

Starting in February 2015, nurses in an elderly care home in Gothenburg have been experimenting with a shorter working day scheme to assess the effects on efficiency and work quality. Workers in a controlled trial switched from an eight-hour to a six-hour working day with the same wage. The results show an increase in productivity and lower turnover. Nurses also report higher levels of well-being and job satisfaction. While the retirement home had to hire new staff members in order to compensate for the shorter hours and the new shift patterns, the returns in terms of higher staff performance and well-being along with increased quality of care seem to offset the higher costs of the initiative, according to the management. This experiment is inspiring other public sector workplaces in Sweden to adopt shorter working days, including in the health sector for doctors. In addition, some small businesses have started adopting shorter working days (Crouch, 2015).

Similarly, Chongqing, a municipality of around 30 million people in the south-west of China, is set to implement an official four-and-a-half-workday week scheme to boost the local economy. The initiative is to grant both public and private sector workers on a 40-hour-contract Friday afternoons off with the same pay. The purpose is to increase domestic consumption and private spending in leisure activities, in particular tourism. The Hebei and Jiangxi provinces, which together account for a population of almost 115 million, are considering a similar scheme (Macauley, 2015).

In recent years, some countries have recognized the negative impact of long working hours on health. In Japan, the overwork culture has led to *karoshi* or death from overwork, as nearly a third of men work more than 48 hours weekly. The Government of Japan has introduced legislation to prevent *karoshi* and has also conducted research on overwork, establishing a committee to promote measures against overwork and obliging the State, local government and enterprises to work together to prevent deaths. In addition, Japan has set up a hotline for employers and employees to call regarding working conditions including unpaid or excessive overtime. Similarly, in the Republic of Korea, in response to concerns regarding death from overwork, the Government has promoted increase leisure time and reduced the legal working week from 44 to 40 hours over a period of seven years. By 2011, the Labour Standards Act covered all workers by setting a limit of 40 hours. These legislative provisions have reduced working hours, in particular for those who work especially long hours (ILO, 2015c).

Some countries have imposed limits on daily and weekly hours by reforming their working-time laws specifically for domestic workers. In Viet Nam, domestic workers have the right to four days off per month or 24 hours of consecutive rest every week, in addition to eight hours rest for every 24-hour period. Added to this, domestic workers are entitled to 24 hours of consecutive rest per week or four days off per month. More than 250,000 domestic workers have benefited from a new ministerial regulation in Thailand, under which domestic workers have the right to at least one day off each week and no less than 13 standard traditional holidays per year. After one year of continuous service, they are entitled to six days of paid annual leave. Domestic workers also have the right to holiday pay rates when they are required to work, sick leave and payment of unused leave if their contracts are terminated. In countries such as Brazil and Argentina where domestic workers already enjoy some levels of protection, new measures have further promoted decent work. In Brazil, domestic workers enjoy the same level of protection as all other workers, including a working-hour limit of 44 hours per week and overtime provisions under a new constitutional amendment. In Argentina, under a new law, domestic workers receive overtime pay, sick leave, maternity leave and work a maximum of 48 working hours per week (ibid.).

6. Changing attitudes towards unpaid care work to overcome the motherhood wage gap

The motherhood penalty reflects a social norm pursuant to which it is the woman who must sacrifice earnings and career progression for childbirth and child care. The fact that women may not recover from the motherhood penalty in the course of a career is indicative of the perpetuation of a narrative that women are secondary income earners and men the primary breadwinners. Consequently, the existence of the motherhood wage gap raises questions about the ability of societies to support reproduction and childcare, together with equal opportunity and treatment at work. This raises a fundamental question regarding the role and impact of work-family policies in recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid household and care work and enabling women to enter, remain and make progress in the labour force. To encourage men to take advantage of flexible work policies, social norms and attitudes need to change; otherwise, introducing flexible working arrangements may not translate into a shift from the culture of presenteeism. Although there are no clear-cut policy solutions to change social norms and attitudes, the adoption of measures, as discussed in the next chapter, encouraging men to follow flexible working arrangements and parental leave and making coherent work-family policies a core policy dimension may lead to changes of attitudes over time.