



“Working 9 to 5” – or Not? Part- and Full-time Employees in Trade¹

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ABSTRACT

Part-time work is about twice as common in trade as in the general workforce in Sweden. More women than men work part time, and women and men tend to work in different trade sectors. This study first compares psychosocial work environment factors (job demands and job resources), work–non-work interference, and health-related factors between part-time and full-time employed women and men in trade in Sweden and, second, describes their sociodemographic characteristics. Data is from a subsample of trade employees in SLOSH 2022 (N = 730; 49% women; mean age 54 years; 92% permanently employed) with 20% in part-time employment. Part-time employees and women reported lower job resources (job control and skill discretion). Women reported higher emotional demands, work–life interference, and symptoms of depression. It is suggested that increased development opportunities and more varied job tasks could contribute to beneficial outcomes, especially for part-time employees and women, and more functional flexibility for organizations.

KEYWORDS

employment contract / gender / health / JD-R model / job demands / job resources / psychosocial work environment / retail / work–non-work interference

The trade sector (including retail, wholesale, and motor trade) constitutes one of the largest sectors when it comes to the number of employees in the private sector in the Nordic countries (Eurostat 2022), including Sweden (Statistics Sweden 2023), where about 11% of the workforce is in the trade sector (Handelsfakta 2022). Part-time work is common in trade; more than 30% of employees in retail in Sweden

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work part time (Statistics Sweden 2023) compared to about 14% in Sweden in general (OECD 2021). As concerns trade in Sweden, part-time work is most common among blue-collar women, of whom about 76% work part time. Despite the high number of part-time employees in the trade sector, there is limited knowledge about what it is like to work part time compared to full time.

This study is grounded in the Job-Demands Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al. 2001), which conceptualizes the work environment in terms of job demands and job resources. The model emphasizes the importance of examining context-specific job demands and job resources to understand their impact on employee health and motivation. Job demands are aspects of the work that require effort and are expected to be associated with an increased risk of strain, ill-health, and interference between work and private life (Demerouti et al. 2001, 2012). Job resources are aspects of the work that help employees to achieve work goals, reduce job demands, and stimulate personal growth and development (Demerouti et al. 2001). Job resources are related to employee motivation and engagement as well as outcomes that are positive for the organization (Lesener et al. 2019) such as job performance and an inclination to remain with the organization.

The trade sector is characterized by high competitiveness, rapid changes, and varying staffing needs during different times of the day, week, and year (Tuckey et al. 2017). Many employees in trade face high job demands, such as job insecurity, having to work fast under time pressure, as well as emotional demands when interacting with many, sometimes difficult, customers (Tuckey et al. 2017; Zeytinoglu et al. 2004). For part-time workers, such job demands may be more intensive as they tend to work during the busiest hours. Job resources, such as being able to influence and control the work, having opportunities for skill use and development (skill discretion), and receiving support from colleagues and managers could help employees to handle job demands (Demerouti et al. 2001). However, such job resources are often lacking in trade (Tuckey et al. 2017; Zeytinoglu et al. 2004), particularly for part-time employees (Gunderson 2020). Trade is also a sector where employees struggle to balance work and private life (Elahi et al. 2022). Some employees may work part time in order to balance work and private life, but it is not known if part-time employees differ in their perceptions of work and private life interference, compared with full-time employees in trade. Poor health is typically more common among part-time employees (Bartoll et al. 2014), but it is not known if that is the case also in trade, where part-time work is more common than in other sectors.

The overall gender distribution in trade in Sweden is rather equal (women: 43%; Statistics Sweden, 2023). However, women and men tend to work in different parts of the trade sector; it is more common for women to work in retail (63% women) and for men to work in wholesale and motor trade (70% and 89% men, respectively) (Statistics Sweden 2023). Even when women and men work in the same workplace, such as at the same grocery store, they tend to work in different departments and with different tasks (Olofsdotter et al. 2023). This could result in women and men being exposed to different levels of job demands and job resources. As job demands and job resources consistently have been related to work–non-work interference as well as health (Gonzalez-Mulé et al. 2021; Michel et al. 2011), gender differences in the psychosocial work environment would most likely mean gender differences also in the possibilities to balance work and private life as well as in health-related factors (e.g., Nyberg et al. 2021).

The overall aim of this study was to increase knowledge about what characterizes part-time compared to full-time work for women and men in trade in Sweden. More specifically, in a first step, employment contract type (part-time and full-time contract) and gender (women and men) were described and compared with respect to psychosocial work environment factors of job demands (job insecurity, workload, emotional demands) and job resources (job control, skill discretion, social support, supportive leadership), work–non-work interference (work–life interference, life–work interference), and health-related factors (self-rated health, symptoms of depression). Second, sociodemographic factors (age, organizational tenure, having a partner, children at home, education, being blue-collar or white-collar, individual and household income, and subjective social status) characterizing part-time and full-time employed women and men in trade were described.

Part-time and full-time work

Full-time permanent contracts have been described as the standard, the norm, and the core of employment contracts (Atkinson 1984; Gunderson 2020); employees who hold them are often valued by the organization on the basis of functional flexibility (the ability to do many different tasks) (Atkinson 1984). Part-time employment contracts, as well as different types of temporary contracts and self-employment, have been described as non-standard, alternative, and in the periphery (Berglund et al. 2021; Gunderson 2020). Employees with these kinds of contracts provide organizations with numerical and temporal flexibility by meeting the shifting needs of staffing, for example, during peak hours, outside typical business hours, or during different seasons (Atkinson 1984; Tanimoto et al. 2021). Definitions of part-time work vary, but it is usually defined in relation to full-time work by specifying a certain amount of work hours that is lower than for full-time work (OECD 1997).

Psychosocial work environment among part- and full-time employees

There are several job demands that might differ between part-time and full-time employees. For instance, higher levels of job insecurity ('a perceived threat of job loss and the worries related to that threat'; De Witte 2005, p. 1) have been found among part-time employees, especially when part-time employees work part time because their employer does not offer full-time work (involuntary part time; Kauhanen & Nätti 2015). Moreover, it is common that part-time employees work during the more stressful hours, when workload and emotional demands are high (cf. Framke et al. 2021). On the other hand, part-time employees work fewer hours than full-time employees and thus have a shorter exposure to job demands (Thorsteinson 2003). Also, compared to full-time employees, part-time employees might not be as affected by organizational problems and politics (Thorsteinson 2003), and may also have lower responsibilities at work.

Another key aspect of the psychosocial work environment is job resources (Demerouti et al. 2001). Part-time employees have been found to have fewer job resources, such as the possibility of exercising job control (i.e., being able to influence how, when, and with whom the job is done; Sverke et al. 2017) as compared to full-time employees (Kauhanen

& Nätti 2015). In addition, research shows that full-time employees are more likely to receive training, learning, and development than part-time employees (Gallagher 2004; Gunderson 2020). When it comes to social support, it has been suggested that colleagues and managers may have different attitudes toward part- and full-time employees (Zeytinoglu *et al.* 2004). Part-time employees could also perceive less social support as they have shorter time to interact with colleagues and managers. However, there are also studies showing that part-time employees are more positive about their social support at work than full-time employees (Gallagher 2004). Finally, some studies have not found any differences in social support between those working part time and full time (Bartoll *et al.* 2014). One important function of job resources is that they have been shown to be associated with lower levels of interference between work and family life (Michel *et al.* 2011) as well as better health (Gonzalez-Mulé *et al.* 2021).

Work–non-work interference and health-related factors among part-time and full-time employees

As concern the relation between work and non-work (here called ‘work–non-work interference’), it has been shown that this relation is bidirectional, such that aspects of work could interfere with life outside work in a negative way (‘work–life interference’) but also that private life outside work, such as family, could interfere with work in a negative way (‘life–work interference’) (e.g., Demerouti *et al.* 2012). It has been suggested that part-time employees are more involved in the non-work life domain and that part-time work facilitates balancing work with private life (Thorsteinson 2003). Indeed, studies have shown that part-time employees report less work–life interference, compared to full-time employees (ILO 2016; Nylén *et al.* 2007), while no such differences have been found for life–work interference (Nylén *et al.* 2007). More interference, in either direction, has generally been found to be associated with poor health (Amstad *et al.* 2011). Concerning health, taking on part-time work can be a result of limitations due to health problems, making full-time work unfeasible. In the Nordic countries, poorer health has been found among part-time employees compared to full-time employees (Bartoll *et al.* 2014).

Gender

The term gender usually refers to how women and men are understood in a cultural context, while the term sex often is used to distinguish biological sex (Alvesson & Billing 2009). Gender is used in the present study to denote women and men to acknowledge the difficulties to separate biological sex from its cultural and social context.

Psychosocial work environment among women and men

Studies investigating gender differences in regard to job demands in the general working population in Nordic countries and Sweden specifically have produced varying results, seemingly depending on the kind of job demand examined (Bartoll *et al.* 2014; Theorell

et al. 2014). When the level of job insecurity is examined, the results are usually rather similar between the genders (Sverke et al. 2017), or sometimes somewhat higher among men (Kinsten et al. 2007). Psychosocially demanding work has been shown to be more common among women compared to men in a random sample of the Swedish working population (Kjellsson 2021). Women in Sweden typically report more emotional demands compared to men (Sverke et al. 2017), which most likely reflects the fact that women are overrepresented in human service occupations (Härenstam & Nyberg 2021), which entail greater interpersonal contact as part of the work.

As concerns job resources, some studies have found rather similar levels of job control among women and men in the general working population in Sweden (Sverke et al. 2017), whereas other studies, including employees working in the Nordic countries, have found that women report lower job control than men (Bartoll et al. 2014). Slightly less social support has been reported by women compared to men in the working population in Sweden (Sverke et al. 2017). Women in the general working population have also reported lower levels than men in regard to their opportunities for both learning new knowledge and skills and for developing their professional role (skill discretion; Sverke et al. 2017; Theorell et al. 2014). In a study of employees in the Nordic countries, more women than men had a negative view of their job's prospects for career advancement (Bartoll et al. 2014). A job resource that has been shown to be important in trade is supportive leadership, both when it comes to its presence (Kazemi et al. 2024; Tuckey et al. 2017) and the lack thereof (Wall et al. 2021). Lack of supportive leadership has been shown to be more detrimental for women's self-rated health than for men's, in an industrial sample from Finland (Schmidt et al. 2014). Gender differences have not been investigated with respect to perceptions of supportive leadership in trade, as far as we know.

Work–non-work interference and health-related factors among women and men

Gender has been a major focus in research on handling work and private life (Shockley et al. 2017) and meta-analyses have shown small or no gender differences in regard to experiencing work–family or family–work interference (Byron 2005; Shockley et al. 2017). Compared to other sectors, however, trade appears to be a sector where employees report a high degree of work–family interference (Elahi et al. 2022). In a study of employees in trade in the United States, Puerto Rico, and Romania, it was found that work–family interference was associated with higher job stress (Netemeyer et al. 2004); this study also found that family–work interference was related to lower job performance, but the role of gender was not investigated. As concerns gender differences in health-related factors, large studies have found that women report poorer self-rated health and higher levels of depression worldwide (Boerma et al. 2016; Salk et al. 2017), including in Sweden (Kjellsson 2021). However, a significantly higher odds of suboptimal self-rated health among men compared to women was found in a sample of the working population of Sweden (Taloyan et al. 2015). When it comes to the trade sector in Sweden, the number of long-term sick-leave cases (longer than 3 months) has been found to be almost three times as many for women as compared to men (AFA 2017b), and it is not well understood why (AFA 2017a).

Part-time and full-time work and gender

Women work part time to a greater extent than men (Eurostat 2021). In general, about 30% of women and around 10% of men work part time in the Nordic countries (except Finland where fewer women work part time) (Eurostat 2021). Trade stands out, with about 46% of women and about 18% of men working part time in Sweden (Statistics Sweden 2023). If part-time work differs from full-time work with respect to job demands and job resources, such difference would more likely affect women than men at a group level (Härenstam & Nyberg 2021). Previous research has typically focused on women's part-time work and the disadvantages of working part time when it comes to income and income-related benefits, such as sick leave benefits and pension (e.g., Berglund *et al.* 2021; Salladarré & Hlaimi 2014). Initiatives to reduce part-time work have been adopted in Sweden, especially in women-dominated sectors (Berglund *et al.* 2021; Björk *et al.* 2020). Less attention has been on men working part time. However, there are indications that men could be more negatively affected by part-time work than women (Bartoll *et al.* 2014). Men have to work short part time (5–19 hours/week) in order to report lower job demands than full-time working men. Also, low control and poor opportunities for promotion were more pronounced for part-time working men compared with full-time working men, while the differences were smaller between part- and full-time working women (Kauhanen & Nätti 2015). One reason could be that the full-time norm is especially strong for men due to expectations around men as breadwinners (Larsson & Björk 2017). For men, working part time could thus be a gender incongruent behavior (van Osch & Schavelin 2020) that does not fit the social role of their gender and is related to lower subjective social status (Eagly & Karau 2002).

Sociodemographic characteristics of part-time and full-time working women and men

As there might be systematic sociodemographic differences between those working part time and full time as well as between women and men, the second aim of this study was to describe and compare employment contract type and gender based on sociodemographic factors including age, organizational tenure, having a partner, children at home, education, being blue- or white-collar, income and subjective social status. Some of those differences have been mentioned above, such as part-time work being considerably more common among women and among blue-collar workers. About 50% of all blue-collar workers in trade in Sweden work part time (76% women and 31% men; Statistics Sweden 2023). In general, part-time work in Sweden is more common among those over the age of 65 (Berglund *et al.* 2021) and those who have young children living at home, especially among women (Statistics Sweden 2022). Other characteristics are that part-time employees usually have a lower individual income than full-time employees, as they work fewer hours (Bartoll *et al.* 2014). It has been suggested that part-time employees could be marginalized (Gallagher 2004; Zeytinoglu *et al.* 2004), as they are not in the inner ‘core’ of the organization and such marginalization could affect the perception of their own social status, but as far as we know, this has not been studied.

Method

Sample and procedure

Data was derived from the Swedish Longitudinal Occupational Survey of Health (SLOSH) study. The SLOSH sample consists of all respondents to the Swedish Work Environment Surveys (2003–2019) and is an approximately representative sample of the Swedish working population. The questionnaire focuses on work life participation, work organization, work environment, social situation, health, and well-being (more details in Magnusson Hanson et al. 2018). The current study is based on SLOSH 2022 respondents ($n = 21,867$) who were working at least 30% and who had an occupation in wholesale or retail trade (based on the Swedish Standard Classification of Occupations 2012 [SSYK], which is based on the International Standard Classification of Occupations [ISCO-08]; Statistics Sweden 2012). All participants were provided with a log-in code for a digital questionnaire, but paper questionnaires were included in reminders. Information, participation invitations, and reminders were sent by traditional mail. In total, 919 respondents were identified as working in an occupation in wholesale or retail trade, and 751 of these provided information regarding part-time/full-time employment.

Internal attrition in the sample of 751 respondents varied between 0% and 9.7%, but was typically below 2%. As we deemed the attrition to be completely at random (Little 1988), imputation was performed with expectation maximization (EM) across all outcome variables simultaneously. After excluding multivariate outliers, the effective sample consisted of 730 employees (49% women), with 145 (20%) employees working part time (105 women, 40 men). The mean age was 54 years (SD: 9; range 25–79), the average organizational tenure was 14 years (SD: 12; range 0–49), and almost all (92%) had a permanent position. Most (78%) were married or cohabiting; 42% had children living at home; 61% had primary or secondary school as their highest level of education; and 28% were blue-collar employees. The most common occupations were business-to-business salespersons and purchasing agents (44%), followed by store personnel (24%). The most common occupation among part-time employees, for both women and men, was store personnel. Among full-time employees the most common occupations, for both women and men, were business-to-business salespersons and purchasing agents.

The SLOSH study was approved by the Regional Ethics Committee in Stockholm or the Swedish Ethical Review Authority as applicable (last approval ref.no. 2022-00156-02). The present study is part of a project with approval from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (ref.no. 2022-02880-01; 2022-03845-02, and 2023-04784-02).

Measures

Table 1 presents information regarding the measurement of the included job demands, job resources, work–non-work interference variables, health-related factors, and sociodemographic characteristics. All measures are based on previously published and validated scales. The table includes the number of items, reliability estimates (Cronbach's alpha), scale ranges, example items, and source for each variable. Reliability was good for all scales ($\alpha > .70$; Cronbach 1951; Nunnally & Bernstein 1994) except for skill discretion ($\alpha = .55$).



Table 1 Description of measures

Variable	No. of items	Alpha	Scale range	Example item	Source
<i>Job demands</i>					
Job insecurity	1	–	1–5 ^a	I’m worried about being laid off.	Hellgren et al. (1999)
Workload	5	.77	1–4 ^b	Do you have to work very fast?	Karasek et al. (1998)
Emotional demands	2	.81	1–5 ^c	Does your work put you in emotionally disturbing situations?	Pejtersen et al. (2010)
<i>Job resources</i>					
Job control	2	.82	1–4 ^b	Do you have a choice in deciding how you do your work?	Karasek et al. (1998)
Skill discretion	4	.55	1–4 ^b	Do you have the possibility of learning new things through your work?	Karasek et al. (1998)
Social support	6	.84	1–4 ^b	My colleagues are there for me.	Karasek et al. (1998)
Supportive leadership	4	.84	1–4 ^b	Does your manager show that he/she cares about you?	Setterlind & Larsson (1995)
<i>Work–non-work interference</i>					
Work–life interference	4	.92	1–5 ^d	My personal life suffers because of my work.	Fisher et al. (2009)
Life–work interference	3	.70	1–5 ^d	My work suffers because of everything going on in my personal life	Fisher et al. (2009)
<i>Health-related factors</i>					
Self-rated health	1	–	1–5 ^e	How would you rate your general state of health?	Idler & Benyamini (1997)
Symptoms of depression	6	.92	1–5 ^f	How much during the last week have you been troubled by feeling no interests in things?	Magnusson Hanson et al. (2014)
<i>Sociodemographic factors</i>					
Part time	1	–	0 = full time 1 = part time	Which of the following options corresponds to your current situation?	SLOSH
Gender	1	–	0 = man 1 = woman	–	Register
Age	1	–	25–79 years	–	Register
Organizational tenure	1	–	0–49 years	For how long have you been working for your current employer/company?	SLOSH

Variable	No. of items	Alpha	Scale range	Example item	Source
Having a partner	1	–	0 = single 1 = married/ cohabiting	Are you single or married/ cohabiting?	SLOSH
Children at home	1	–	0 = no 1 = yes	Do you have any children living at home? Include children living with you at least half of the time.	SLOSH
Higher education	1	–	0 = primary or secondary school 1 = university or college	–	Register
Blue-collar	1	–	0 = white- collar 1 = blue-collar	–	Register
Individual income	1	–	0 = lower income, 1 = higher income	The individual's income from work before taxes (gross) in SEK (from 2020)	Register
Household income	1	–	0 = lower income, 1 = higher income	Total income from work for the household before taxes (gross) in SEK (from 2020)	Register
Subjective social status	1	–	1-10	A common perception is that some people are at the top of our society while others are at the bottom. On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is the bottom and 10 is the top, where would you place yourself these days?	Singh-Manoux et al. (2003)

– Not applicable. ^aFrom 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree. ^b1 = No, never; 2 = No, seldom; 3 = Yes, sometimes; 4 = Yes, often. ^c1 = Never/Almost never; 2 = Seldom; 3 = Sometimes; 4 = Often; 5 = Always. ^d1 = Very rarely; 2 = Not very often; 3 = Sometimes; 4 = Very often; 5 = The whole time. ^e1 = Very poor; 2 = Poor; 3 = Neither good nor poor; 4 = Good; 5 = Very good. ^f1 = Not at all; 2 = A little; 3 = Moderately; 4 = Quite a lot; 5 = A great deal.

Statistical analyses

To fulfill the first aim, main and interaction effects of employment contract and gender on (1) job demands, (2) job resources, (3) work–non-work interference, and (4) health-related factors were analyzed, using four multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs). A significant main effect of contract would indicate an overall difference between part-time and full-time employees, while a significant effect of gender would indicate an overall difference between women and men. A significant interaction effect would indicate that the difference between part-time and full-time work varied between women and men. The multivariate *F*-tests were supplemented with follow-up univariate *F*-tests for the specific variables.

To fulfill the second aim, to describe what characterizes part-time and full-time working women and men in trade in regard to sociodemographic factors, chi-square tests were used to compare the groups on categorical variables, while univariate analysis of variance was used for continuous variables.

Results

The results of the analyses for the first aim are shown in Table 2 (psychosocial work environment factors in terms of job demands and job resources) and Table 3 (work–non-work interference and health-related factors). The tables include mean values for part-time and full-time working women and men, along with *F*-tests. Table 4 presents the results of the sociodemographic comparisons between part-time and full-time working women and men (second aim).

Psychosocial work environment

The results of the MANOVAs (Table 2) show that part-time and full-time employees mainly differed in regard to job resources. More specifically, part-time employees reported less job control and less opportunities to use their skills and to develop (lower skill discretion) than full-time employees, while there were no differences in social support from colleagues or supervisors. Part-time and full-time employees did not differ in regard to job demands, that is, there were no differences in job insecurity, workload, or emotional demands between part-time and full-time-employees.

As is also evident from Table 2, gender differences were found regarding job demands and job resources. Compared to men, women reported higher emotional demands, and also lower levels of job control, skill discretion, and social support from colleagues. The genders did not differ in regard to the job demands of job insecurity and workload, or in their perceptions of the job resource of supportive leadership.

The multivariate interactions between contract and gender were neither significant for job demands nor for job resources. However, there was a significant univariate interaction between contract and gender in regard to emotional demands. Part-time working women reported higher emotional demands than full-time working women, but part-time working men reported lower emotional demands than full-time working men.

Work–non-work interference and health-related factors

As concerns work–non-work interference (Table 3), there was no overall difference between part-time and full-time employees. However, there was an overall gender difference, where women reported more work–life interference, while the genders did not differ when it came to life–work interference. The multivariate interaction between contract and gender for work–non-work interference was not significant. In terms of health-related factors, there were no significant multivariate effects of contract, gender, or multivariate interaction, but there was a univariate difference between women and men for symptoms of depression, where women reported higher levels than men.

Table 2 Means and comparisons between employment contract, gender, and their interaction, for job demands and job resources

Variable	Scale range	Part time: Mean values			Full time: Mean values			Gender: Mean values			F	F	F
		Women (N = 105)	Men (N = 40)	All (N = 145)	Women (N = 250)	Men (N = 335)	All (N = 585)	Women (N = 355)	Men (N = 375)	All (N = 730)			
Job demands													
Job insecurity	1–5	1.32	1.13	1.27	1.38	1.32	1.35	1.36	1.30	1.33	1.48	4.61**	2.03
Workload	1–4	2.57	2.43	2.53	2.59	2.55	2.57	2.58	2.54	2.56	1.48	2.56	.83
Emotional demands	1–5	2.60	2.08	2.46	2.42	2.33	2.37	2.47	2.30	2.38	.14	11.68***	5.49*
Job resources													
Job control	1–4	2.68	2.95	2.75	2.95	3.35	3.18	2.87	3.31	3.10	7.42***	5.48***	.78
Skill discretion	1–4	2.83	2.88	2.84	2.97	3.09	3.04	2.93	3.07	3.00	16.28***	4.01*	.51
Social support	1–4	3.30	3.45	3.34	3.30	3.38	3.34	3.30	3.39	3.34	.46	5.28*	.47
Supportive leadership	1–4	3.27	3.35	3.29	3.34	3.27	3.30	3.32	3.28	3.30	.01	.02	1.42

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. $N = 730$.



Table 3 Means and comparisons between employment contract, gender, and their interaction, for work and non-work interference and health-related factors

Variables	Scale range	Part time: Mean values			Full time: Mean values			Gender: Mean values			F	Contract	Gender	Contract* Gender	F
		Women (N = 105)	Men (N = 40)	All (N = 145)	Women (N = 250)	Men (N = 335)	All (N = 585)	Women (N = 355)	Men (N = 375)	All (N = 730)					
Work–non-work interference															
Work–life interference	1–5	2.76	2.34	2.64	2.64	2.37	2.49	2.68	2.37	2.52	.15	.15	11.55***		.52
Life–work interference	1–5	1.33	1.36	1.34	1.37	1.39	1.39	1.36	1.39	1.38	.71	.71	.24		.01
Health-related factors															
Self-rated health	1–5	3.87	4.05	3.92	3.95	3.97	3.96	3.93	3.98	3.95	.00	.00	1.35		.97
Symptoms of depression	1–5	2.02	1.82	1.96	2.05	1.82	1.92	2.04	1.82	1.93	.05	.05	5.73*		.02

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$, $N = 730$.

Sociodemographic characteristics

In relation to the second aim, frequencies and means of sociodemographic characteristics for part- and full-time working women and men are shown in Table 4. Part-time employees were older, had longer organizational tenure, fewer had children living at home, and they were more often blue-collar workers, with lower income (both individually and in the household) as compared to full-time employees. There was no difference between part-time and full-time employees in terms of having a partner, higher education, or subjective social status. Concerning gender, compared to men, women were younger, more often blue-collar workers, with lower individual and household incomes, but with higher subjective social status. There were no gender differences in regard to organizational tenure, having a partner, having children living at home or higher education. For women, contract type did not appear to be associated with having a partner or not, but fewer men with part-time work had a partner compared to men with full-time work. For both women and men, employment contract (part time vs. full time) was associated with having children at home, with stronger effects observed among men (very few men working part time had children living at home). Level of education did not differ between women and men working part or full time. For both women and men, employment contract (part time vs. full time) associated with their individual and household income, such that lower income was more common among part-time working women and men compared with those working full time. However, while the percentage of part-time working men having lower income was about the same for individual and household income (65.0% vs. 67.5%, respectively), it appeared that fewer part-time working women had a lower household income (61.0%) than individual income (88.6%). The interaction effect between contract and gender on subjective social status indicated a tendency ($p = 0.128$) for part-time work to be associated with lower subjective social status for men, but not for women.

Discussion

This study aimed at increasing the knowledge about what characterizes part-time compared to full-time work for women and men in trade in Sweden by describing and comparing type of employment contract (part-time and full-time contract) and gender (women and men) on psychosocial work environment factors (job demands and job resources), work–non-work interference, and health-related factors while also identifying the sociodemographic characteristics of women and men working part time and full time. The results indicate that the main difference between part-time and full-time employees was that part-time employees reported having lower job resources (lower job control and skill discretion). Regarding gender, women reported having lower job resources (lower job control, skill discretion, and social support) compared to men but also higher emotional demands, higher work–life interference, and more symptoms of depression. Concerning sociodemographic factors, part-time employees and women were more often blue-collar workers and had lower income. However, women reported higher subjective social status than men. Part-time-working men seemed to differ more from men working full time (for instance in terms of having a partner, having children living at home and household income) than part-time working women differed from full-time working women.



Table 4 Means and proportions of sociodemographic factors and tests of differences between employment contract and gender

Variables	Scale range	Part time			Full time			Gender		F ^a /χ ^{2b}	Contract	Gender	Contract	Gender & Gender
		Women (N = 105)	Men (N = 40)	All (N = 145)	Women (N = 250)	Men (N = 335)	All (N = 585)	Women (N = 355)	Men (N = 375)					
Sociodemographic factors														
Age ^a (mean)	25–79	54.90	60.15	56.35	51.72	54.18	53.13	52.66	54.81	53.77	24.93***	17.63***	2.31	
Org. tenure ^a (mean)	0–49	16.74	17.97	17.06	12.15	14.12	13.29	13.53	14.50	14.03	11.07***	1.60	.09	
Having a partner ^b (%)	1/0	81.0	50.0	72.4	78.4	80.9	79.8	79.2	77.6	78.4	3.77	.26	♀: .29 ♂: 19.62***	
Children at home ^b (%)	1/0	30.5	5.0	23.4	43.6	48.1	46.2	39.7	43.5	41.6	24.65***	1.05	♀: 5.32* ♂: 26.96***	
Higher education ^b (%)	1/0	34.3	32.5	33.8	41.2	38.5	39.7	39.2	37.9	38.5	1.69	.13	♀: 1.48 ♂: .55	
Blue-collar ^b (%)	1/0	64.8	45.0	59.3	21.6	18.5	19.8	34.4	21.3	27.7	90.50***	15.48***	♀: 61.07*** ♂: 14.94***	
Lower individual income ^b (%)	1/0	88.6	65.0	82.1	53.6	29.9	40.0	63.9	33.6	48.4	82.35***	67.24***	♀: 39.22*** ♂: 19.79***	
Lower household income ^b (%)	1/0	61.0	67.5	62.8	49.6	40.3	44.3	53.0	43.2	47.9	15.91***	6.96**	♀: 3.83 ♂: 10.78***	
Subjective social status ^a (mean)	1–10	4.39	3.85	4.24	4.02	3.90	3.96	4.13	3.90	4.01	1.26	5.71*	2.32	

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001. N = 730. ^aUnivariate F-tests. ^b χ^2 -tests. Q: women; O: men.

Psychosocial work environment

Part-time and full-time employees did not differ in regard to any of the job demands (job insecurity, workload, or emotional demands). The finding that part-time employees did not report higher job insecurity than full-time employees was somewhat unexpected, as part-time employment in previous research has been described as non-standard, alternative, or in the periphery (Atkinson 1984; Gunderson 2020), thus suggesting that part-time employees deviate from the core of an organization, where full-time permanent employees are typically positioned (Atkinson 1984) and expected to have the most secure employment. Thus, part-time employees could be expected to report more job insecurity than full-time employees. However, in terms of organizational structure, it has been suggested that part-time work is a kind of non-standard work that is close to the core (Atkinson 1984), especially when concerning permanent contracts, which was the case for almost all employees in the current study. A related reason might be that the part-time employees in the present sample seemed to be well-established in the labor market, as most were permanently employed, their mean age was high, and their organizational tenure long.

That the part-time employees in the current study seemed to be well-established in the labor market might also have implications for other results in this study, particularly regarding the finding that the job demands of workload and emotional demands did not differ between part-time and full-time employees. The part-time employees in the current study might have had the leeway to adjust their work situation such that they could better handle the workload and emotional demands. It could also be the case that part-time workers did not perceive the job demands as higher than full-time employees because they manage the job demands by working shorter hours and recovering during non-working (and not paid) time. However, given that part-time employees reported lower job resources, they might have a higher risk for developing work–life interference and ill-health (cf. Demerouti et al. 2012; Gonzalez-Mulé et al. 2021; Michel et al. 2011).

Women reported experiencing emotional demands to a higher degree than men, and lower levels of the job resources (job control, skill discretion, and social support). The higher level of emotional demands among women is in line with previous research (Kinsten et al. 2007; Sverke et al. 2017). Our findings may help shed light on previous findings showing that long-term sickness absenteeism is three times more common among women than men in the trade sector in Sweden (AFA 2017b). Specifically, the combination of higher emotional demands and lower levels of job resources among women compared to men may offer a partial explanation (cf. Framke et al. 2021). The higher levels of emotional demands we found among women compared to men could be related to the highly gender segregated labor market; women work to a higher extent in retail and men more often in wholesale and motor trade (Statistics Sweden 2023). However, in the current study, women and men had similar occupations. Another possible explanation is that women and men work in different departments and/or have different work tasks, even when they are working in the same workplace (cf. Olofsdotter et al. 2023).

It might also be that customers' service expectations differ depending on the employee's gender. If the expectation of service is higher for women than for men, this could contribute to higher emotional demands among women compared to men. It is also possible that men are less sensitive to emotional demands and thus report them to a lower degree.



The present study could not rule out any of these explanations, but just concludes that women reported higher emotional demands and that previous research suggests that the gender segregation of work and job tasks are present at many levels of the labor market (Härenstam & Nyberg 2021; Olofsdotter et al. 2023). In the same vein, we could not rule out that women *perceive* that they have lower levels of job resources than men. However, it is likely that women, in fact, have lower job control, lower skill discretion, and less social support, due to the same reasons as outlined above – namely gender segregation and gendered expectations contributing to a disadvantageous psychosocial work environment for women. There were, however, no differences between women and men in how they perceived the support from their manager. There was one significant univariate interaction effect between contract and gender, indicating that men working part time had the lowest emotional demands, while women working part time had the highest emotional demands. This was the case even if the most common occupation (i.e., store personnel) was the same for part-time working women and men. However, as this was the only univariate interaction effect that was significant – and the multivariate interaction effect for job demands was non-significant – this result should be interpreted with caution.

Work–non-work interference

When it comes to handling work and non-work, the results of this study show that there was no difference between part-time and full-time employees, which was somewhat unexpected as part-time work has previously been found to be associated with less work–life interference, compared to full-time employment (ILO 2016; Nylén et al. 2007). Working part time is sometimes used as a type of strategy for managing both work and family life, especially among women and particularly when children are young (Statistics Sweden 2022), but in the present study, *fewer* part-time employees had children living at home than did full-time employees – and this was the case for both women and men. A reason behind this might be that the mean age in the sample was high and that some part-time employees may already be in a pre-retirement phase. However, a clear gender difference did emerge in regard to work–life interference, where women reported that work interfered with life to a higher extent than was the case for men. This result is not in line with meta-analysis findings that women and men report rather similar levels of work–family interference (Byron 2005; Shockley et al. 2017). Common antecedents of work–family interference include high job demands and/or low job resources (Demerouti et al. 2012; Michel et al. 2011). The gender differences in respect to women reporting higher emotional demands and lower job resources may thus explain their higher work–life interference in the current study. It could also be that women work in specific parts of trade or have positions that are more difficult to combine with private life. As working conditions, such as working hours, differ between different parts of trade – and between different positions – this might also affect the possibility to combine work and private life. Trade has in previous studies been found to be a part of the labor market where it is difficult to combine work and family (Elahi et al. 2022). However, there was no gender difference in regard to the perception of life–work interference. Having a high degree of private life obligations interfering with work is sometimes mentioned as an explanation for poor health among women, but this could not be supported by the results of the present study.

Health-related factors

Health-related factors did not differ in respect to employment contract, which was somewhat unexpected, as poorer health has been found among part-time workers in most previous studies (Bartoll et al. 2014; Kauhanen & Närtti 2015). While it has been suggested that poor health is a consequence of part-time work, this type of contract could also be a consequence of poor health. Part-time work is also often associated with low income, and low income has been shown to relate to poorer health (Marmot et al. 1991). The finding that women and men did not differ in their general self-rated health is in line with some studies (Taloyan et al. 2015), but not with the bulk of research (Boerma et al. 2016; Kjellsson 2021; Salk et al. 2017). In contrast, the finding that women reported more symptoms of depression is in line with previous research (Salk et al. 2017). The more disadvantageous situation that women seem to face in terms of higher emotional demands, less job resources, and greater work–life interference could be what leads women to report more symptoms of depression than men. However, as the multivariate effect of gender on health was non-significant, this result should be interpreted with caution.

Sociodemographic characteristics

When comparing part-time and full-time employees in sociodemographic factors, both similarities and differences were found. Part-time employees were older, had longer organizational tenure, less often had children living at home, were more frequently holding blue-collar occupations, and had a lower income (both individual and household) compared to full-time employees. No differences between the contract forms in regard to having a partner, education, or in subjective social status were found. In terms of gender, there were no gender differences regarding organizational tenure, having a partner, having children living at home, or education. Women were, however, compared to men, younger, more often blue-collar workers and had a lower individual and household income, but reported higher subjective social status.

One observation is that part-time working men differed more from full-time working men than part-time working women differed from full-time working women. For example, household income differed marginally between part-time and full-time working women, while part-time working men had significantly lower household (and individual) income than full-time working men. A possible explanation could be that part-time working women have a partner who compensates for their lower individual income on a household level, while this was not the case for part-time working men. Few part-time working men had a partner or children living at home, compared with full-time working men. The gendered nature of part-time work is also hinted at in the finding that women working part time reported the highest levels of subjective social status, while part-time working men reported the lowest. Although this interaction effect only approached significance, it might suggest that part-time working men sense that part-time work is gender incongruent and therefore report lower subjective social status. Other studies have found that men working part time have to deal with deviating from the traditional masculine breadwinner role (Larsson & Björk 2017). In a heterogenous couple, this might impact which gender works part

time if the family situation requires one of them to work less than full time. However, in the current study, the number of men working part time was low and they had a high mean age, which makes it risky to generalize about part-time working men in trade in general.

Methodological considerations

It is worth considering how representative this sample is of employees in trade in Sweden. The gender distribution seems to be more equal in the current sample (49% women) than in trade in general (43% women) (Statistics Sweden 2023). A smaller proportion in this sample worked part time (20%) and were blue-collar workers (about 30%) compared to the proportion found in trade generally (30% and 50%, respectively) (Statistics Sweden 2023). A greater proportion had a higher education (39%) compared with trade in general in Sweden (26%; Eurostat 2022). In trade in Sweden, about 18% are 16–24 years old (Eurostat 2022), an age group that is not represented in the current study. In the current sample, all participants were 25 years old or older. The mean age in the present study was rather high (54 years) and almost all participants (92%) had a permanent employment contract. The characteristics of the participants give the impression that those who are included in this study are well-established in the labor market, and are perhaps representative of employees with more favorable psychosocial work environments than of employees in trade in general. This could also apply to those working part time, as they had a high mean age and long organizational tenure. Any interpretation of the results of this study should bear in mind that young employees are not represented in the current study and almost no temporary employees. Additionally, information about the workplaces and about the job tasks that the employees performed would have nuanced the understanding of the results further, but such information was not available.

In the heterogeneous flora of part-time contracts, the current study did not distinguish between part-time employment being *involuntary* (those working part time because they cannot find a full-time job, sometimes called underemployment; Allan *et al.* 2020) or *voluntary* (working part time by volition; Thorsteinson 2003). Even if this might be a disadvantage, a difficulty with studying involuntary and voluntary part-time work is that what is called ‘voluntary part-time work’ might be based on different constraining circumstances. Examples of such constraining circumstances include working part time because poor health precludes working full time, the job demands of full-time work being too high, and full-time work being incompatible with demands outside work (Ingstad & Hedlund 2017; Statistics Sweden 2022). Working part time for any of these reasons may not be voluntary, even if the part-time work might be self-selected (Björk *et al.* 2020). Still, it would have been an advantage to be able to distinguish between part-time work being initiated by the individual or by the organization.

Although this study used established scales, the reliability of the skill discretion variable was somewhat low. This study used cross-sectional data, as the aim was not to draw any causal conclusions or to investigate long-term consequences related to job contract type and gender, although such long-term consequences could be interesting to investigate in future studies.

Conclusion

The current study increases our knowledge of how it is to work part time and full time in trade, among women and men that appear to be well-established in the labor market. It seems as especially those not working ‘nine-to-five’ (i.e., part-time employees) would benefit from higher levels of job resources such as more job control and more skill discretion. Strengthening such job resources would help to create more egalitarian and equal work situations between part-time and full-time employees, and between women and men, in trade. Maybe one possible way forward is to identify and assess the possibilities available for part-time employees to develop the skills needed to perform more varied job tasks. Such action could possibly increase the job control and skill discretion among part-time employees – and simultaneously increase organizations’ functional flexibility. Aiming to reduce emotional demands would also be beneficial, since such demands are related to increased sickness absenteeism, especially when combined with having little opportunity for development (Framke et al. 2021). Reducing emotional demands and improving job resources would most likely also facilitate work–life balance. It is worth considering why part-time work is so much more common among women than among men in trade, especially as part-time work is related to lower income. One possible explanation is gender norms. Hopefully, the results of this study could be a basis for discussions about equal opportunities for women and men working part and full time in trade.

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