorter working hours depends not only on the struggles that accompany the reconciliation of work and family but also on whether it is an available and accepted strategy for such reconciliation with respect to the fathers' surroundings. Previous research on preference formation argues and illustrates that preferences are likely to be adapted to opportunities to realize them (Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener, 2003; Shultz & Lepper, 1996). The capabilities approach in work–family research has been used to specify that a person's agency in developing goals in life and in choosing how to realize these goals is influenced by that person's capabilities (Hobson & Fahlén, 2009; Sen, 1992, 1999). According to Sen (1999), capabilities are 'substantive freedoms to choose the life one has reason to value' (p. 74). This definition suggests that there are different ways to integrate work and family in a satisfying way, but that the availability of such options is context-dependent and differs among different groups of employees. Cultural norms and values, both at home and in the workplace, set certain expectations with regard to the typical number of working hours for women and for men. More specifically, fathers' financial responsibilities due to the gendered division within the family domain, as well as the perceived organizational culture within the work domain (Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, & Hammer, 2011; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999), are likely to play a crucial role for fathers' preferences to work fewer hours as they restrict or enhance father's capabilities of a reduction in working hours (Hobson & Fahlén, 2009). We consider these to be 'capability-based' explanations for fathers' preferences to work fewer hours so they can spend more time with their families.

Family context

Need-based arguments

The family context is likely to influence whether fathers experience the need to reduce their working hours. Because young children in particular require a considerable amount of care (Nangle, Kelley, Fals-Stewart, & Levant, 2003; Possinger, 2013), fathers with young children would be expected to prefer shorter working hours so they can spend more time with their family. Moreover, fathers who have more than one child at home might want to support their female partners by sharing childcare and other responsibilities and would therefore want to work fewer hours. In line with this argument, previous research has shown that the presence of children in the home increases work–family conflict (Adkins & Premeaux, 2012; Byron, 2005; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Hill, 2005) and that women with young children tend to reduce their working hours (Bianchi, 2000; Hill, Märtinson, Ferris, & Baker, 2004). Therefore, one can assume that the

presence of a young child or more than one child at home goes along with fathers' desire to spend more time with the family. Thus, we developed our first hypothesis (H1):

Hypothesis 1: Fathers with (a) younger children or (b) more than one child are more likely to prefer shorter working hours for family reasons.

Capability-based arguments

In line with the capability-based argument, it can be further assumed that fathers' financial responsibilities due to the gendered division of labor between work and the household will affect their opportunity to consider reducing their working hours. With regard to the division of labor in a couple household, traditional norms and values imply that the male partner bears greater responsibility for the family's financial situation and is less responsible for care-related functions (Bielby & Bielby, 1989; Blossfeld & Drobnič, 2001; Coltrane, 2000; Pfau-Effinger, 2009). Thus, if the female partner is not employed or the household income is relatively low fathers' capabilities to reduce working hours are likely to be lower because he is expected to be the breadwinner. In contrast, a high household income implies larger capabilities for shorter working hours because the drop in household income would be manageable and therefore a shorter working hours an available strategy to better combine work and family life.

Based on these arguments, we developed a second, two-part hypothesis (H2):

Hypothesis 2: Fathers (a) with an unemployed female partner or (b) in families where the household income is relatively low are less likely to prefer shorter working hours for family reasons.

Workplace context

Need-based arguments

Demands. In addition to the family context, the workplace context is likely to influence whether fathers feel the need to reduce their working hours. Research on combining work and family life (e.g. Abendroth & den Dulk, 2011; Byron, 2005) emphasizes that workplace demands, such as long working hours or overtime work, can make it difficult for fathers to reconcile both life spheres. Also, supervisory responsibilities at work often seem to reinforce the difficulty of reconciling the work and family spheres, because such responsibilities involve considerable strain and require the father to be available at all times to meet the needs of his subordinates, thus restricting his ability to spontaneously adjust work demands to family demands. This stream of research implies that high workplace demands increase the likelihood that the father will desire shorter working hours owing to problems in reconciling work and family life. In line with this, Reynolds and Aletraris (2006) found that men who worked many hours and those in professional and managerial positions were more likely to prefer shorter working hours. In keeping with our need-based argument, we developed our third hypothesis (H3):

Hypothesis 3: Fathers who (a) have long contractual working hours, (b) frequently work overtime, or (c) have supervisory responsibilities are more likely to prefer shorter working hours for family reasons.

Resources. The job demands–resources approach emphasizes the relevance of workplace resources that could help fathers reconcile work and family life (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Such resources can mitigate or even prevent the negative consequences of work demands and might allow fathers to reach a satisfying arrangement without considering a reduction in their working hours. According to recent research, support from supervisors and colleagues, as well as supportive workplace arrangements, can help employees better combine these two life spheres (Abendroth & den Dulk, 2011; Goh, Ilies, & Wilson, 2015; Kossek et al., 2011). For example, supervisors could show understanding of an employee's work–family situation, or colleagues could take over work tasks in the event of unexpected childcare obligations. Supportive workplace arrangements were argued to allow more flexible adjustments between the life domains, such as flexible working hours, telework or job autonomy (e.g. Behson, 2005). Therefore, the need to reduce working hours may be less urgent as support from supervisors and colleagues, as well as supportive workplace arrangements, provides alternative opportunities for fathers who are attempting to reconcile their work and family life. Thus, we developed the following additional need-based hypothesis (H4):

Hypothesis 4: Fathers who receive (a) supervisory and/or colleague support or (b) supportive workplace arrangements are less likely to prefer shorter working hours for family reasons.

Capability-based arguments

We further assume that the workplace context shapes not only the need for a reduction in working hours but also the capabilities to do so. Research on work time regimes has revealed the prevalence of the 'ideal worker norm', which is characterized by continuous full-time employment in which the employees' family responsibilities are not taken into account (Hobson & Fahlén, 2009; Kelly, Ammons, Chermack, & Moen, 2010). This norm implies that an employee has no responsibilities outside the workplace and should be fully dedicated to work. In line with this, previous research further indicates that employees do not make use of family-friendly programs at work when they assume that using these programs will make them appear to be less committed to their work (Thompson et al., 1999). In the same vein, the capabilities argument implies that an employee whose workplace has a strong ideal worker norm would be less likely to prefer a reduction in working hours as a way to reconcile work and family, because this preference would contradict the expectation of availability, flexibility, and family involvement. The perception that employees must be completely dedicated to work (e.g. expected to work overtime and be constantly available) and that they will be penalized if they use family-friendly workplace arrangements can create an atmosphere in which fathers might believe that it is not acceptable to desire shorter working hours for family reasons. Thus, even though an organizational culture that subscribes to the ideal worker norm and that is perceived to be family-unfriendly is also known to increase work–family conflict (Allen, 2001; Thompson et al., 1999; Thompson & Prottas, 2006), a reduction in working hours is less likely to be the available strategy to successfully combine work and family. In keeping with the capability-based argument, our fifth hypothesis (H5) is as follows:

Hypothesis 5: Fathers who perceive that they are expected (a) to work overtime, (b) to be constantly available, or (c) to be less committed when they use family supportive policies are less likely to prefer shorter working hours for family reasons.

Data and operationalization

Data

For our analysis we used a linked employer–employee dataset based on the study ‘Interactions Between Capabilities in Work and Private Life’ (LEEP-B3) undertaken at the Collaborative Research Center 882 at Bielefeld University. (For more information, see Diewald et al., 2014.) This study comprised three parts: an employer survey involving 100 large work organizations (i.e. those having at least 500 employees) from various segments of the economy, an employee survey involving 6454 employees from these organizations, and an additional employee partner survey.¹ Additional information on the employees’ work histories and their organizations was derived from linked German administrative social security records and demographic data from the German Federal Employment Agency. The American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) response rates for the first wave (conducted in 2012/2013) were 23.6% for the employer survey and 29.8% for the employee survey. Selectivity tests comparing the sample with the German workforce employed in large work organizations indicate that the LEEP-B3 data set is representative of the workers in large work organizations, the only exceptions being employees whose nationality is not German and employees without vocational training or whose educational status is unknown, a group that is slightly underrepresented. The employer data include information about the organization’s structure as well as the benefits it provides for its employees. The employee data comprise information about the employees’ working conditions and their personal lives. By using the data set from this first wave, we obtained information for 1548 fathers with children who were 16 years of age or younger living in the household.

Dependent variable

We measured the employees’ preference for shorter working hours as a way for them to attend to family responsibilities on the basis of their answers to three questions. The first two questions involved an established measurement that was also used by several other surveys, such as the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) and the European Social Survey (ESS), referenced in Hobson and Fahlén (2009).

Employees were asked to state the number of hours they actually worked; their preferred number of working hours, bearing in mind that this change would affect their income; and the main reason for wanting such a reduction, if the preferred number of working hours was less than the actual amount stated. Of the total group, 55% of fathers stated that they wanted shorter working hours. Table 1 shows the distribution of the main reasons why fathers and childless men wanted to reduce their working hours. The distribution indicated that the most common stated reason was ‘more leisure time’ (44%), followed by ‘family reasons’ (39%). The share of childless men who desired to reduce their working hours for family reasons was rather low (5%), whereas the great majority of the childless men wanted to reduce their working hours to have more leisure time (74%).

Fathers whose main reason for preferring shorter working hours was related to family responsibilities (childcare, more time for the partner, more time for the family) were coded ‘1’, and those who did not wish to reduce their working hours were coded ‘0’. Respondents

Table 1. Main reasons for the desire to reduce working hours.

Reason	Fathers		Non-fathers	
	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent
Family reasons	326	38.62	30	4.98
<i>More time for the family</i>	209	24.76	14	2.32
<i>More time for the partner</i>	40	4.74	15	2.49
<i>Childcare</i>	77	9.12	0	0
<i>Care for dependent persons</i>	0	0	1	0.17
More time for leisure	373	44.19	444	73.63
Self-realization/higher quality of life	16	1.89	6	0.99
Reducing work stress and strain	56	6.64	63	10.45
Overtime not paid/tax reasons	31	3.68	7	1.16
Sideline employment	13	1.54	20	3.32
Health reasons	12	1.42	14	2.32
Housework	4	0.47	4	0.66
Other	13	1.54	15	2.49
Total	518	100	603	100

Note: 'Family reasons' is composed of the italic items.

who reported other reasons for desiring shorter working hours were not considered in the analysis. The sample included 969 fathers whose children were age 16 years or younger and were living in the household who either preferred to reduce their working hours for family reasons or did not prefer such a reduction. As a result of missing values, the final sample used for our analysis included 632 fathers, of whom 225 desired shorter working hours and 407 did not. Of those who preferred shorter working hours, 124 preferred to reduce their contracted hours and 101 wanted to reduce their overtime.²

Independent variables

Family context. To capture fathers' need to reduce working hours, we considered the age of the youngest child (metric) and the number of children within the household (1 = one child, 2 = two or more children). To consider a father's capability to reduce their working hours, we determined whether his female partner was employed (1 = partner employed)³ and used the logarithm of the amount of household net income per month (logarithmized).

Workplace context. Demands: We considered contractual working hours and the frequency of overtime to be time-related workplace demands that are known to foster conflict between work and family life (Byron, 2005). Contractual, agreed-upon working hours were measured as a continuous variable and overtime work was measured as a categorical variable (1 = nearly every day, 2 = every week/several times per month, 3 = rarely/from time to time, 4 = never). Furthermore, we considered supervisory responsibilities to be a workplace demand (1 = yes).

Resources: To capture support in the workplace, respondents were asked to use a 5-point scale ranging from 'Applies completely (1)' to 'Does not apply at all (5)' to indicate whether supervisors supported employees in their efforts to reconcile work with family life and to determine whether coworkers helped one another to get their work done when one had to leave early or return to work late for personal reasons. We also took into account whether employees made use of flexible working hours (1 = yes) or telework (1 = yes). Job autonomy (Breugh, 1985) was measured based on three items ('During my

working hours, I have control over the sequencing of my work activities'; 'I am allowed to decide how to go about getting my job done'; 'I am able to define what my job objectives are'), and these values were included in an index that ranged from 3 to 15, with higher values indicating greater job autonomy.

Workplace culture: To capture whether an employee's organizational culture adhered to the ideal worker norm, we took into account the employee's perception of the work organization's expectations regarding overtime work and constant availability. Based on their position or on comparable positions within their organization, respondents were asked to rate the importance of working overtime or being constantly available by means of a 5-point scale that ranged from 'not important at all' (1) to 'very important' (5). In addition, respondents were asked to what extent employees in their organization were perceived to be less committed if they made use of family supportive measures, according to a scale of 1–5 that ranged from 'I do not agree at all' (1) to 'I totally agree' (5). This item is labeled 'perception of commitment stigmas when using family supportive policies' in the analysis.

Control variables

We included fathers' age in our analysis, assuming that younger fathers must still invest in their careers giving them less capabilities for the preference for shorter working hours. We also considered fathers' educational level (based on the Comparative Analysis of Social Mobility in Industrial Nations [CASMIN]), because the higher this level, the higher the opportunity costs of reducing working hours. Moreover, we included fathers' monthly income (logarithmized), because those with a high monthly net income would also have higher opportunity costs by reducing working hours if this change would affect their income.

Methodology

Given the hierarchical structure of the data, we used a multilevel approach. Having multiple workers in the same organization would violate the independence assumption inherent in conventional ordinary least squares estimators. Therefore, our analyses were based on hierarchical logistic regression that reported odds ratios in which the independent variables were incorporated stepwise. With regard to the family context, the variables in Model 1 considered need-based arguments and those in Model 2 considered capability-based arguments. With regard to the workplace context, the variables in Model 3 considered need-based demands and those in Model 4 considered need-based resources. Model 5 integrated indicators that illustrate the capability-based arguments in the work domain. Finally, all variables were included in the full model.⁴

Results

Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations or proportions of the independent variables for fathers who wished to reduce their working hours for family reasons and for those who did not. The mean ages of the youngest child indicated that the children of fathers who preferred shorter working hours were younger than the children of fathers who did not show this preference. The percentage of fathers with two or more children was larger for those who did not prefer to reduce their working hours compared with those who held this preference (75% vs. 64%). Fathers who wanted to reduce their

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation (SD) or proportion (%) of independent variables according to whether or not fathers desire shorter working hours.

Independent variables	Desire to reduce working hours for family reasons (N = 225)		No desire to reduce working hours (N = 407)	
	Mean or %	SD	Mean or %	SD
Family context: Need				
Age of youngest child (yr)	6.818***	(4.600)	8.437	(4.648)
Number of children				
One child	36.44%**		24.82%	
Two or more children	63.56%**		75.18%	
Family context: Capability				
Ln (monthly household net income)	8.242	(0.371)	8.211	(0.422)
Partner employed	76.00%		75.43%	
Workplace context: Need–demands				
Contractual working hours	38.816***	(2.753)	37.714	(4.142)
Supervisory responsibilities	58.67%**		47.67%	
Frequency of working overtime				
Nearly every day	36.89%*		27.76%	
Every week/several times per month	38.22%*		30.47%	
Rarely/from time to time	21.78%*		30.96%	
Never	3.1%***		10.81%	
Workplace context: Need–resources				
Support from supervisors	3.893*	(1.008)	4.079	(1.036)
Support from colleagues	4.058	(1.057)	4.170	(1.052)
Flexible working hours	60.44%		63.64%	
Telework	27.11%**		17.94%	
Job autonomy	11.147	(2.574)	10.936	(2.903)
Workplace context: Capability				
Perception of commitment stigmas when using family supportive policies	2.249*	(1.138)	2.039	(1.133)
Perception that working overtime is expected	4.093***	(0.816)	3.791	(1.043)
Perception that being constantly available is expected	3.093***	(1.216)	2.705	(1.148)
Control variables				
Age	41.99	(6.518)	43.03	(6.414)
Low education level	12.00%		14.74%	
Medium education level	40.44%*		48.65%	
High education level	47.56%**		36.61%	
Ln (monthly income)	8.402	(0.489)	8.345	(0.485)

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$, test for differences between fathers who do and fathers who do not desire shorter working hours. Ln = logarithmized.

working hours worked longer hours than did fathers without this preference; the average number of actual working hours per week was more than 4 hours longer, and they worked overtime more frequently. Table 3 shows the correlations of all the independent variables and indicates no problem of multicollinearity.

Table 4 shows the results of the multilevel regression analysis. Model 1 includes need-based arguments regarding the family context, such as the number of children in the household and the age of the youngest child. The results indicated that with each additional year of age of the youngest child, the odds of wanting shorter working hours decreased by a factor of 0.914, which is in line with hypothesis H1a. However, hypothesis H1b was not supported. Surprisingly, fathers who had one child were more likely to desire a reduction in working hours than were fathers who had two or more children. This result was already evident in the descriptive. The control variables showed no significant effects.

Model 2 provided no evidence for the capability-based hypothesis in the family context (H2a and H2b). Neither the employment situation of the female partner nor the household income had a significant effect on the fathers' preference for reducing working hours.

Table 3. Intercorrelations of independent variables.

Independent variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Age of youngest child (yr)	–										
2 Two or more children	0.1395*	–									
3 Ln (monthly household net income)	0.0365*	0.0905*	–								
4 Partner employed	0.1278*	-0.0617*	0.1817*	–							
5 Contractual working hours	-0.0691*	-0.0013	0.0821*	-0.0420*	–						
6 Supervisory responsibilities	0.0766*	0.0446*	0.1986*	0.0106	0.1350*	–					
7 Overtime: Nearly every day	0.0068	-0.0245	0.1791*	-0.0896*	0.0673*	0.1567*	–				
8 Overtime: Every week/several times per month	-0.0851*	-0.0311*	-0.0070	0.0561*	0.0504*	-0.0358*	-0.4730*	–			
9 Overtime: Rarely/from time to time	0.0508*	0.0364*	-0.1664*	0.0053	-0.0509*	-0.0939*	-0.4149*	-0.4365*	–		
10 Support from supervisors	-0.0295*	-0.0329*	0.0440*	-0.0074	-0.1148*	0.0027	-0.0515*	0.0175	0.0405*	–	
11 Support from colleagues	0.0005	-0.0770*	-0.1185*	0.0174	-0.0952*	0.0141	-0.0858*	-0.0167	0.1050*	0.3097*	–
12 Flexible working hours	0.1060*	0.0387*	0.0533*	0.0476*	-0.0984*	-0.0441*	0.0177	0.0677*	-0.0612*	0.1908*	-0.0008
13 Telework	-0.0275*	0.0324*	0.2468*	0.0961*	0.0291*	0.0223	0.0121	0.1025*	-0.0701*	0.1292*	-0.0418*
14 Job autonomy	0.0237	-0.0075	0.1660*	-0.0334*	-0.0387*	0.1878*	0.1004*	0.0092	-0.0786*	0.2037*	0.0631*
15 Perception of commitment stigmas when using family supportive policies	-0.0697*	-0.0189	-0.0250	0.1022*	-0.0037	-0.0199	0.0441*	0.012	-0.0526*	-0.2285*	-0.1417*
16 Perception that working overtime is expected	-0.0701*	-0.0090	0.0457*	-0.0362*	0.0334*	-0.0064	0.1115*	0.0319*	-0.0698*	-0.0507*	0.0143
17 Perception that being constantly available is expected	-0.0028	0.0128	0.1065*	0.0307*	0.0834*	0.1044*	0.0569*	0.0422*	-0.0734*	-0.1270*	-0.0471*
18 Age	0.6344*	0.2423*	0.1576*	0.0620*	-0.1031*	0.0730*	0.0470*	-0.1079*	0.0567*	-0.0815*	-0.1056*
19 Medium education level	-0.0154	-0.0022	-0.2203*	-0.0265	-0.0030	-0.1085*	-0.1279*	0.0875*	0.0282*	-0.0020	0.0196
20 High education level	-0.0552*	0.0009	0.3921*	0.0479*	0.0547*	0.1351*	0.2272*	-0.0415*	-0.1504*	0.0620*	-0.0649*
21 Ln (monthly income)	0.1429*	0.1019*	0.6229*	0.0539*	0.2365*	0.2830*	0.3108*	-0.1049*	-0.1868*	0.0227	-0.0792*
	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20		
13 Telework	0.2259*	–									
14 Job autonomy	0.3149*	0.1951*									
15 Perception of commitment stigmas when using family supportive policies	-0.0862*	-0.0247	-0.1107*	–							
16 Perception that working overtime is expected	-0.0502*	-0.0136	0.0445*	0.1143*	–						
17 Perception that being constantly available is expected	0.0052	0.1502*	0.0762*	0.1459*	0.3033*	–					
18 Age	0.1332*	0.0423*	0.0510*	0.0046	-0.0233	0.0679*	–				
19 Medium education level	-0.1353*	-0.1420*	-0.1073*	-0.0361*	0.0171	0.0222	-0.1100*	–			
20 High education level	0.2397*	0.2738*	0.2302*	0.0024	-0.0365*	0.0193	0.0754*	-0.7574*	–		
21 Ln (monthly income)	0.1668*	0.2808*	0.2184*	-0.0384*	0.0338*	0.1162*	0.2458*	-0.2426*	0.4286*		

* $p < .05$ (Pearson correlation coefficients).

Table 4. Multilevel Regression Analysis of Fathers' Desire for Shorter Working Hours (N = 632).

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Full model	
	Family context: Need		Family context: Capability		Workplace context: Need—demands		Workplace context: Need—resources		Workplace context: Capability			
	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE
Family context: Need												
Age of youngest child (yr)	0.914***	(0.023)									0.917**	(0.025)
Two and more children	0.584**	(0.118)									0.574**	(0.120)
Family context: Capability												
Ln (monthly household net income)			0.934	(0.278)							0.808	(0.261)
Partner employed			1.027	(0.216)							1.134	(0.258)
Workplace context: Need—demands												
Contractual working hours					1.081*	(0.035)					1.079*	(0.038)
Supervisory responsibilities					1.445+	(0.277)					1.541*	(0.315)
Frequency of working overtime (ref=never)												
Nearly every day					4.038**	(1.859)					3.255*	(1.555)
Every week/several times per month					3.970**	(1.804)					3.244*	(1.525)
Rarely/from time to time					2.462+	(1.138)					2.268+	(1.081)
Workplace context: Need—resources												
Support from supervisors							0.793*	(0.076)			0.852	(0.087)
Support from colleagues							0.968	(0.087)			0.976	(0.092)
Flexible working hours							0.793	(0.166)			0.899	(0.201)
Telework							1.757*	(0.436)			1.598+	(0.419)
Job autonomy							1.034	(0.037)			1.012	(0.039)
Workplace context: Capability												
Perception of commitment stigmas when using family supportive policies									1.111	(0.090)	1.059	(0.091)
Perception that working overtime is expected									1.305**	(0.134)	1.264*	(0.137)
Perception that being constantly available is expected									1.272**	(0.104)	1.192*	(0.103)
Control variables												
Age	1.021	(0.019)	0.973+	(0.014)	0.981	(0.015)	0.971*	(0.014)	0.971*	(0.014)	1.025	(0.021)
Education level (ref = low)												
Medium education level	0.901	(0.263)	0.939	(0.269)	0.839	(0.246)	0.936	(0.271)	0.955	(0.280)	0.826	(0.252)
High education level	1.258	(0.405)	1.439	(0.457)	1.234	(0.397)	1.379	(0.450)	1.551	(0.501)	1.178	(0.408)
Ln (monthly income)	1.373	(0.310)	1.318	(0.346)	0.891	(0.213)	1.140	(0.257)	1.151	(0.259)	0.890	(0.261)
Constant	0.041+	(0.076)	0.256	(0.555)	0.042	(0.088)	1.117	(2.082)	0.067	(0.123)	0.043	(0.120)

Note: +p < 0.1; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001 (two-tailed test). OR= odds ratio; SE = standard error.

The results concerning workplace demands in Model 3 support hypothesis H3, which states that fathers whose work is highly demanding are more likely to desire a reduction in their working hours to allow them more time with their families. The contractual working hours, supervisory responsibilities, and frequent overtime showed a significant positive effect. For example, fathers who worked overtime nearly every day were more than four times more likely to desire shorter working hours than were fathers who never worked overtime.

With regard to resources in the workplace, the results for Model 4 showed that fathers who received work–family support from supervisors were less likely to desire shorter working hours, which is in line with hypothesis H4. However, telework, which organizations often advertise as a family-friendly program, had the opposite effect, in that fathers who teleworked were more likely to want to reduce their working hours than were fathers who did not telework. Moreover, flexible working times and support from colleagues were not significant.

Model 5 included indicators of the perceived workplace culture. The perception within the organization that overtime work is expected (odds ratio = 1.305) or that the employee should be constantly available (odds ratio = 1.272) increases the likelihood that fathers will wish to reduce their working hours. The perception that employees who made use of family supportive measures were less committed to their organization showed no significant effect. This finding is contrary to capability hypothesis H5, which suggested that fathers who perceive a strong ideal worker norm as part of their workplace culture were less likely to prefer a reduction in their working hours for family reasons.

In the full model, most results remained unchanged, with the exceptions that the effect of supervisor support disappeared. The reason for this was the inclusion of the organizational culture variables (the perception that constant availability and overtime work are expected, as well as a family-unfriendly workplace culture).

Discussion

This study is among the first to analyze fathers' desire to work shorter hours specifying that the desire is related to the wish to spend more time with the family. Previous research was not designed to distinguish whether fathers' desire to work fewer hours was related to family reasons or to other factors. In line with earlier studies that focused on fathers' working hour preferences in Europe (Bielenski & Wagner, 2004), we found that more than half the sample of fathers employed in large German work organizations (55%) would like to work fewer hours; however, there are several reasons for this preference. The two major reasons we found in our study were that fathers desired more time for leisure activities or more time to attend to the family. Men without children rarely cited the latter reason. Moreover, additional sensitivity tests highlight the importance to differentiate working hour preferences for the reasons why shorter working hours are desired while studying the implications of the family and work context.

Based on the critiques of Hakim's preference theory (Crompton & Lyonette, 2010; Ginn et al., 1996; Hakim, 2000, 2002), we assumed that fathers' working hour preferences are not static but are instead context-dependent. Advancing previous research, we developed and tested both need-based arguments (following the demands–resources approach in work–life research, e.g. Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), and capability-based arguments (following

the capabilities approach in work–life research e.g. Hobson & Fahlén, 2009) with respect to fathers' preference for shorter working hours. The need-based arguments refer to demands and resources in the work and family domains that either restrict or enhance reconciliation of these two life domains, and these demands and resources therefore prompt a new strategy to achieve this goal, such as shorter working hours to allow more time for one's family. The capability-based arguments refer to the broader work and family contexts (such as financial responsibilities that result from the gendered division of labor) and the workplace culture, which influence whether a reduction in working hours is perceived as an available alternative for reconciling work and family life.

We conclude that fathers' preferences for shorter working hours are indeed context-dependent and that there is more evidence to support the need-based arguments than the capability-based arguments. In line with the need-based arguments, our findings show that factors within the family domain (e.g. the age of the youngest child) as well as those in the work domain (long working hours, frequency of overtime, supervisory responsibilities) increase the likelihood that a father will desire shorter working hours.

The fact that number of children had the opposite effect – that is, fathers with two or more children had a lower preference for reducing their working hours for family reasons – indicates that fathers desire to change their working hours primarily for their first newborn, but that they are less desirous of such a reduction as they begin to have more children. Possibly fathers who have already adjusted their work–family situation to accommodate a firstborn do not feel the need for such adjustments as their family grows, or perhaps they become less engaged in family matters and become more concerned with the financial position of the household.

Concerning need-based arguments, our research also revealed the importance of resources in the work domain, namely that work–life support from supervisors decreased the likelihood that fathers would prefer shorter working hours. The fact that this effect disappeared when the culture of the workplace was taken into account indicates that employees who report receiving supervisory support do not perceive their workplace as conforming to a strong ideal worker norm. Rather, it would seem that supervisory support is more likely to exist in workplaces with a weak ideal worker norm. This finding is in line with recent research showing that supervisors' attitudes towards work schedules are important when it comes to their employees' ability to successfully combine work and family life (e.g. Goh et al., 2015; Kossek et al., 2011). Support from colleagues did not show a similar effect, although previous research has shown that such support does reduce problems related to the integration of work and family (e.g. Döge, Behnke, Kassner, & Reuys, 2005); thus, this kind of support is not a valid alternative to the strategy of reducing fathers' working hours as a way to reconcile their work and family lives.

In contrast, we found that supportive workplace arrangements did not decrease the likelihood that fathers would prefer shorter working hours. Rather, engaging in teleworking actually fostered fathers' desire to reduce their working hours. This finding is in line with previous research indicating that engaging in a flexible work arrangement (which has been labeled as a supportive workplace arrangement) can have different implications depending on its implementation – that is, rather than being a resource to improve the integration of work and family life, such flexibility blurs the boundaries between life domains (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004; Glavin & Schieman, 2012).

Furthermore, our findings did not support the capability-based arguments. There was no evidence that a more traditional division of labor within couples, a relatively low household income, or a workplace culture that followed the ideal worker norm decreased the likelihood that fathers would prefer shorter working hours. Instead, even the perception of a highly demanding work culture, as based on the ideal worker norm (i.e. when working overtime and being constantly available are expected), was found to increase the likelihood that fathers would desire shorter working hours. It seems that the demands of the workplace, which go hand in hand with a strong ideal worker norm culture, are so severe and influential for the experience of work–family conflicts that they outweigh the pressure to be an ideal worker.

Nevertheless, our results concerning the capability-based arguments do not imply that fathers' work–life strategies are not shaped by their capabilities. Perhaps family and workplace characteristics that impair a father's ability to shorten his working hours have a greater influence on whether such a reduction is actually realized than does the desire itself. Concerning the preference for shorter working hours, the difficulties one faces in attempting to integrate work and family life are so great that the more general societal and organizational expectations with respect to fathers' working hours do not seem to play a role. Moreover, the growing discourse concerning new fathers who participate more in family life, which is prevalent in Germany (Döge et al., 2005; Possinger, 2013), may have already fostered the perception that shorter working hours are an available option.

Our findings provide support for recent political debates concerning fathers' greater involvement in family responsibilities. Proposals such as limiting the amount of working hours to 32 hours per week for all parents are one way of enabling fathers to spend more time with their families.

In the future, it would be worthwhile to examine longitudinal data concerning the desire of fathers for shorter working hours. Our study, which relied on cross-sectional data, could not disentangle the causal relationship between fathers' preference for shorter working hours and their family and work situations. Longitudinal data would permit an analysis of the relevance of the family and workplace contexts to fathers' ability to realize their working hour preferences. Moreover, collecting data in other countries on fathers' preferences for reducing working hours specifically for family reasons would make it possible to investigate whether the relevance of the workplace and family contexts varies across countries.

Notes

1. Workers subject to the social security insurance contribution were selected. In Germany, almost every worker is covered by social insurance paid for jointly by the employer and worker. Only those employees who work very few hours or who have a limited amount of earnings (currently below 450 euros per month) are not covered by social insurance.
2. We performed additional sensitivity tests applying different specifications to the dependent variable. We re-estimated our models two times: once by defining the preference to work shorter hours with a mismatch of actual and preferred work hours by at least 4 hours, and once by calculating the differences between preferred and actual hours. The results of these sensitivity tests looked very much like our reported results, and in some cases the effects were even larger. Only the effect of number of children was no longer significant, which suggests that this finding was less robust.

3. In an additional analysis, we used information on the female partner's gross income to determine how much income the female partner contributed to the household. The effect of this variable was not significant, and owing to the relatively high amount of missing data, we decided not to include this variable in our analysis.
4. In additional analyses, we investigated how the workplace and family contexts shaped the preference to work shorter hours for leisure time reasons and for stress/strain/health reasons in different ways, and we compared the results with our analysis. We also performed an analysis in which we considered all employees who desired to work shorter hours. The results showed similarities and differences, indicating the need to analyze the specified preference to reduce working hours according to the reason for the preferred reduction.

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