



Work Autonomy,  
Flexibility and  
Work-Life Balance

# Gendered discrepancies in the outcomes of flexible working: the case of overtime and income in the UK

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# Consequences of schedule control

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- Focus mostly on positive impact: work-life balance, productivity, work commitment, health etc.
- Some studies examine some negative impact: increase in work intensity, namely overtime
- Some overlooked aspects: income, and career perspectives
- For schedule control to be a true alternative to adapt work around family life, it should not have negative implications for career...



# What we add to previous studies

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- Most studies based in the US – but institutional structures may influence this relationship  
→ we look at UK case
- Most previous studies gender and worker context blind  
→ we specifically take gender, parental status, working time status into account
- We look at different types of schedule control → flexitime, flexiplace, but also time autonomy (control over working hours)
- Most based on cross-sectional data → We examine longitudinal data



# Definition schedule control

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- Control over when and where one works (Kelly and Moen, 2007)
- Flexitime: control over when one works (e.g., start end times, accumulation of hours to take days off)
- Flexiplace: control over where one works (working from home for personal reasons)
- Time autonomy: how much control do you have over your working hours?



# Schedule control uses

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- Can be used for a variety of reasons
  - Family-friendly arrangement
  - High performance/involvement strategy
  - Reward for higher status/supervisory, management role



# Autonomy control paradox

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- When workers identify more with the work domain the flexibility in the borders between work and family will result in expansion of work
  - Employees who are “free” to work whenever however they wish, may work perpetually (use autonomy to become the ideal worker)
  - “honey trap” (Grönlund 2007) “autonomy-control paradox” (Putnam et al 2014)
- ➔ But depending on the extent to which you can expand the work environment



# Causes of intensification (Kelliher & Anderson 2010)

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- **Imposed intensification:** imposed by employers/contract – same amount of work but fewer hours (task based work)
- **Enabled intensification:** allow people to work harder easily – removal of distractions, increased optimization of hours
- **Gift/social exchange theory:** The ability to take advantage of flexible working options may engender a reaction in employees, which results in them expending greater effort, increase motivation, commitment → increase other characteristics of the “ideal worker”



# Enabled intensification & Stress of a higher status hypothesis (Schieman et al., 2009)

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- Individuals in higher positions may engage in role blurring because of the **demands of higher status work conditions** which can increase work-nonwork interference
- Schedule control for these groups of workers may entail “**work that never ends**” and a **devotion to work** that responds to the demands of high status
- Clark (2000) – flexibility of borders can increase spillover to the other sphere of life when one aspect takes precedence (workers where work has a high significance in life)





# Variance across individuals

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- If Clark's theory is correct, increased work intensity and hours will depend largely on individuals
- Individuals whose life focuses more on work, more likely to intensify/increase work efforts → increase spill over
- Individuals who has other demands (family demands) may be less likely to intensify/increase work efforts
  
- Gender, parental status, and occupational status



# Impact on income

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- Work intensity
  - Overtime/increased work intensity leads to higher income → via overtime
  - (unobserved) Increase in work effectiveness/qualitative intensity and productivity (de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011) → direct impact
- Healthier happier workers
  - ‘happy worker thesis’ (Leslie et al., 2012)
  - Decrease in stress, sickness, and absenteeism, and better work-life balance brought on by schedule control (Weeden, 2005)



# Varying across individuals

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- Depending on how it is used/perceived to be used by employers
  - Use of schedule control as a signal for lower work commitment (Glass and Noonan, 2016)
  - When used for personal reasons/family demands, schedule control does not lead to income gains (Leslie et al., 2012)
  - Women/parents/lower occupational groups more likely to be perceived to do so (Brescoll et al., 2012)
- Discrimination in rewards
  - Women/lower occupational groups generally gain less rewards (Acker 1990) including rewards from schedule control
- Trade off of flexibility for lower wages



# Data

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- Understanding Society waves 2 and 4
- Several selections
- 3,621 men and 3,837 women
- Fixed and random effects models



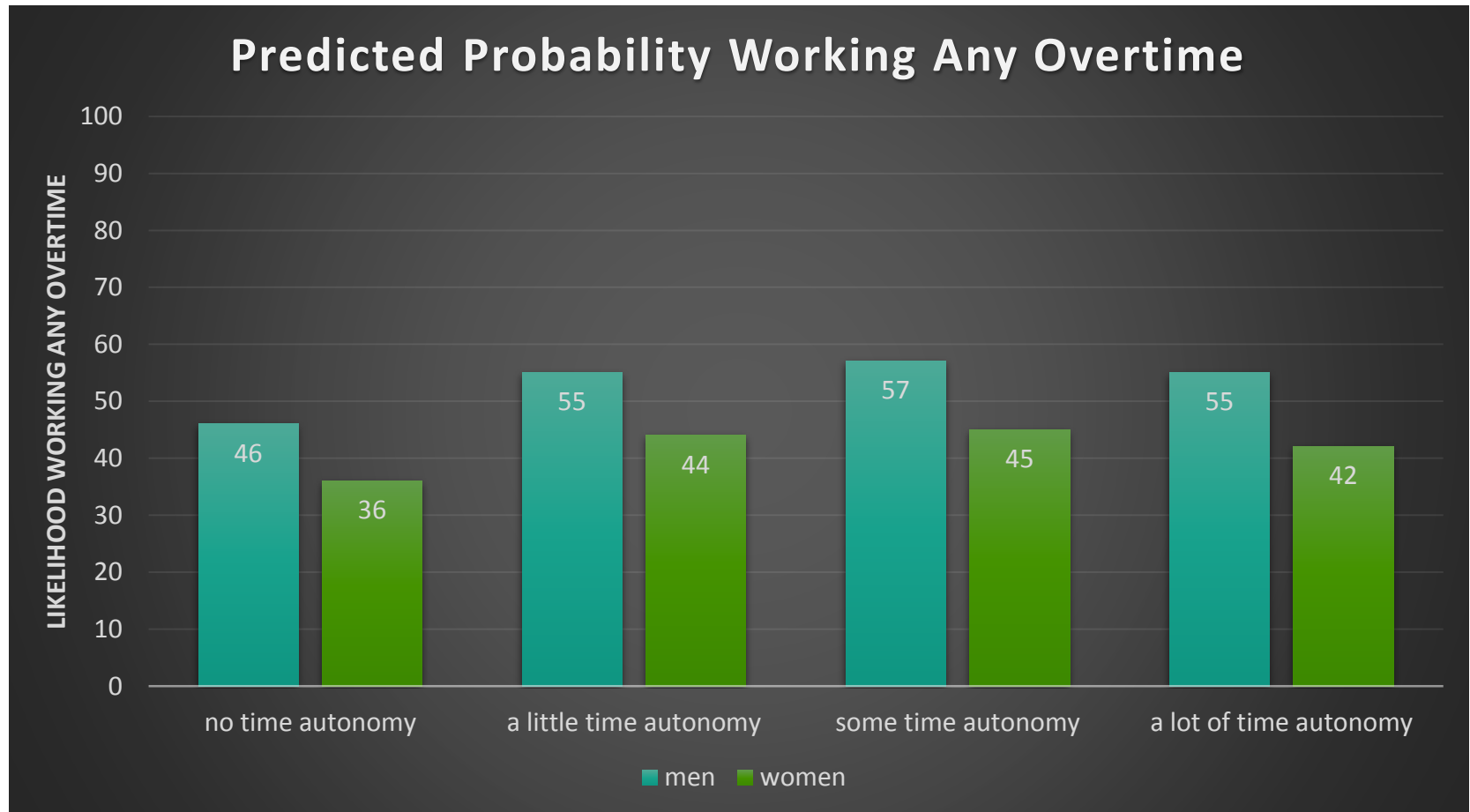
# Preliminary Results: Overtime

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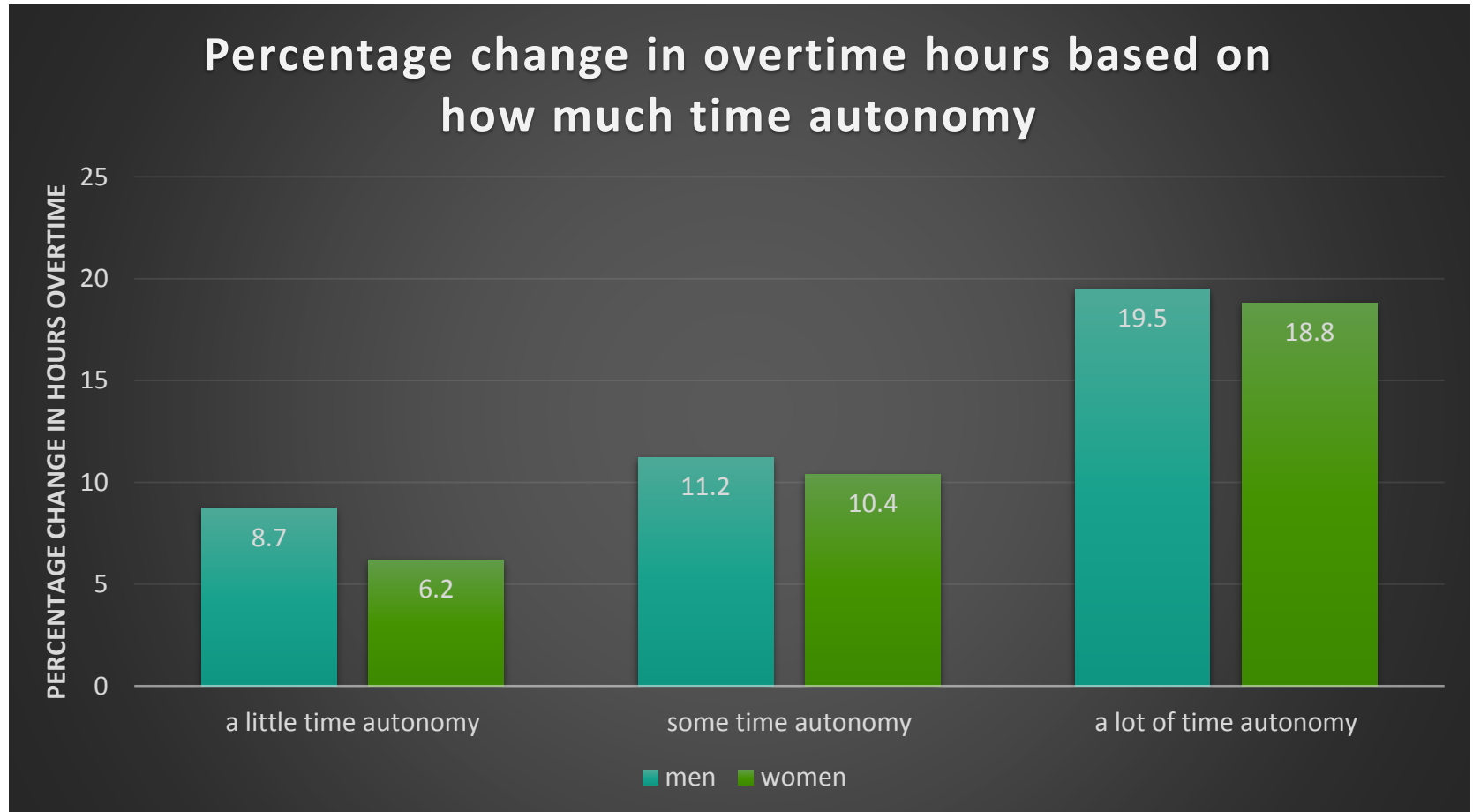
- Having time autonomy positively related to the likelihood of working overtime and how much overtime people work.
- Both men and women
  - But regarding working any overtime clearer for women.
  - Using flexitime was *negatively* related to how much overtime men worked.
- Regardless of parental status
  - But relationship between time autonomy and working any overtime seems clearer for mothers than for childless women.
  - And relationship between time autonomy and how many overwork hours appears to be clearer for non-parents than parents.
- Part-time vs full-time (for women only)
  - Positive relationship between working (any) overtime and time autonomy seems clearer among part-time working women than among full-time working women.
  - However, when we are looking at *how much* overtime these women worked, we see the positive relationship only for full-time working women.



# Preliminary Results: Overtime



# Preliminary Results: Overtime



# Preliminary Results: Earnings

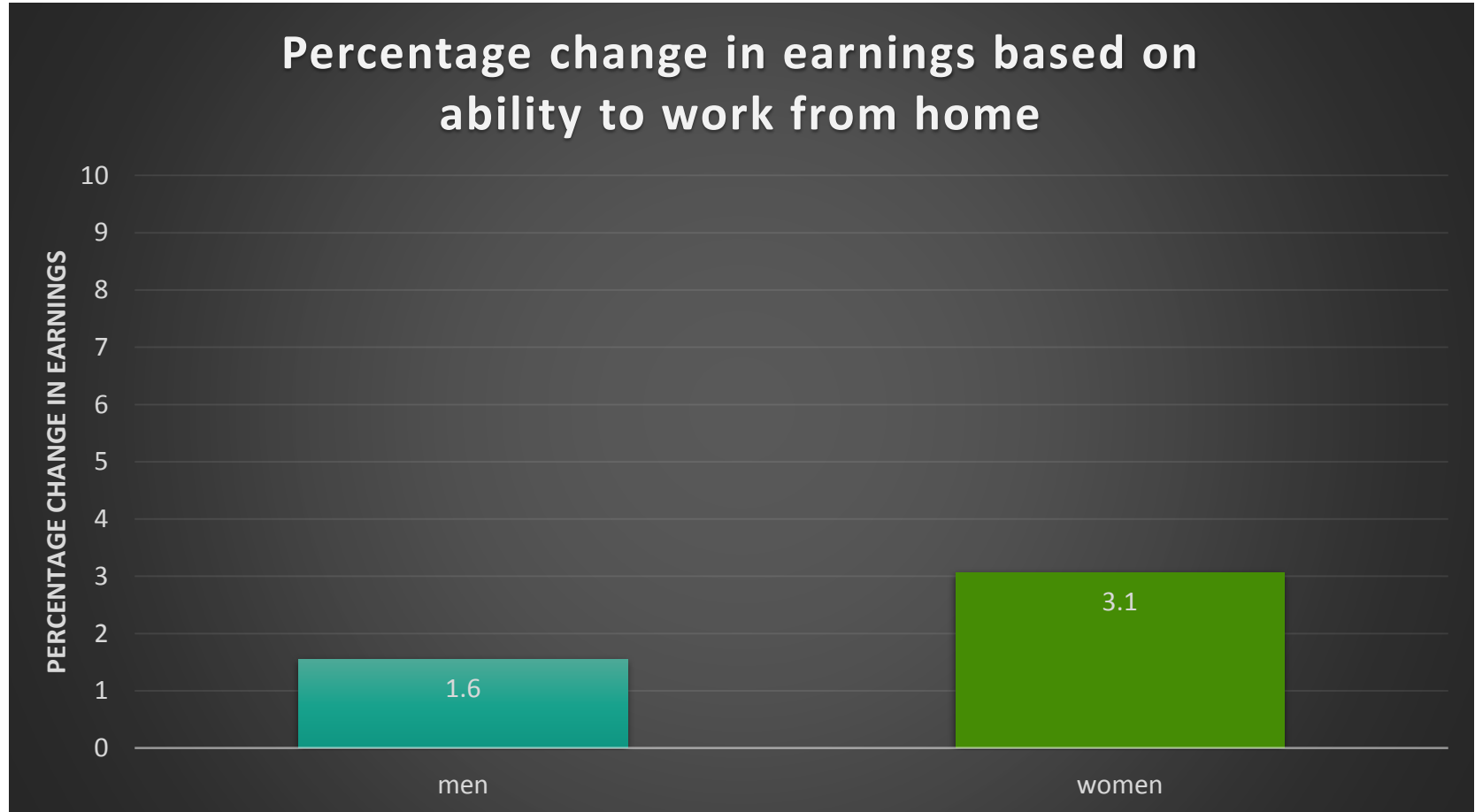
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- Being able to work from home seems to be positively related to earnings
- Most clearly for women.
- Clearer for mothers than for childless women
- Clearer for part-time working women than for full-time working women.





# Preliminary Results: Earnings



# Conclusion

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- Overall, schedule control can have positive outcomes (higher earnings) and negative outcomes (more overtime)
- Type of flexibility clearly matters
- There is variability in outcomes based on type of workers



# Next steps

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- Robustness checks
- Looking at the gender differences in more detail
- Compare high-status jobs with lower occupational groups
- Investigate possible indirection relationship from schedule control → working overtime → earnings
- When more waves are available: look at this again!



# Thank you!

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