

Working Mothers in the Netherlands: Do They Freely Choose to Work Part-Time?

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## DO MOTHERS FREELY CHOOSE TO WORK PART-TIME

## Abstract

Part-time employment is a desirable option for many mothers in the Netherlands. It is a balanced alternative when having to choose between full-time employment or no employment. Part-time employment provides many benefits, but does not come without its downsides. Literature on this topic often implies that mothers make a free choice to work part-time, however, there are reasons to challenge this assumption. Because part-time employment also brings downsides, it is therefore worth investigating whether mothers perceive this choice as free and if they would rather have worked full-time. In the present study, this assumption is tested by making use of an adaptation and extension of the theory of planned behavior. According to this hypothesized model, a mother's choice to start working part-time is influenced by her own attitude, subjective norms from her environment and her perceived control over the choice. A total of 111 part-time employed Dutch mothers participated in this study. The main analyses revealed that the hypothesized model, as used in this study, was unable to predict whether mothers had made a free choice when they decided to start working part-time. Closer interpretation of the data however revealed some points of interest and practical implications worth discussing.

Keywords: part-time work, theory of planned behavior, gender differences, free choice

**Working Mothers in the Netherlands: Do They Freely Choose to Work Part-Time?****Introduction**

As is the case in many Western-European countries, the Dutch part-time workforce has increased substantially (Wielers & Raven, 2013). Noteworthy is that the majority of this workforce consists of part-time working women, whom greatly outnumber the full-time working women (Dutch Central Bureau for Statistics, 2015). The majority of part-time working women are mothers, as part-time work provides mothers with the opportunity to balance their work-family lives (Higgins, Duxbury & Johnson, 2000). When having to choose between a demanding full-time job and no job at all, it thus makes sense to start working part-time when childcare is an issue, hence the large amount of part-time working women (Booth & van Ours, 2013). There are other (in addition to financial) benefits provided by part-time employment as opposed to being unemployed, namely that part-time employees continue to develop relevant work related skills, career momentum can be somewhat retained and it is easier for a part-time employee to make the transition back to full-time employment (Kropf, 1998). An additional reason to work part-time and have more time for child caring is that daycare in the Netherlands is generally expensive and thus an unattractive option, especially for lower-income families (Merens, Hartgens, & Van den Brakel, 2012).

**The 'free' choice to work part-time**

Although part-time employment provides many advantages, it is in the scope of the current research also important to highlight some of the disadvantages. For example, part-time employees receive lower wages (Barsadi & Gornick, 2008), limited career prospects and advancement opportunities (Higgins, Duxbury, & Johnson, 2000) and experience decreased job security (Naswall & de Witte, 2003). This leads to the conclusion that part-time work is not

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without its' downsides and further leads to the assumption that part-timework is not desirable for everyone. In the literature on mothers and part-time work, however, there is something in particular related to part-time work that requires attention and has mainly given cause to why this current research is conducted. It is, in the literature, often presented in such a way that mothers make a voluntary choice to work part-time, for example: 'Voluntary part-time employment after childbirth' (Hill et al., 2004, p. 122) and '...mothers may choose to work part-time (Buehler & O'Brien, 2011, p. 903). There are, however, reasons to assume this choice is not as free as it might appear to be. A person experiences freedom of choice when she is unconstrained in which option she can choose (Carter, 2004). Translating this definition of free choice to a working mother, there are certain environmental factors (explained in detail in the next section of this paper) which are likely to play a prominent role in refraining her from making an actual free choice. These environmental factors could, perhaps some of them very subtly, cause constraint when choosing between full- or part-time employment. Following this example, it could thus be that a lot of mothers in the Netherlands are working part-time involuntarily, or at least partially so, and this research will attempt to explore whether this is the case. Gaining insight in whether mothers choose to work part-time freely is important, because of the downsides brought by part-time employment, and as such actually having a choice in choosing for this employment status is desirable. Furthermore, contributions could be made in further assessing whether societal and labor related changes for part-time working mothers are necessary. In the following section of this paper, the assumption that mothers might not have chosen to work part-time voluntarily will be explained by a well-known theoretical framework which can be used to predict behavior. In the case of this study, this behavior is choosing to work part-time.

### **Theory of planned behavior**

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To explain the assumption stated earlier, that the choice to work-part time is not necessarily free, it is useful to turn to the theory of planned behavior by Ajzen (1985; 1991). Ajzen (1985) in his theory postulates three factors underlying behavioral intention and behavior: attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control. The attitude is an individual's positive or negative evaluation of a behavior, whereas the subjective norm is the perceived social pressure from important others an individual feels to engage or to not engage in a behavior. Perceived behavioral control refers to whether the individual feels she is able to perform the behavior, i.e. the ease or difficulty of performing the behavior of interest (Ajzen, 1991). These three factors, in turn, lead to the intention to perform a particular behavior. Following the model, it is also possible that when an individual believes she is able to perform the behavior, the behavior can be performed without the foregoing behavioral intention. In the present research, a modified and extended version of this model will be used without the elements of behavioral intention, because the behavior has already been performed. This model can be seen in Figure 1. Overall, the theory of planned behavior has proved useful in predicting (intentions of) behavior, such as the use of condoms (Sheeran & Taylor (1995), leisure (Ajzen & Driver, 1992) and exercise (Nguyen, Potvin & Otis, 1997) and has received considerable support regarding its validity and efficacy (e.g. Armitage & Conner, 2001).

Regarding a working mother, her decision to start working part-time is determined by her own views (attitudes), important other's/environmental views (subjective norms) and her perceived behavioral control. Her attitude, for example, would be the view she has on combining work and caretaking. It could be that she values caretaking greatly, but thinks that working full-time will not negatively impact the child's development. Or, for example, she might argue that

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working full-time while having to take care of the child is not desirable. In the case of the attitude, this is her own view and what she would do without external pressures.

Besides her own view, her social environment has a significant impact on her decision in the form of subjective norms. Subjective norms are rules that are understood by members of a group and guide and/or constrain behavior without the use of law (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). Two types of subjective norms can be distinguished: descriptive and injunctive norms. Descriptive norms inform us what is typically done, and injunctive norms what is typically approved or disapproved (Cialdini, Kalgren & Reno, 1991). Research demonstrates that when descriptive and injunctive norms align, the behavior is more likely to occur (Göckeritz et al., 2010). To give an example related to subjective norms and a part-time working mother: she is likely to work part-time because other mothers work part-time (descriptive norm) *and* because others think it is the appropriate thing for mothers to do (injunctive norm).

To understand how these subjective norms form, it is necessary to look at certain sets of attributes which are closely related to gender roles. This means that there are sets of attributes typically related to behavior performed by males and females. These can be described as agentic and communal attributes (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Agentic ('male') attributes typically include assertiveness, confidence, and independence whereas communal ('female') attributes include selflessness, concern with others, and a desire to be aligned with others. These agentic and communal attributes are embedded in role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) which postulates that a person or a group performing behavior which is in line with their social roles, will be evaluated more favorably. Even in industrialized countries, the typical male role is that of provider, while the female role still is the caretaker (Sheridan 2004). In general, the subjective norm (and unspoken rule) for a mother is thus to take on the role of caretaker, because this is

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what is traditionally done and generally evaluated favorably. The pressures from social norms and the fact that mothers are still primarily seen as caretakers, and not as providers, could contribute negatively to the amount of free choice they perceive in choosing how much to work. Mothers are 'expected' to spend a lot of time on caretaking and not on working and as a result may act accordingly, thus working part-time or not at all. If she starts working part-time due to influences from subjective norms, it could be stated that this decision is not perceived free.

In addition to pressures from social norms and ought social roles, the fact that a child has to be cared for is likely to constrain her from choosing freely, which is related to the perceived behavioral control part of the model. Mothers with dependent children are more likely to start working part-time (Gregory & Milner, 2009) because, for example a toddler, generally requires more of the mother's time than an older child who will be at school for most of the day. Consequently, mothers have to be home in time from work or work less to be able to care for their children, thus decreasing the number of hours worked. Following the theory of planned behavior model as used in the present study, the more constraint a mother perceived, the more she is inclined to start working part-time. If she started working part-time due to constraints experienced by having to care for her child, her choice to work part-time should be perceived as 'forced' due to the lack of control, and her decision should not be perceived as free.

### **Assessing perceived free choice**

The aim of this research is to explore whether mothers actually perceive their choice to start working part-time instead of full-time as free, using a modification and extension of Ajzen's (1985) theory of planned behavior model. The decision to start working part-time is, according to this model, caused by her own attitude (i.e. her own view on the topic of part-time work), the amount of pressure perceived from subjective norms and in the form of her perceived control

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(i.e. having to care for her young child). Following, certain combinations of scores on these predictors should allow for the assessment on how this choice was made. It should provide information on whether this was her 'own' decision or that external factors had primarily led to this decision. For example, the part-time working mother agreeing on pro part-time attitudes regarding work, and who indicates not perceiving much pressure from subjective norms and perceives being in control, will indicate that she perceives her decision to start working part-time as free. If however, a mother's attitude conflicts with the subjective norm (i.e. scoring high on own attitude but also high on influence from subjective norm) and feels not in control, the choice is not perceived free. In this study, perceived free choice is measured and expressed by the mother's current evaluation regarding her past decisions. For example, did she feel 'forced' in making this decision? Is she happy with the decision to work part-time? Would she, with her current mindset, make the same decision again? A further elaboration on how these free choice items are operationalized to fit the current research can be found in the method section of this paper, and is from now on referred to as the free choice measure.

### **Hypotheses**

To determine whether the choice was perceived free, a mothers responses on attitude, subjective norm, and perceived control items should align with her responses on the free choice measure. Following this notion, the following hypotheses are formulated.

#### **Hypothesis 1a:**



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*Part-time working mothers who score high<sup>1</sup> on own attitudes regarding part-time work, low on influences from social norms, and low on perceived control, will indicate that their past decision to start working part-time was perceived free<sup>2</sup>.*

### **Hypothesis 1b:**

*Part-time working mothers who score high on own attitudes regarding part-time work, high on influences from social norms, and high on perceived control, will indicate that their past decision to start working part-time was perceived un-free.*

Next, it would be interesting to try and replicate the findings of Göckeritz et al. (2010), who found that aligning influences from descriptive and injunctive norms are stronger predictors of behavior than non-aligning norms. Mothers with aligning norms should thus be more inclined to start working part-time because they feel they are expected to do that, and should perceive their choice as less free. The following hypothesis is formulated:

### **Hypothesis 2:**

*Mothers whose descriptive and injunctive norms align will score lower on the free choice measure than mothers whose descriptive and injunctive norms do not align.*

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Dutch companies were approached and asked to distribute emails (containing a short introductory script with the general purpose of the study and a link to a *Qualtrics* survey tool)

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<sup>1</sup> In this context, scoring ‘high’ means agreeing with the items, scoring ‘low’ means disagreeing with the items. The items are formulated in such a way that, without taking recoding into account: high scores on attitude mean ‘pro part-time attitudes’ (i.e. “I feel part-time work is better than full-time work when you have to raise children”), high scores on subjective norms mean perceiving high influence from these norms and high scores on control mean not being in control. The items can be found in detail the method section.

<sup>2</sup> Other ‘high-low’ combinations of the predictors are not included in this study, because the current combinations are expected to provide enough insight in whether a choice was perceived free or un-free.

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amongst their female employees, in which they were requested to participate in this study.

Participants were also approached via LinkedIn, Facebook, and by E-mail. When approaching participants, it was clearly stated to them that only part-time working mothers who, at some point in their lives decided to switch from full-time to part-time work because of children were to take part. This is to exclude mothers who already worked part-time when they got children, and thus never made the choice to switch from full to part-time work.

A total of 133 mothers initially participated in this study. Prior to the analyses, 22 participants were removed because a major part of their response was missing. This left a total of 111 female participants ( $M$  age at time of decision to start working part-time = 30.11,  $SD$  = 4.42). Average age of their children was 2.6 ( $SD$  = 7.20) Participants reported working in different sectors, such as healthcare (48%), business services (29%), retail and wholesale (10%) and education (8%). At the time of data collection, participants worked an average of 25 hours a week ( $SD$  = 5.75). Table 1 gives a more elaborate overview of the demographic statistics.

### **Procedure**

Participants filled out an informed consent to ensure their anonymity and in which it was clearly stated there would be no wrong answers. In the informed consent, participants were also requested to fill in all the items in honesty. They were asked to indicate their highest level of education, number of children, the age of their youngest child at the time of their decision, the sector in which they are working, the amount of responsibility in their job position has, and how many hours they are currently working; these questions served as the control variables. In the survey, participants were also requested to confirm that they have children and that they are working part-time. Only mothers working 35 hours or less (part-timers according to the Dutch Central Bureau for Statistics, 2016) were included in the analyses. If participants indicated

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otherwise, they were redirected towards the end of the questionnaire. At the end of the survey, participants were thanked and informed about the full purpose of this study. If they wished, they could leave a comment or contact the researcher for questions about this study.

### Measures

For this non-experimental research, a modified and extended version of the theory of planned behavior was used. This model was used to assess how the choice to start working part-time had been made, using combinations of scores on the predictor variables. Participant's responses on the free choice measure were measured, which allowed for the assessment whether this choice was perceived by them as free. All items in the questionnaire were answered on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *completely disagree*, 7 = *completely agree*). Some questions are derived from Ajzen & Sheikh (2013) and modified to fit the current research.

**Attitude towards behavior.** Attitude was measured with four items (Cronbach's alpha = .71): (1) "I think working part-time is more beneficial for child rearing than working full-time"; (2) "I consider full-time working mothers as worse mothers"; (3) "Working part-time is better for the mother-child relationship" and (4) "I feel it's unacceptable to work full-time while having a child". The mean score of these items will form the measure of attitude towards behavior, with high scores indicating a more favorable attitude of part-time work than full-time work.

**Subjective norm.** Three items were used to assess injunctive norms: (Cronbach's alpha = .83) (1) "Most people who are important to me think working full-time is not beneficial when I have/had a young child"; (2) "Most people whose opinions I value would disapprove when I would work full-time when I have/had a young child" and (3) "Most of the people close to me believe full-time working mothers are worse mothers".

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Three items were used to assess descriptive norms: (Cronbach's alpha = .62) (1) "Most of my friends and colleagues work part-time when they have a young child"; (2) "Most mothers who are close to me stay more at home when they have a young child" and (3) "Many mothers in my environment start working part-time when they have a baby". The average score of these items will form the measure of subjective norm, with high scores indicating high influence from environment (Cronbach's alpha = .69.).

**Perceived control.** To measure perceived control, the following four items were used (Cronbach's alpha = .71.): (1) "My child requires/required me to stay at home"; (2) "I have/had to be home in time to care for my child"; (3) "I have/had to work part-time because formal childcare/day-care is too expensive" and (4) "I have/had to be home a lot to care for my child. The mean scores of these items will be the measure of perceived control, with high scores indicating low levels of control<sup>3</sup>.

**Free choice.** Free choice was operationalized by five items (Cronbach's alpha = .89.): (1) "I feel my decision to start working part-time was forced" (reverse coded); (2) "I am happy with my choice to start working part-time"; (3) "I would make the same decisions again regarding part-time work", (4) "With the knowledge I have now I would make the same choice again" and (5) "I regret my decision to start working part-time" (reverse coded). The average scores of these items is the free choice measure, with high scores indicating the choice was free.

## Results

### Correlations

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<sup>3</sup> Due to the formulation and coding of the items, high scores on the perceived control items mean feeling less in control and suggest mothers are more inclined to start working part-time, because they feel full-time employment is not possible due to having to care for children. Higher scores thus indicate lower perceived freedom of choice.

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In Table 2, a full summary of all the means, standard deviations and correlation coefficients can be found between the variables. It was decided to leave out the variable indicating level of responsibility within an organization, because this question was framed in the present, while it should have been framed in the past to be relevant for this research. None of the control variables significantly correlated with the dependent variable, free choice. However, number of children was nearly significant ( $r [110] = -.16, p = .09$ ), and therefore included in the regression analyses. There were significant correlations amongst the control variables. Age of youngest child when started working part-time positively correlated with education ( $r [110] = .27, p = .005$ ). Education was negatively correlated with hours working currently ( $r [110] = -.29, p < .002$ ). There were also significant correlations amongst the control and predictor variables: hours working currently negatively correlated with attitude ( $r [110] = -.33, p < .001$ ), number of children positively correlated with control ( $r [110] = -.22, p = .02$ ). Lastly, all predictor variables were correlated to each other (all  $r$ 's  $[110] = > .21 < .34$ , all  $p$ 's  $< .05$ ).

### **Regression analyses**

All of the predictor variables met the assumptions for performing a hierarchical multiple regression (e.g. low multicollinearity, normal distribution) except the dependent variable. The dependent variable (free choice) was very heavily skewed, nearly all participants scored near 7 "Completely agree" on all items and was therefore transformed (using a square root transformation) to reduce skewness. Following, two hierarchical regressions were performed. The first was to test the model and Hypothesis 1a and b: a three step hierarchical regression containing a control variable in Step 1, the predictor variables in Step 2. In Step 3, interaction between the predictors were added. To test Hypothesis 2 (whether aligning injunctive and descriptive norms have greater predictive power than when they do not align) a second and

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separate hierarchical regression was performed with the average of injunctive and descriptive norms variables in the first step and an interaction term of injunctive norm and descriptive norm in the second step. A full summary of these regression analyses can be found in Tables 3 and 4.

**Hypothesis 1a & b.** To test whether the model can be used to assess whether a free choice was made, a three step hierarchical regression was conducted. The control variable added in Step 1 did not have a significant effect on perceived free choice ( $\beta = -.06, p = .088$ ). The model was not able to predict free choice, ( $R^2 = .03; F = 2.96, p = .088$ ). In Step 2 the predictor variables were added, attitude ( $\beta = .013, p = .522$ ), subjective norm ( $\beta = .02, p = .423$ ) and perceived control ( $\beta = .00, p = .956$ ), which did not significantly add to the model ( $R^2 = .04; \Delta F = 0.51, p = .353$ ). In the third and final step, interaction terms between the predictor variables were added. These did not significantly add to the model ( $R^2 = .05; \Delta F = 0.26, p = .642$ ).

**Hypothesis 2.** To test whether aligning injunctive and descriptive norms have greater predictive power than when they do not align, a two-step hierarchical regression was performed. In Step 1, injunctive and descriptive norms were added separately, but these not did not significantly predict free choice ( $R^2 = .02; F = 1.19, p = .308$ ). Adding the interaction term in Step 2 did not significantly improve on the model ( $R^2 = .04; \Delta F = 2.49, p = .186$ ). By adding the interaction term, the descriptive norm variable became a significant predictor of free choice ( $\beta = .11, p < .05$ ).

## Discussion

This research aimed to investigate whether mothers in the Netherlands, who made the choice to start working part-time instead of full-time when they got children, perceived this choice as a free choice. In the literature, the decision to start working part-time after childbirth is often framed as a choice, however, there are reasons to assume this choice might not actually be

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free. This is important to study because part-time work provides mothers not only with advantages, but also disadvantages. Thus, being able to choose freely in such a situation is desirable. Certain societal matters about women, child caring and employment gave reason to doubt the 'freedom' of this choice, and how it might be influenced. Referring to Ajzen's (1985) theory of planned behavior model, a choice is influenced by a person's attitude about this behavior, the influence from subjective norms, and the amount of control the person has over the behavior. This study tested whether a modified and extended version of the theory of planned behavior model could assess if the choice to start working part-time was perceived free or un-free. Analyses of the obtained data revealed that none of the attitude, subjective norm and perceived control measures used in this model proved to be significant predictors of free choice. Based on these results, Hypothesis 1a and b were not confirmed.

The secondary aim of this research was to replicate findings from a paper by Göckeritz et al. (2010), whom reported that aligning injunctive and descriptive norms had greater predictive power than when they do not align. Hierarchical regression analysis revealed no such effect in this study: the interaction effect between injunctive and descriptive was not significant, disconfirming Hypothesis 2.

Although the hypothesized model did not allow for a statistically sound assessment on whether the choice to start working part-time was perceived as free, various different results found in this research are notable. First, whereas none of the predictor variables were a near significant predictor of free choice, there was one control variable that was marginally significant: number of children. It is therefore concluded that it requires further explanation. Number of children correlated negatively with free choice and positively with control, indicating that the more children a mother has, the less free her choice to start working part-time is

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perceived. A result in a similar fashion was found in a study by Stratton (1996), who found that number of children had a strong negative impact on women's perceived full-time employment opportunities. Although the results in the present study are not completely similar to those found by Stratton (1996), it allows for the conclusion that a greater number of children hampers mothers in making a free choice, as they might have wanted to work full-time instead.

Second, descriptive statistics analysis show that, on average, Dutch part-time working mothers perceive a high level of freedom with their choice to start working part-time. Nearly all mothers scored, on average, a nearly maximum score on the free choice measure. These survey items indicated that overall mothers felt free in their choice. If we by, these scores, carefully assume that the choice was free, it implies that Dutch mothers would make the same choices again regarding part-time work, do not regret their choice and work part-time voluntarily. However, no statistical verification can support these results since the predictors did not explain a significant part of the variance of the free choice measure.

### **Alternative explanation**

As mentioned in the previous section, this study is statistically unable to explain the very high scores on the free choice measure. Because these results have been discussed and interpreted (although with speculation) assuming mothers do actually perceive their choice as free, it is useful to also present an argument that challenges this assumption. The following section will therefore contain an alternative explanation as to why these scores might actually be 'inflated', and not a true reflection of the actual perceived free choice. This alternative theory proposes that mothers could be experiencing (or have experienced) post decision dissonance. Post-decision dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957, 1964) states that when an individual has made a decision, she might experience dissonance. Dissonance, in psychological terms, is a mental



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state of discomfort and tension and occurs when an individual holds conflicting attitudes, values or beliefs about a performed action. Because individuals are striving to maintain internal psychological consistency and reduce mental discomfort, they are motivated to reduce these feelings of dissonance (Festinger, 1957). To reduce these feelings of dissonance, the individual might change her perspective on the decision to make it seem as if this was the better option of the alternatives. In case of this study, the choice between full- or part-time employment might have been a difficult choice which caused post-decision dissonance. Because the choice to work part-time has been made in the (distant) past, it might at present time be evaluated more positively than it was when the choice was made.

This notion mainly stems forth from dissonance reduction theories stating that individuals who feel they have made the ‘wrong’ decision can engage in dissonance reducing behavior, such as seeking out information justifying their choice and rejecting their not chosen alternative (see Frey & Ross, 1984; Case et al., 2005). Relating this example to the part-time working mothers, they, over time, might have adjusted their evaluation of part-time work and started to evaluate it more positively by seeking information supporting their decision that part-time work is indeed the better choice than full-time work. It is not possible to confirm whether this is actually the case in this study, but it does allow for a plausible alternative explanation if we assume that these high scores are in fact ‘inflated’.

### **Limitations and directions for future studies**

The present study was subject to several limitations. First, the dependent variable displayed a very high amount of negative skewing. By transforming this variable the skewing was reduced, however, it is still difficult to assign valid conclusions when working with such a skewed distribution because the hypothesized model failed to assess free choice.

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Second, this study uses a modified version of Ajzen's (1985) theory of planned behavior model, and is used to explain outcomes of past behavior and not to predict future behavior, as it is originally intended to do. To test whether the present study's model is applicable in assessing whether a past decision is perceived as free, a follow up study could be designed where an evaluation of a choice is shortly done after this choice has been made. For example, companies could be approached and asked if they want to distribute the same questionnaire as used in this study to mothers who have just started working part-time again after parental leave. The main advantage of a quick measurement of the perceived freeness of this choice, over a (distant) past choice, could contribute to the reduction of the effect of post-decision dissonance discussed in the previous section and add to a more valid measure of free choice. Some support for this notion stems forth by research stating that significant dissonance reducing effects occur after some time (e.g. Gailon & Watts, 1967), and not immediately after a decision is made.

Third, the present study lacked an item asking participants about their age when they participated in the study. Only their age when they started working part-time was asked. This was discovered when the time of data collection was nearly over, and should be included in future research. In the scope of the present study, age could have been used to explore the following two assumptions. First, considering the possible effect of dissonance reduction over time, it could follow that mothers who have made the choice to start working part-time longer ago, report higher scores on the free choice measure. It would thus have been informative to compare groups of mothers varying in their time between the decision, and see if this could contribute to what is known about dissonance reduction over time. Second, mothers of different age cohorts might have given different responses on the predictor variables used in this study. Over the years, attitudes towards working mothers have become less traditional and more

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egalitarian, showing a clear positive trend in egalitarian attitudes towards working mothers between the 1970's and 1990's (Donnelly et al., 2013). Mothers of older generations might thus have experienced more environmental pressure to take on the role of caretaker, and therefore started to work part-time while mothers of younger generations might have perceived less pressure.

### **Practical implications**

Because the hypothesized model was unable to assess whether Dutch mothers work part-time freely, the following section should be interpreted with care. When looking solely at the average item scores on the free choice measure in this study, it generally indicates that Dutch part-time working mothers are very content with their choice to work part-time and do perceive it as free. They do not seem to have wanted to work full-time and judging from these results it can be concluded that no arrangements are needed to provide mothers with additional opportunities to work full-time. On the other hand, although they do not seem to desire a full-time position, attempts to increase the equal distribution of full-time working women and men should not necessarily cease. If we consider career advancement opportunities, it is generally agreed that part-time employment reduces these opportunities, contributing to an unequal distribution of female and male employees at managerial and executive positions (e.g. Higgins et al., 2000). More equal gender distributions at managerial level, however, brings many benefits to organizations and individual employees alike. A more equal distribution of male and female managers could positively contribute to more creative and critical thinking within organizations (Lee & Farh, 2004). In addition, it could increase the heterogeneity of values, beliefs and attitudes to broaden perspectives in workplace decision making processes (OECD, 2012). At the individual level, a decrease of gender differences between managers and subordinates in

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organizations would occur, increasing employee productivity (Giuliano, Levine & Leonard, 2006). Although this is a very brief overview of the benefits, these advantages are clear and support the notion for more gender diversity at higher organizational levels. To attempt and achieve this distribution, many organizations are implementing quota to increase the amount of women at executive positions (Christiansen, 2016). Combining these quota with increased childcare assistance opportunities and arrangements at work, should at least somewhat contribute to a more equal division of men and women at executive positions and make full-time work a more attractive alternative for mothers.

### **Concluding remarks**

Part-time employment status does not only provide mothers with benefits but also with downsides and it is therefore important to assess whether mothers perceive a free choice when choosing for this employment status. This study was unable to assess whether mothers freely choose to work part-time. The theoretical model to test this assumption proved unable to statistically verify either of the hypotheses. Implications of the results were discussed, but should be implemented with care since no major significant results were obtained. Future research will be needed to assign more valid conclusions to this particular research topic.

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Table 1

*Sample characteristics*

Variable		<i>N (%)</i>
Total		111
Education	High School diploma	10 (9%)
	Vocational education	46 (42%)
	Post high school higher	39 (35%)
	University or higher	16 (14%)
Age when started working part-time	25 or younger	12 (11%)
	26-30	55 (49%)
	31-45	43 (39%)
	Older than 45	1(1%)
Number of children	1	22 (20%)
	2	55 (49%)
	3	31 (28%)
	4 or more	3 (3%)

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Table 2

*Results of the correlation analysis*

	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	30.08 (5.75)									
2. No. children	2.14 (.757)	.09								
3. Age youngest child	2.63 (7.21)	.11	.14							
4. Education	-	-.07	.05	.27**						
5. Hours working currently	25.37 (5.75)	-.17	-.16	-.14	.29**					
6. Attitude	3.82 (1.32)	.104	-.07	.03	.09	.33**				
7. Subjective norm	4.59 (1.10)	.00	-.06	-.05	-.05	-.13	.29**			
8. Perceived control	4.09 (1.53)	.07	.22*	.07	.07	-.14	.21*	.34**		
9. Perceived free choice	6.43 (.99)	-.13	-.16	-.05	.00	-.08	.09	.11	.00	

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ . Age and age youngest child represent data from when mothers started working part-time.

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Table 3

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Free Choice*

Variable	$\beta$	$t$	$F$	$\Delta F$	$R^2$	Adj $R^2$
Step 1			2.96	-	.026	.02
Number of Children	-.06	-1.72				
Step 2			1.12	.51	.04	.00
Number of Children	-.05	-1.53				
Attitude	.01	.64				
Subjective Norm	.02	.80				
Control	.00	-.06				
Step 3			.74	.26	.05	-.02
Number of Children	-.06	-1.61				
Attitude	-.07	-.70				
Subjective Norm	-.01	-.07				
Control	.00	.02				
Attitude *Norm	.01	.59				
Attitude *Control	.01	.40				
Control *Norm	-.01	-.31				

*Note: None of the effects were significant*

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Table 4

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Hypothesis 2*

Variable	$\beta$	$t$	$F$	$\Delta F$	$R^2$	Adj $R^2$
Step 1			1.19	-	.02	.00
Injunctive Norm	.00	.06				
Descriptive Norm	.03	1.49				
Step 2			1.64	2.49	.04	.02
Injunctive Norm	.11	1.55				
Descriptive Norm	.11*	2.03				
Injunctive *Descriptive	-.02	-1.58				

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*Note.* \*  $p < .05$

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Figure 1

*Modified and extended model of theory of planned behavior as used in this study*

