

## **A Sectoral Study of Part-Time Workers Covered by Collective Agreements: Why do Employers Hire Them?**

Isik Urla Zeytinoglu

Volume 46, Number 2, 1991

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/050676ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/050676ar>

[See table of contents](#)

### Publisher(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

### ISSN

0034-379X (print)

1703-8138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this article

Zeytinoglu, I. U. (1991). A Sectoral Study of Part-Time Workers Covered by Collective Agreements: Why do Employers Hire Them? *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 46(2), 401–419. <https://doi.org/10.7202/050676ar>

### Article abstract

This exploratory study examines, on a sectoral basis, employers' reasons for hiring part-time workers covered by collective agreements. The data for the study were collected from a survey of employers in Ontario. The results revealed that in the health care, education and retail trade sectors flexibility in scheduling work was considered as the most important reason for hiring part-time workers, but in the hospitality sector, the unavailability of full-time labour was the most important reason. While the health care and education sectors considered employees' preference for part-time work also as relatively important, the hospitality and retail trade sectors placed more emphasis upon flexibility in employment decisions and savings in wages and benefits.

# *A Sectoral Study of Part-Time Workers Covered by Collective Agreements Why Do Employers Hire Them?*

**Isik Urla Zeytinoglu**

*This exploratory study examines, on a sectoral basis, employers' reasons for hiring part-time workers covered by collective agreements. The data for the study were collected from a survey of employers in Ontario. The results revealed that in the health care, education and retail trade sectors flexibility in scheduling work was considered as the most important reason for hiring part-time workers, but in the hospitality sector, the unavailability of full-time labour was the most important reason. While the health care and education sectors considered employees' preference for part-time work also as relatively important, the hospitality and retail trade sectors placed more emphasis upon flexibility in employment decisions and savings in wages and benefits.*

Part-time workers are increasing in number in Canada as well as elsewhere (Zeytinoglu 1987a; ILO 1989; Lever-Tracy 1988). To a less dramatic extent, the number of unionized part-time workers has also increased in Canada throughout the years. According to the most recent figures (Statistics Canada 1984), 19 percent of part-time workers in Canada are unionized, and a further 5 percent are covered by collective agreements.

---

\* ZEYTINOGLU, I. U., Faculty of Business, Mc Master University, Hamilton, Ontario.

\*\* This study is partially supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

\*\*\* The author would like to thank Roy Adams, Naresh Agarwal, Garth Mangum and Joe Rose for their comments on an earlier draft and Liz Brown and Christine Peters for assistance with the research.

Most unionized part-time workers are employed in the service-producing sectors, in health care, education and hospitality sectors in particular. Retail trade also employs some of the unionized part-time workers<sup>1</sup>.

The literature on part-time work suggests savings in labour costs, flexibility and the gender of the workers as factors for the hiring of part-time workers (see, for example, Belous 1989; Mangum, Mayall, and Nelson 1985; Beechey and Perkins 1987; Nye 1988; ILO 1989; Lever-Tracy 1988). Although based on the literature we might be able to make aggregate level generalizations about why employers hire part-time workers, if we were to analyze hiring reasons on a sectoral basis, and focus on unionized organizations only, we might well discover that hiring reasons differ from one employment sector to another. The purpose of this study is to explore, on a sectoral basis, employers' reasons for hiring part-time workers<sup>2</sup> covered by collective agreements. The data for the study were collected from a survey of 172 organizations in Ontario that had collective agreements covering part-time workers<sup>3</sup>.

There are two related reasons for choosing part-time workers covered by collective agreements as the focus of analysis in this study. First, part-time employment is an established procedure in the organizations covered here. Thus, there is sufficient cumulative experience on the part of employers to evaluate their part-time employment practices and discuss their hiring reasons. Second, collective agreements provide some documentation on these organizations' part-time employment practices, in particular compensation packages and working conditions. Having signed collective agreements, and thus legally documented their practices, we believe these employers would be willing to discuss their hiring reasons and be open and frank in their responses.

---

1 The service sector, which includes health care, education and education-related, and hospitality, employs 51 percent of all part-time workers, and the trade sector, which includes retail trade, employs 28 percent of part-time workers. The service sector is highly unionized; 33 percent of all unionized workers are in the service sector, but only 6 percent of all unionized workers are in trade sector (Statistics Canada 1989).

2 In this study part-time workers are defined as employees who work less than the employers' regularly scheduled full-time hours. Depending on the collective agreement, part-time hours might range between 24 to 30 hours per week.

3 In this study the phrase "part-time workers covered by collective agreements" includes unionized as well as nonunion workers employed in the same bargaining unit. 136 of the 172 agreements studied here cover both full-time and part-time unionized and nonunion workers, and the rest (36 agreements) are for (unionized and nonunion) part-time workers only. The 36 part-time only agreements also have comparable full-time agreements, but since full-time workers are not the focus of this research they are not studied here.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies that examine the increase in part-time work from the demand side (see, for example, Mangum, Mayall and Nelson 1985; Belous 1989; Kassalow 1989; Nye 1988; ILO 1989) conclude that the flexibility part-time workers provide to their employers, and the savings in wages and benefits constitute the primary reasons for hiring part-time workers. Other studies focus on gender issues (Beechey and Perkins 1987; Lever-Tracy 1988; ILO 1989), and demonstrate that in addition to the above factors, employers' gender-based attitudes towards the work force also influence their hiring decisions. The latter studies argue that employers create part-time work for female workers because they consider part-time work to be appropriate for women rather than men.

Despite the large body of literature on employer reasons for hiring part-time workers, there is only a single study in Canada (Labour Canada 1983: 128) which briefly refers to possible sectoral differences in hiring part-time workers. Although the results of that study (Labour Canada 1983) suggest flexibility, savings in labour costs, and employee preferences for part-time work as employer reasons for hiring part-time workers, the design of the questionnaire and the way the results are presented makes it difficult to reach definitive conclusions on what the hiring reasons are in each sector, and whether the conclusions can be generalized to unionized organizations.

From a theoretical perspective, the practice of employing part-time workers is often discussed within the framework of management strategies and goals. In order to achieve the three major organizational goals, — of cost effectiveness, maximizing predictability, flexibility (Osterman 1987) —, companies use a core of more or less permanent full-time workers who are surrounded by a periphery of temporary, contract, and part-time workers (Mangum, Mayall and Nelson 1985; Atkinson 1987; Belous 1989; Kassalow 1989). The peripheral group enables organizations to achieve flexibility and cost effectiveness, while predictability in human resources is accomplished by using permanent full-time workers. Unlike the core work force, the peripheral group has a weak affiliation with the company because employers make no long-term commitments to them (Belous 1989).

While the core-periphery perspective gives us an overall framework, it can offer no more than a general management strategy on utilizing human resources. Since no general theory has yet been established, and since there are no empirical studies on employer reasons for hiring part-time workers in

unionized environments, and only a single study discussing the possible differences between sectors, no specific hypothesis are presented here. We use exploratory analysis to determine which, if any, factors influence employers' decisions to hire part-time workers in unionized organizations in various sectors of the economy. Based on the literature on part-time work and our interviews with employer and union representatives<sup>4</sup>, we list the following reasons for hiring part-time workers covered by collective agreements and provide some expectations.

*Lower Wages and Benefits:* Macro-level studies in Canada indicate that, in comparison to their full-time counterparts, both nonunion (Labour Canada 1983) and unionized (Zeytinoglu 1987 a,b) part-time workers earn lower wages and benefits. While some part-time workers might be employed because both their wages and benefits are lower, others might be hired because their benefits alone are less than those of full-time workers (*The Worklife Report* 1989). Thus, in this study, we examine the influence of the labour costs<sup>5</sup> in hiring decisions for the wage item and benefits item separately.

Although based on the literature, one should expect the influence of the labour costs to be a relatively important hiring reason, we expect to find the contrary in the organizations studied here regardless of the sector they are in. This is because, as indicated in our interviews, full-time and part-time workers employed in these organizations perform the same or substantially similar tasks during the hours they are employed. Furthermore, they are either covered by the same agreement or separate but substantially the same agreement negotiated by the same union<sup>6</sup>. Since according to the exclusive representation principle the union represents all (unionized as well as nonunion) workers covered by the collective agreement equally; and since the unionization literature indicates that collective agreements provide one

---

4 See Study Design section for details.

5 In referring to labour costs, we focus only on wages and benefits because they are the major and the most obvious labour cost items. Even if wages are equal and benefits are prorated, there might be other saving in labour costs, such as savings in shift premiums, reporting pay, and overtime. Similarly, there might be increases in administrative costs because of employing a larger number of workers for the same hours of work. Such savings or increases in labour costs are not covered here.

6 The Ontario Labour Relations Board has a tendency to certify part-time and full-time workers into separate bargaining units. Although in some organizations these two bargaining units are voluntarily combined into one and covered by the same agreement, in others two separate agreements are signed. The political, economic and social reasons in having single or separate bargaining units is beyond the focus of this study. However, for an excellent discussion of this issue, see, Pupo and Duffy (1988).

pay level for comparable workers in a job category (Balkin 1989) and prorated benefits for part-time workers (Zeytinoglu 1987b), we believe the part-time workers covered here will earn the same but prorated wages and benefits, and thus, we expect the importance of the labour costs to be minimal in the organizations studied here.

*Flexibility in Scheduling Work and in Employment Decisions:* Achieving flexibility is another factor often referred to in discussions of the hiring of part-time workers (Belous 1989; Dombois and Osterland 1987; Beechey and Perkins 1987; Nye 1988; ILO 1989). The term flexibility, however, takes on different meanings as used by academics and professionals from different backgrounds (Piore 1986). In this study flexibility refers to “numerical flexibility” which enables the organization to increase or to decrease the number of workers quickly in response to short-term changes in demand for the product or service produced (Atkinson 1987). For this study we refine the definition of numerical flexibility to mean first, flexibility in scheduling work to cover peak periods or to provide continuity of work, and second, flexibility in employment decisions, such as the freedom to dismiss or lay off part-time workers, or to decrease their hours of work unilaterally. Based on part-time literature and our interviews, we expect to find both flexibility in scheduling work and in employment decisions to be similarly important hiring reasons in all sectors.

*Changes in the Macro-Economic Environment:* The literature also indicates that part-time workers are often hired as a buffer against changes in the macro-economic environment (Sengenberger 1981; Dombois and Osterland 1987; Osterman 1988). In private sector organizations, profits might decrease due to the instability of the national or global economy, or because of the globally competitive environment. In public and semi-public organizations, macro-level economic downturns often result in declines in funds or budgets, particularly when the government’s priorities change. In schools, a decrease in the school-age population might result in a decrease in teaching positions allotted to school boards. Any one of these factors could force employers to seek new or alternative strategies in managing human resources; the result would be the hiring of part-time workers. Although we expect changes in the macro-economic environment to be a factor in hiring decisions, we do not expect to find any differences between sectors in considering the importance of this factor.

*Employee Prefers and Employee is Suitable:* In terms of gender, we list two related but different reasons: one proposed by the workers’ themselves, and the other by the employers. Since statistics (Statistics Canada 1989)

indicate that more than a third of part-time workers (36 percent) do not want full-time work, and an additional 16 percent work in part-time schedules because of family responsibilities, we list the employee's preference to work in part-time schedules as one of the reasons for employers to hire part-time workers. Based on the literature (Beechey and Perkins 1987; Lever-Tracy 1988; ILO 1989) which suggests that part-time positions are created for women because employers believe that part-time jobs are appropriate for women with young or dependent children, we also include this factor in our list of hiring reasons. Similar attitudes also exist towards young workers, particularly students (ILO 1989; Lever-Tracy 1988). Therefore, we also include age as another factor that might influence employers' perceptions. We expect employees' preference and their suitability as important factors in sectors where the work force consists predominantly of women or young (school-age) workers.

*Unavailability of Full-Time Labour:* We list one last factor which was brought up in our interviews with employers and unions. Organizations might hire part-time workers because of possible difficulties in finding full-time workers willing to work in jobs that exist in their sectors. This might be because the jobs are low in prestige, or because they are stressful, or not respected to a degree commensurate with the effort they entail, and are therefore not considered worth working at on a full-time basis. Because full-time labour is not available, employers might have no other choice but to hire the only available labour supply — part-time workers. We expect this to be an important factor in those sectors where the labour market is tight.

## STUDY DESIGN

### Method

A questionnaire was developed to learn employer reasons for hiring part-time workers who are covered by collective agreements. It asked employers to rank the importance of the listed reasons, and to include any other reasons that they considered important. Respondents were asked to rank their responses on a scale, where 1 referred to the most important reason and 8 referred to the least important reason. For the reasons that are not applicable to their organizations, respondents were instructed to write "not applicable". They were also provided ample opportunity to elaborate on issues they considered important. The questionnaire also asked

for the number of full-time and part-time workers covered by the agreement and the number of females in each group. Information on the collective agreement coverage, the occupational group, and the sectors (SIC codes) was obtained from the Ontario Ministry of Labour. (An Appendix giving all the questionnaire items is available from the author upon request.)

A complete listing of collective agreements (1,844) covering full-time and part-time workers in the same or separate but substantially similar agreements was obtained from the Ontario Ministry of Labour in October 1986. This list showed that the sectors that had the largest number of agreements covering the largest number of part-time workers were: health care, education and education-related work, retail trade and the hospitality sectors.

Before sending the questionnaire, I conducted seven semi-structured interviews with employers in organizations where part-time workers covered by agreements were employed. The interviewed organizations were a hospital, a nursing home, a separated and a public school, a museum, a retail food store, and a restaurant-chain. The interviewees were chief executive officers, human resource directors, and one director of nursing. In addition, interviews were held with the representatives of two employers' associations that had collective agreements covering part-time workers. Since the study concerned a unionized environment, semi-structured interviews were also held with union executives, research or collective bargaining directors of unions that were the bargaining agents for part-time workers in the organizations selected for interviews. These unions also had the largest number of contracts covering the largest number of full-time and part-time workers in Ontario. A total of nine interviews were held with union representatives.

Interviews with the employers and the unions helped the researcher to get in-depth information on the part-time phenomenon; they also amounted to pre-tests of the survey. Prior to the interviews, a copy of the questionnaire was sent to each employer and union in the interview group with a request that they fill in the questionnaire and return it with their comments on the day of the interview. As a result of the pre-tests, the item 'the availability of labour supply' (in this paper rephrased as 'the unavailability of full-time labour') was included after an employer and a union representative (from different sectors) indicated that it would be their first choice if it were listed in the questionnaire.



### **Sample Selection**

In order to keep the sample size manageable and within the budgetary limitation of approximately 250 organizations, agreements which covered fewer than 100 workers and those that had an expiry date of 1988 were excluded. Since the questionnaire was to be mailed in 1988, we did not expect parties to respond at a time when they might be in negotiations. After these deletions, the survey group consisted of 258 organizations. Of the 258 organizations, 45 percent were in the health care, 31 percent were in the education and education-related sectors. A smaller percentage was in the hospitality (5 percent) and the retail trade (8 percent) sectors. The rest (11 percent) were in various other sectors. The survey group represents roughly 58 percent of the organizations in Ontario with agreements covering both full-time and part-time workers in bargaining units of 100 or more workers. In terms of the total number of workers, the survey covers 49 percent of the full-time and part-time workers in the total of 1,844 agreements.

### **Procedure**

A letter was mailed both to the chief executive officer and the human resources director in each organization informing them of the survey. After the initial mailing of the questionnaire, employers who had not responded were contacted by phone and offered another copy of the questionnaire. A reminder letter and a duplicate of the original questionnaire were then sent to those who had not responded to the initial requests. This procedure resulted in 83 percent response rate<sup>7</sup>. The majority (80 percent) of the respondents were human resources or labor relations directors or specialists who were involved in negotiating the most recent agreement.

### **Data Analysis**

The survey data was analyzed by using the Minitab Statistical Package. To learn whether the relative importance of the factors will vary according to the sector the workers are employed in, the responses were separated according to sectors. Four sectors were identified as having the largest number of responses (ranging from 97 to 9 organizations). For each sector,

---

<sup>7</sup> There were 199 responses. Nineteen questionnaires were returned either because the employer was out of business or did not employ part-time workers. Forty did not respond. Thus, the response rate, excluding those 19 organizations that were out of business or did not employ part-time workers, was 83 percent  $[(199/(258-19)) \times 100]$ .

the 'not applicable' responses and missing data were separated from the rankings, and the median employer responses were found. A total of 172 responses were analyzed<sup>8</sup>.

### Characteristics of the Respondent Organizations

Half of the 172 respondents were in health care, 37 percent in education and education-related work, 8 percent in retail trade, and the remaining 5 percent from the hospitality sector. In terms of the occupational coverage, a large minority (42 percent) of the bargaining units covered the single profession of either nurses or teachers. The mean bargaining unit size the respondents referred to was 967 full-time and part-time employees (std.dev. 2177, median = 436, N = 170, 2 blank responses), with a mean of 419 part-time employees (std.dev. 1339, median = 124, N = 166, 6 blank responses). A large majority of the workers in the bargaining units the respondents referred to were female (mean = 641, std.dev. 1177, median = 235, N = 164, 8 blank responses). Although the survey asked for the number of females in the part-time group, in many cases the respondents had no information about this subject. In interviews, however, both employer and union representatives acknowledged that those working part-time were predominantly female.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Most respondents confined themselves to the listed factors in their ranking, and only a few respondents (3 percent) included another factor in

<sup>8</sup> There were 199 responses. In 22 of those responses there were 11 organizations each having substantially similar but separate full-time and part-time agreements. (Thus, 11 full-time agreements + 11 part-time agreements = 22 agreements for 11 comparable occupations in 11 organizations.) Although these full-time and part-time agreements were legally separate documents, in practice they were implemented together as a single document. Therefore, in responding to our survey, a single respondent from these organizations provided exactly the same response for the two (full-time and part-time) agreements. This resulted in coding the same persons' opinions twice, giving more weight to these 11 individuals' responses than the other responses. Therefore, in analyzing the data we decided to exclude the 11 repeated responses. This decreased the data to be analyzed to 188 (= 199-11).

In separating the remaining 188 responses according to sectors, there were 16 responses from 11 different sectors which could not be grouped in a meaningful way. These 16 responses were from the following sectors (number of responses in parentheses): Plastic Fabricators (1); Local Administration (2); Air Transportation (4); Engineering and Scientific Service (1); Truck Transportation (1); Poultry Processors (1); Printing and Publishing (1); Urban Transit Systems (1); Other Services to Business Management (2); Slaughtering and Meat Processing (1); and Paper Producing (1). In the analysis, these 16 responses were also excluded. Thus, the analyzed data decreased to 172 (= 188-16).

addition to the ones listed. That factor was 'the work itself is part-time', such as school bus driving, lunchtime student monitoring, open only on weekends, or open only for a few hours in the evening. For those that provided an additional reason, it was mostly ranked as one of the lowest in importance.

As presented in Table 1, in listing the reasons considered important in hiring, at least half the respondents in the following sectors said that the following were not one of the reasons for them to hire part-time workers and, therefore not applicable: lower wages (in the health care, education and hospitality sectors); lower benefits (in the health care and education sectors); flexibility in employment decisions (in the education sector); changes in macro-economic environment (in the health care, education<sup>9</sup>, hospitality and retail trade sectors); and the unavailability of full-time labour supply (in the education and retail trade sectors).

For those that provided a ranking, as we expected, flexibility in scheduling work seemed to be one of the most important reasons for hiring part-time workers covered by collective agreements. In the health care, education, and retail trade sectors it was the most important reason (median = 1.00) and in the hospitality sector it was ranked as third in importance (with two other reasons) (median = 3.00). The part-time workers cover peak periods or they provide continuity of work. For example, in the health care sector, both in hospitals and in nursing homes, the work requires round-the-clock patient care. Therefore, full-time as well as part-time professional and non-professional workers are scheduled to work a day, evening, or weekend shift. In other sectors, such as education, continuity in instruction and supervision is required; furthermore, certain specialty courses are taught on a part-time basis only. In education-related work, hospitality, and retail trade, extended business hours are necessary in order to serve the public effectively or for the success of the business. For example, in the education-related organizations such as museums or art centres, extended business hours or the project-oriented short-term work require hiring part-time workers. In the hospitality sector, for example in restaurants, where the majority of the business is either at noon or in the evenings, the labour concentration has to be at these specific times of the day, and full-time workers have to be backed up by part-time workers. In retail trade, such as in department stores and food stores, evenings, weekends and the pre-holiday season are the busiest periods and can only be covered by a flexible work force of part-time workers.

---

<sup>9</sup> In the education sector 49 percent.

**Table 1**  
**The Importance of Reasons in Hiring Part-Time Workers**  
**Covered by Collective Agreements**  
**(According to Sectors)**

Reasons	Health Care (N=86)			Education (N=63)			Hospitality (N=9)			Retail Trade (N=14)		
	NA	M	Ranked N Median	NA	M	Ranked N Median	NA	M	Ranked N Median	NA	M	Ranked N Median
Lower Wages	76	2	8 7.00	52	3	8 8.00	7	0	2 3.00	2	0	12 3.00
Lower Benefits	67	2	17 7.00	45	3	15 6.00	1	0	8 6.00	2	0	12 4.00
Flexibility in Scheduling Work	0	0	86 1.00	14	2	47 1.00	0	0	9 3.00	0	0	14 1.00
Flexibility in Employment Decisions	29	0	57 4.00	40	2	21 4.00	4	1	4 2.50	2	0	11 2.00
Changes in the Macro-Economic Environment	48	1	37 5.00	31	1	31 4.00	5	0	4 3.50	7	0	7 4.00
Employee Prefers	8	0	78 3.00	13	0	50 2.00	1	0	8 3.00	6	0	8 6.00
Employee is Suitable	18	2	66 4.00	25	3	35 2.00	1	0	8 4.50	7	0	7 7.00
Unavailability of Full-Time Labour	37	1	48 3.50	39	3	21 4.00	4	0	5 1.00	7	0	7 8.00

Respondents were asked to rank the factors in order of importance with 1 = most important, ..., 8 = least important; and to write NA if the factor was not applicable.  
 NA: Not applicable. M: Missing data. N: Number of ranked responses.

Contrary to our expectations that flexibility in employment decisions would be an important hiring reason in all sectors, we found it to be relatively important only in two sectors — retail trade and hospitality sectors. The data indicated that in these two sectors flexibility in employment decisions tended to be the second most important reason for hiring part-time workers covered by collective agreements (median = 2.00 in the retail trade and 2.50 in the hospitality sectors). This is because in these sectors, since jobs are relatively easy to learn and do not require any particular skills, workers are easily replaceable. Therefore, employers can easily adjust the number of employees according to changes in the demand for product or service. By contrast, in the health care and education sectors, where a substantial majority of the part-time workers are professionals who are unionized (nurses and teachers), flexibility in employment decisions is a relatively unimportant factor (median = 4.00 in both sectors). This is because most jobs — full-time or part-time — have to be filled with individuals who have gone through an education program and obtained a diploma or a certificate. Therefore, workers cannot so easily be replaced by any available person. Furthermore, in Ontario, both sectors are currently faced with a severe shortage of nurses and teachers. They have not laid off workers, particularly professionals in the last few years, and, according to our interviews and remarks provided in our survey, they do not foresee such layoffs in the near future. In the health care sector, employers are having difficulties in finding nurses to work on a full-time basis because an increasingly large number of nurses are choosing to work part-time or are leaving the profession (Meltz and Marzetti 1988; Goldfarb Associates 1988); and there is such a shortage of teachers that students in training for teaching profession are being hired for full-time and part-time positions even before they graduate.

We expected that in sectors where the work force consisted predominantly of women, employees' preference for part-time work would be an important reason for hiring. Although all four sectors in our study had predominantly female workers<sup>10</sup>, we found differences between sectors in terms of the importance given to this reason. In the education and its related fields, and the health care sector employee preference was one of the important reasons for hiring part-time workers (median = 2.00 and 3.00, respectively). On the other hand, in the retail trade sector, the employees'

---

<sup>10</sup> In the service sector, 63 percent of the (full-time and part-time) workers are female, and in the trade sector, 44 percent of the (full-time and part-time) workers are female. In the part-time work force, in the service sector, the percentage of part-time female workers is 81 percent and in the trade sector it is 73 percent (Statistics Canada 1989).

preference was relatively unimportant (median = 6.00). In the hospitality sector it was ranked as third in importance (with two other third ranked reasons) (median = 3.00).

The differences in ranking the importance of the employee's preference to work part-time occur for a number of reasons. As indicated in our interviews and in remarks provided with our survey, in the health care and education sectors part-time workers covered by agreements and employed in hospitals, nursing homes or schools, generally have regular employment schedules. They work a substantial proportion of a full-time schedule, and since most are professionals, such as nurses and teachers, they are paid relatively well. Furthermore, the majority of these workers are married and financially supported by their spouses (Meltz and Marzetti 1988; Goldfarb Associates 1988; Zeytinoglu 1989). Therefore, such employees could afford to choose to work in part-time schedules.

The employee's preference to work part-time tends to be less important in the retail trade and hospitality sectors because the majority of the part-time work force in these sectors is comprised of females who are single or single household heads with young and dependent children (interviews and Statistics Canada 1989). Their work schedule tends to be irregular and ranges from a few hours in a week to close to a half of full-time schedule. These workers tend to be employed in the lowest paid occupations in these already low paying sectors. If they had the choice, instead of working part-time, many of these workers would choose to work full-time or close to full-time, in regular schedules, to support their families. Since in these two sectors most part-time employees do not prefer to work part-time, this reason is relatively unimportant for the employers.

The data also indicated that some employers in unionized organizations hired a worker on a part-time schedule because the employee was considered as suitable for this type of work: either a mother with young or dependent children or a student. This factor seemed to be particularly important in the education sector (median = 2.00), where part-time workers covered by the agreements were predominantly female teachers. It is possible that for some of these employees, part-time work might be a necessity or a sensible choice at certain periods of their careers because of child rearing or caring responsibilities. As our interviews and the remarks offered in our survey indicated, employers of these workers accept this tendency as a fact. For those employers in other sectors even though this was one of the reasons for hiring part-time workers, it was ranked relatively low.

It is interesting to note that although for the majority of our respondents, the unavailability of full-time workers was not an important reason, as we predicted, for those sectors where the labour market was tight

this seemed an important reason. For example, in the hospitality sector for those employers that provided a rank it is the most important reason (median = 1.00). This is because in this sector for some employers it is difficult to find full-time workers willing to work in the low-valued, low paying, unskilled but highly demanding jobs typical of restaurants and hotels. Employers therefore hire whomever is available for any time period — mostly those, as it happens, who would like to work on a part-time basis, either while continuing their education or seeking full-time jobs elsewhere.

In the health care sector, the relative importance assigned to this reason (median = 3.50) should be interpreted differently. Some workers in this sector, but nurses in particular, do not want to work full-time. They believe they do not get the respect they deserve and are not compensated for their contributions to patient care. Meanwhile, their job continues to be stressful, demanding, and requires a 24 hour commitment (Meltz and Marzetti 1988; Goldfarb Associates 1988). Thus, many nurses opt out of full-time jobs, and employers are left to employ the only available labour supply — nurses who are willing to work only part-time.

Our results showed that the reason of 'changes in the macro-economic environment' was not applicable to most organizations in all four sectors studied here. Even for those who responded, this was a relatively weak reason for hiring part-time workers. This is probably because the majority of the organizations surveyed here either operate in noncompetitive markets and provide services such as health care or education where drastic market fluctuations common in product markets do not exist; or even if they are in competitive markets such as in hospitality and retail trade sectors, the competition takes place at the local market level, and they are not directly influenced by changes in the macro-economic environment.

In terms of lower wages and benefits, contrary to our expectations that these reasons will be similarly unimportant in all sectors, our data showed distinct differences in importance between sectors. While in health care and education sectors lower wages and benefits were not even considered as applicable by most respondents, for those respondents from the retail trade and hospitality sectors lower wages or benefits seemed relatively important. To be more specific, in the health care sector, collective agreements provided the same hourly wage for full-time and part-time workers, and a percentage in lieu of benefits was added to the wages of part-time workers. This meant that if some part-time workers were married and covered by their spouses' benefit plans, then in real terms they earned more per hour than did their full-time counterparts. In the education sector, the situation was similarly favourable for part-time workers. They had pro-rated salaries and were either covered by their spouses' benefit plans or had pro-rated

benefits. In addition, in some school boards, according to the agreements, part-time workers had the option of purchasing a benefit as if they worked full-time.

In addition, the semi-public or non-profit characteristics of these organizations might also explain the minimal importance given to the cost of wages and benefits in the health care and education sectors. Since these institutions provide services that cannot be easily purchased elsewhere, increases in wage and benefit costs are passed on to taxpayers who are willing to buy their essential, and often monopoly, services at a higher cost.

However, our data indicated that for the unionized organizations in the retail trade sector, lower wages and benefits were both relatively important reasons in hiring part-time workers covered by collective agreements (median = 3.00 and 4.00, respectively). Similarly, in the hospitality sector the few respondents who provided a rank identified lower wages as an important factor in hiring decisions (median = 3.00 with two other reasons ranked as third). As our interviews and the remarks provided in the questionnaire showed, employers in the retail trade and hospitality sectors claimed that the low profit margins and the labour intensiveness of their businesses dictate negotiating separate wages for full-time and part-time workers and offering lower wages for part-time workers even if the workers are performing same tasks as their full-time counterparts. Furthermore, while retail trade provides some prorated benefits to part-time workers and thus, low cost is relatively important, in the hospitality sector, benefits are not even considered an important reason in hiring part-time workers (median = 6.00), since benefits in this sector — even for full-time workers — are minimal or limited only to the legally required benefits.

In addition, in the retail trade and hospitality sectors, the diverse interests of workers within the part-time group might make it difficult for unions to negotiate equal but prorated wages and benefits: this difficulty results in the negotiated and ratified differential compensation for workers performing the same work. For example, in retail food stores or in chain restaurants, a small group, typically consisting of unskilled, single or single-parent women, considers its unionized part-time jobs as careers. The group is dependent on income earned from these jobs and would like to earn better wages and benefits. A second and larger group within the part-time work force in these sectors consists of students. These part-time working students do not have the same concerns nor the family responsibilities of the first group; they work in part-time jobs until they complete their education. Since students are transient in these jobs, they are unwilling to strike on an issue which will not significantly affect their future, and therefore do not insist on changes to improve their working conditions. As explained by



union and employer representatives during our interviews, it is this second group — students — who agree to employers' offers of lower wages and benefits, and ratify the inferior contracts.

## CONCLUSIONS

Focusing on unionized organizations, this exploratory study provided a sectoral analysis of the relative importance of reasons for hiring part-time workers. In our study, we attempted to control as many external factors as possible. Hence, we chose our data from the same province, where the organizations were more or less subject to the same economic, legal, political and social environment. All part-time workers performed the same or substantially similar tasks during the hours they were employed; and all were covered by collective agreements. We found that in unionized organizations employers tended to hire part-time workers for a variety of reasons, and the importance of each reason differed depending upon the sector the organization was in.

In particular, the results revealed that in the health care, education and retail trade sectors, flexibility in scheduling work was considered as the most important reason for hiring part-time workers, but in the hospitality sector, the unavailability of full-time labour was the most important reason. While the health care and education sectors considered employees' preference for part-time work as relatively important, the hospitality and retail trade sectors placed more emphasis upon flexibility in employment decisions and savings in wages and benefits.

Our results also suggested that the public versus private characteristic of the organization, the predominance of professional versus nonprofessional part-time occupations in the sector, and the level of earnings in part-time jobs, the regularity of the part-time employment schedule, and the number of hours worked in part-time employment also influenced employers' decisions for hiring part-time workers covered by collective agreements. Our data, however, did not enable us to clearly analyze the correlations between hiring decisions and these characteristics. Further research might focus on these characteristics to clearly present their impact on decisions for hiring part-time workers covered by collective agreements.

**REFERENCES**

- ATKINSON, John. 1987. "Flexibility or Fragmentation? The United Kingdom Labour Market in the Eighties." *Labour and Society*, Vol. 12, No. 1, January, 87-105.
- BALKIN, David B. 1989. "Union Influences on Pay Policy: A Survey." *Journal of Labor Research*, Vol. X, No. 3, 299-310.
- BELOUS, Richard S. 1989. "Human Resource Flexibility and Equity: Difficult Questions for Business, Labor, and Government." *Journal of Labor Research*, Vol. X, No. 1, 67-72
- BEECHEY, Veronica and Tessa PERKINS. 1987. *A Matter of Hours: Women, Part-Time Work and the Labour Market*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- "Benefits for Part-Timers." *The Worklife Report*. 1989. Vol. 7, No. 1, 12.
- DOMBOIS, Rainer and Martin OSTERLAND. 1987. "New Forms of Flexible Utilization of Labour: Part-Time and Contract Work." Roger Tarling, ed. *Flexibility in Labour Markets*. London: Academic Press, 225-243.
- GOLDFARB ASSOCIATES. 1988. *The Nursing Shortage in Ontario*. A Research Report for the Ontario Nurses' Association, March.
- ILO. 1989. "Part-Time Work." *Conditions of Work Digest*, Vol. 8, No. 1.
- KASSALOW, E. 1989. "Labour Market Flexibility and New Employment Patterns: The U.S. Case in a Comparative Framework." H. Wheeler, ed. *Labour Market Flexibility and New Employment Patterns, Proceedings of the Eighth World Congress of the IIRA*. Brussels, 4-7 September, 75-98.
- LABOUR CANADA. 1983. *Part-Time Work in Canada. Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Part-Time Work*. Ottawa: Ministry of Labour, Government of Canada.
- LEVER-TRACY, Constance. 1988. "The Flexibility Debate: Part-Time Work." *Labour & Industry*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 210-241.
- MANGUM, Garth, Donald MAYALL and Kristin NELSON. 1985. "The Temporary Help Industry: A Response to the Dual Internal Labour Market." *Industrial and Labour Relations Review*, Vol. 38, No. 4, 599-611.
- MELTZ, Noah M. and Jill MARZETTI. 1988. "The Shortage of Registered Nurses: An Analysis in a Labour Market Context." Toronto: Registered Nurses Association of Ontario.
- NYE, David. 1988. *Alternative Staffing Strategies*. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of National Research.
- OSTERMAN, Paul. 1987. "Choice of Employment Systems in Internal Labor Markets." *Industrial Relations*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 46-67.
- . 1988. *Employment Futures: Reorganization, Dislocation and Public Policy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- PIORE, Michael J. 1986. "Perspectives on Labour Market Flexibility." *Industrial Relations*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 146-166.

PUPO, Norene and Doris DUFFY. 1988. "The Ontario Labour Relations Board and the Part-Time Workers." *Relations industrielles/Industrial Relations*, Vol. 43, No. 3, 660-685.

SENGENBERGER, Warner. 1981. "Labour Market Segmentation and the Business Cycle." Frank Wilkinson, ed. *The Dynamics of Labour Market Segmentation*. London: Academic Press, 243-259.

STATISTICS CANADA. 1984. *Survey of Union Membership*.

———. 1989. *The Labour Force*. Catalogue 71-001, August.

ZEYTIÑOGLU, Isik Urla. 1987a. "Part-Time Workers: Unionization and Collective Bargaining in Canada." *Proceedings of the Thirty-Ninth Annual Meeting*. Madison, Wis.: Industrial Relations Research Association, 487-495.

———. 1987b. "Part-Time Workers and Collective Bargaining in Internal Labour Markets." Harish Jain, ed. *Proceedings of the 24th Annual Meeting of the Canadian Industrial Relations Association*. Hamilton: ACRI, 669-686.

———. 1989. *Part-Time Workers and Collective Bargaining: A Survey of Employers and Unions*. Technical report prepared for the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 57 p.

### ***Étude sectorielle sur les salariés à temps partiel régis par convention collective***

Le nombre d'employés à temps partiel augmente au Canada comme ailleurs. La littérature sur le sujet évoque inmanquablement l'économie dans les coûts de main-d'oeuvre, la flexibilité et le sexe des salariés comme facteurs importants pour l'embauche de salariés à temps partiel. Bien que la littérature suggère certains énoncés généraux sur les motifs d'embauche des salariés à temps partiel, une étude réalisée au niveau sectoriel, touchant les entreprises syndiquées, pourrait lever le voile sur des motifs différents d'une branche d'activité à une autre. Le présent article vise à examiner, secteur par secteur, les motifs retenus par les employeurs pour l'engagement d'employés à temps partiel assujettis à des conventions collectives. Les données utilisées dans cette enquête ont été recueillies auprès de 172 entreprises ontariennes liées par des conventions collectives qui couvrent des employés à temps partiel.

À partir d'un relevé de la littérature et d'entrevues auprès des représentants des employeurs et des syndicats, nous avons établi une liste des motifs pouvant justifier l'engagement d'employés à temps partiel: salaires et avantages sociaux moindres, flexibilité dans l'aménagement des horaires et dans les décisions associées à l'embauchage, évolution de la situation économique, préférence des employés pour le travail à temps partiel, caractéristiques personnelles des salariés et, enfin, indisponibilité de travailleurs à temps plein.

Les résultats de l'enquête ont révélé que dans les secteurs des soins de santé, de l'éducation et du commerce au détail, la flexibilité dans l'aménagement des horaires de travail était considérée comme la raison la plus importante de l'engagement des temps-partiels, alors que dans le secteur hôtelier, l'indisponibilité de salariés à temps plein en était la principale raison. Cependant, dans les secteurs des soins de santé et de l'éducation, on estimait que la préférence des employés pour le temps partiel était aussi relativement importante, alors que dans l'hôtellerie et le commerce au détail on attachait plus de poids à la flexibilité dans les décisions relatives à l'embauchage et aux économies en matière de traitements et d'avantages sociaux.

---

# JIR

## THE JOURNAL OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

---

The Journal of the Industrial Relations Society of Australia  
 Editor: Professor John Niland, The University of New South Wales

**December 1990 — Volume 32 Number 4**

**Articles**

**Antecedents of the 1986 Victorian Nurses' Strike**  
 Carol Fox

**Total Factor Productivity and Wages Policy**  
 Owen Covick

**Reluctant Conscripts? Small Business Management Attitudes to Employee Relations in Travel Agencies**  
 Peter McGraw and Ian Palmer

**Towards the Wagner Framework: Change in New Zealand Industrial Relations**  
 Peter Boxall

**Regulating Decentralized Industrial Relations: The Niland Prescription**  
 John M. O'Brien

**The 'Sickie': A Public Sector Phenomenon?**  
 Mark Wooden

**Notes**

**Australian Workplace Industrial Relations: Towards a Conceptual Framework—A Comment**  
 Jon Zappala

**Australian Workplace Industrial Relations: A Rejoinder to Zappala**  
 Craig R. Littler, Michael Quinlan and Jim Kitay

**Book reviews**

---

Published quarterly. Subscriptions: Australia \$40, overseas \$50 (surface mail). Single issues: \$12 (including postage), overseas \$14 (surface mail). Prices quoted are in Australian dollars and remittances should be in Australian dollars. Order from the Business Manager, **Journal of Industrial Relations**, GPO Box 4479, Sydney, NSW 2001, Australia.