Why flexible working does not always reduce work-family conflict

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This presentation will bring together four papers from the Economic Social Research Council funded project Work Autonomy, Flexibility and Work-Life Balance. (http://www.wafproject.org)
The project focuses on flexible working – that is workers’ control over their work schedules (start/end times), and where they work (tele/home working). The starting point of the paper is the puzzle of why, despite it being hailed as a major way to tackle work-family demands of workers, flexible working does not always lead to reduced feeling of work-family conflict – the feeling that your work and family demands are at odds with one another.

I provide two reasons. First, because freedom at work and flexibility/blurring boundaries between work and other spheres of life can lead to expansion, rather than contraction, of work. Second, because flexibility at work may allow you to maintain your work intensity (working hours/staying at work) especially in the times when there are higher demands in family life than you would have otherwise. The paper then goes on to show how there are gender and occupational discrepancies, as well as discrepancies in the type of flexible working arrangements in these relationships. The paper concludes with some suggestions of what needs to change in order for flexible working to really work to enable a better work-family reconciliation for workers.

Papers the presentation will draw from include

Lott, Y. & Chung, H. (2016) "Gender discrepancies in the outcomes of schedule control on overtime hours and income in Germany" European Sociological Review. 32(6)752-765


Chung, H. and van der Horst (work-in-progress) Flexible working and unpaid overtime hours in the UK: the role of gender, parental and occupational status.

Chung, H. (work-in-progress) Flexibility stigma and its impact on take up of flexible working arrangements.