

Race/ethnicity, Gender, and Work:
Black, Hispanic and White Women's Reasons for Employment in
Nonstandard Jobs

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Abstract

Women may choose nonstandard jobs (work that is part-time, temporary or has varied hours) as they balance work and family or they may accept nonstandard jobs if they are the only employment available. Using the 2005 Current Population Survey Contingent Work Supplement, we examine women's preferences and reasons for working nonstandard jobs and consider differences across race and ethnic groups. Through race specific logistic regression models we predict the odds of women working nonstandard jobs from family structure, sociodemographic factors, and job characteristics focusing on the variation in relevant predictors across race and ethnic groups. We hypothesize that white women enter nonstandard jobs by choice to balance work and family and that black and Hispanic women enter nonstandard jobs out of economic necessity and prefer standard employment. Differences in reasons for entering nonstandard work across white, black and Hispanic women likely reflect minority women's disadvantage in the labor market.

Introduction

Nonstandard jobs have become an increasing share of US employment; a trend that has certainly impacted families (Presser 2003; Winson and Leach 2002). There are many factors that relate to these trends, such as globalization (Carre et al. 2000), the increasing service sector (Herzenberg, Alic, and Wial. 2000), changing relationships between employers and employees (Kalleberg 2001), and workers needing alternatives to standard full-time jobs so that they can meet family obligations (Marler and Moen 2005). It is important to understand how various causes of working nonstandard jobs may have different impacts on workers and families differently.

It is clear that some of these causes of nonstandard work imply a negative outcome for workers (i.e. an employer moves to a contingent workforce and employees either become contingent or lose their jobs) whereas others imply a positive outcome (i.e. a voluntary part-time job allows workers to earn income and care for family). Workers can be pushed or pulled into nonstandard jobs by choice or necessity. In this paper we consider how women's reasons and preferences for working nonstandard jobs differ according to race and ethnicity. We also examine how family characteristics may relate differently to women's employment in nonstandard jobs across race and ethnic groups.

Race/Ethnicity, Gender and Nonstandard Work

Black and Hispanic single mothers are now less likely to be employed than white single mothers (Browne 2000; Cohen 2002; England, Garcia-Beaulieu, and Ross 2004). Differences in human capital may explain in part minority women's employment disadvantage but racial differences in the likelihood of employment remain when education is controlled (Browne 2000; England et al. 2004). Immigration status is an important factor that disadvantages Hispanic women in finding jobs (England et al. 2004). Beyond individual characteristics, industrial restructuring and the movement of jobs from central cities to suburban areas are important factors in black women's lower employment rates (Browne 2000). Changes that are related to minority women's lower employment rates such as industrial restructuring are also related to the rise in nonstandard work.

Just as minority women are disadvantaged in terms of overall employment rates, they are likely to also be disadvantaged in the ability to choose a type of work that will fit their individual and family needs. For black women in central cities, in particular, nonstandard jobs may be the only employment available. When women enter nonstandard jobs as a last resort, rather than by choice, they are likely to be unsatisfied with their work. White women are likely to possess traits, especially nativity and education, which provides them with greater choice in the job market. Perhaps more importantly, white women are likely to reside in areas where there are more job opportunities overall (Browne 2000).

Research has shown that black women are disadvantaged in the labor market relative to white women in that they are more likely to leave full-time jobs due to lay off or temporary jobs that end (Reid 2002). Occupation explains part of the black/white difference in likelihood of being laid off. Black women are employed in occupations more susceptible to lay-offs and to temporary or seasonal work. This indicates that there is a difference in job quality between black and white women's jobs and that black women may be facing discrimination in the labor market. As a result of this inequality in full-time job exits, black women are more likely to enter nonstandard jobs for economic reasons such as when an employer moves from a full-time to a contingent or part-time workforce. Furthermore, even when both white and black women are in nonstandard employment, the jobs black women fill may have fewer benefits, less stability, and overall poorer working conditions. Therefore, employment in nonstandard jobs may reflect minority women's greater vulnerability to being laid off and general disadvantaged position in employment.

Research Questions

We ask two main research questions:

- 1 – Do women differ in their reasons for working nonstandard jobs based on race and ethnicity?
- 2 – In race specific logistic regression models, which individual, family and employment characteristics are common predictors of nonstandard work across race and ethnic groups?

Data and Analysis

The 2005 Current Population Survey Contingent Work Supplement data is analyzed. Nonstandard Work includes employment in part-time jobs (less than 35 hours per week), jobs where the minimum hours worked varies from week to week, and/or contingent work (jobs that are expected to last for one year or less). Our analysis will proceed in two parts. First, we describe women's reasons for working nonstandard jobs and their preference for their current type of job. We focus on differences across race and ethnic groups and consider whether women are taking these jobs by choice or economic necessity. Second, we examine predictors of women's employment in nonstandard work and make comparisons of women across non-Hispanic White, non-Hispanic Black, Hispanic and other race/ethnic groups. These regression models will include family characteristics such as number and age of children, marital status, and access to health insurance through another family member. Race specific regression models will allow a determination of how factors predicting nonstandard work vary across race and ethnicity.

Preliminary Findings

Tables 1 and 2 show the percentage of women reporting each of the reasons or preferences for nonstandard work. Differences by race/ethnicity in reasons for choosing nonstandard jobs are apparent. The responses given by women were grouped into five categories (Marler and Moen 2005). Most women indicate they are in nonstandard jobs for work/family reasons (balancing work and family obligations, issues related to child care, family and personal obligations, or needing a flexible schedule) or economic reasons (this was the only type of work found, the worker hopes the job leads to permanent employment, worker was laid-off and rehired as a contingent worker, or other economic reasons). The majority of white women (56%) say that they are working nonstandard jobs to meet work and family needs. Only 17 percent of white women are pushed into nonstandard work for economic reasons. From the reasons given it seems that white women are often choosing to work nonstandard jobs because it meets their personal situation. This does not seem to be true among black women. Black women seem more often pushed into nonstandard jobs for reasons outside of their own control as 38 percent cite economic reasons for nonstandard jobs. About 35 percent of black women give work and family reasons. More Hispanic than black women cite family reasons (45%) but they still less often cite family than do whites. Hispanic women also give economic reasons quite frequently as well (36%). Among other racial and ethnic groups, 50 percent are in nonstandard jobs for family reasons and about a quarter for economic reasons.

These percentages suggest that white women more than other groups may more often choose to enter nonstandard jobs as a means of balancing work and family, while black and Hispanic women more than other groups may more often accept nonstandard jobs because they are the only ones available. The preferences reported in Table 2 confirm these racial differences. Most white women (74%) prefer their current work arrangement. While a little less than half of black (49%) and Hispanic (47%) women

prefer their current type of job. Women of other racial and ethnic groups fall in the middle with 60 percent preferring their current work arrangement.

From these basic descriptive statistics it appears that the increase in nonstandard jobs may be a positive outcome for white women in that these work arrangements can help to balance work and family. It is important to note that work and family reasons do not necessarily mean that women would choose these jobs in a perfect world. For instance, a woman might say she prefers a nonstandard job because she cannot find full-time childcare. But, if this woman had the opportunity to utilize full-time childcare she may very well prefer a full-time job. It is clear that work choices, especially for women, are made within family constraints and all options are not available for all women. For black and Hispanic women, however, they might not even have the choice of working full- or part-time or temporary or permanent because nonstandard jobs are the only jobs they can gain access to. From women's reported reasons and preferences for nonstandard jobs, it seems that many Black and Hispanic women are being stuck in nonstandard jobs they may not want.

Further analyses will predict women's employment in nonstandard jobs from sociodemographic and family characteristics. We will focus on family factors to determine if family characteristics (marital status, children, access to health insurance from another family member) affect the likelihood of nonstandard employment differently for women across race/ethnic groups. We will also control for education, age, residence (suburban, central city, nonmetropolitan) and occupation.

Based on the data reported above, we expect that family factors will be strong predictors for white women, but not for black or Hispanic women. Family characteristics may be somewhat less relevant in minority women's choice of nonstandard jobs and other factors such as local economic conditions may be more compelling.

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Table 1. Percentage of Female Nonstandard Workers citing each Reason* for Employment in Nonstandard Jobs

	Non-Hispanic White	Non-Hispanic Black	Hispanic	Other
Work/Family	55.6	34.6	44.8	50.0
Work Related	6.3	3.8	4.9	7.5
Economic	16.9	37.7	35.9	24.2
Personal	14.1	18.8	7.8	13.3
Other	7.1	5.1	6.7	5.1
N=	3739	293	351	254

*The broad reasons above include the following responses:

Work/Family reasons include: balancing work and family obligations, issues related to child care, family and personal obligations, or needing a flexible schedule

Work Related reasons include: worker likes being her own boss, the money is better, or the job provides training opportunities

Economic reasons include: this was the only type of work found, the worker hopes the job leads to permanent employment, worker was laid-off and rehired as a contingent worker, or other economic reasons

Personal reasons include: health limitations, social security limitations, in school, or other personal reasons

Data are weighted using a standardized weight.

Table 2. Percentage of Female Nonstandard Workers citing each Preference for Employment in Nonstandard Jobs

	Non- Hispanic White	Non- Hispanic Black	Hispanic	Other
Want Different type of Job	24.3	49.7	52.0	39.0
Want to Keep same type of Job It Depends	74.3	49.1	46.6	60.2
N=	1.4	1.2	1.4	0.8
	3880	309	363	262

Data are weighted using a standardized weight