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## Women need flexible work, but men get it – issues in R&D work efficiency

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# **Women need flexible work, but men get it – issues in R&D work efficiency**

MARIT REBANE\*, AARO HAZAK\*, KADRI MÄNNASOO\*

## *Abstract*

Flexible working time is often advocated as a means of providing better employment opportunities for women by considering the time constraints related to their family obligations. Based on our survey among Estonian creative R&D employees in 2015 and 2016, we find that there is a selection mechanism in filling positions that provide a flexible working time option. In other words, there is a higher probability that certain types of employees get jobs with flexitime than others. It appears that men have much better chances of getting flexible working time despite the understanding that it is women who need flexitime more.

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# Naised vajaksid, ent mehed saavad paindlikku tööaega? T&A valdkonna töökorralduse tõhususest

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## *Kokkuvõte*

Paindlikust tööajast räägitakse tihti kui võimalusest pakkuda paremaid tööelus osalemise tingimusi. See puudutab ka naisi, kes laste kõrvalt ei saaks fikseeritud algus- ja lõpukellaajaga tööd teha. Meie uurimus tugineb 2015-2016 Eesti teadus- ja arendusvaldkonna töötajate hulgas läbi viidud küsitlusuuringule. Kogutud andmeid analüüsidest tuvastasime, et paindliku tööajaga töökohtade täitmisel on oluline selektsioonimehhanism, st paindliku tööaja võimaluse saavad teatud tüüpi töötajad suurema tõenäosusega. Tulemustest selgub, et mehed saavad või valivad naistega võrreldes oluliselt suurema tõenäosusega neid ametikohti, kus paindlikku tööaega pakutakse. Need tulemused võivad kõneleda meeste paremast läbirääkimispositsioonist sobiva töö saamisel ja töötingimuste kokkuleppimisel, samas kui naised võivad paindlikku tööajakorraldust meestest enam vajada. Sellele viitavad meie uurimuse tulemustest selgunud naiste suurem väsimus ja suurem päevane unisus. Seega võib paindlik tööaeg kui tööturul osalejate ringi laiendamise allikas kõlada kaunimalt kui selle realiseerumine tegelikkuses.

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# **Women need flexible work, but men get it – issues in R&D work efficiency**

MARIT REBANE\*, AARO HAZAK\*, KADRI MÄNNASOO\*

## **Women need flexible working options more than men**

Flexible working time is often advocated as a means of providing better employment opportunities for women by considering the time constraints related to their family obligations. A large volume of research from various countries and eras has been devoted to understanding who uses flexible work options and why. Some of these studies demonstrate that gender is among the key factors that determine the need and desire to work with flexible schedules (see, e.g. Almer et al., 2003; Giannikis & Mikhail, 2011). Although the results of past research are mixed, overall, women appear to benefit more from flexitime as the work-family conflict is commonly more persistent for females.

## **But men get the positions with flexible work**

In 2015–2016, our research group at the Department of Economics and Finance at Tallinn University of Technology, in collaboration with our partners, carried out a repeated survey among Estonian creative R&D employees. One of the research questions was about gender differences in the working arrangements in creative R&D jobs. Our study covers 153 employees from 11 companies and research institutes.

We find that the gender effects are quite complex. While gender appears to be an important determinant of various output variables – like work results, sleepiness and tiredness – there is an additional important selection effect. Namely, a specific type of employee appears to get positions offering flexitime. Our research shows that women have a significantly lower probability of getting the flexitime positions. The reason for that could be

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that women have less negotiating power when applying for jobs and agreeing upon working arrangements.

A similar finding has been reached by Golden (2009), for example, who shows that positions with the flexitime option are offered to males more often than to females, especially to managers whose working hours are long and salary high. Another aspect is the actual use of the flexible working time options available. Sarbu (2014) argues that while males have better chances of getting flexible work options, it is females who make use of flexible work more intensively. In our sample, however, we did not find any significant gender differences in the actual use of flexitime.

### **Flexitime may affect work outcomes for women more than for men**

We find from our study that women are significantly less satisfied with their work results (Hazak et al., 2017). While this may be something inherent to females (see, e.g. Scandura and Lankau, 1997), gender differences in the selection into positions providing flexible work arrangements may have an effect as well. In past research, for example, Golden (2009) finds that flexible work options appear to impact the work results of women more than in the case of men.

Although we do not explicitly see these effects from our study, the fact that females have lower chances of getting a job where flexitime is offered may have an impact on the results of the work and the performance of companies and research institutes at large. For example, Konrad and Mangel (2000) and Yang and Zheng (2011) have identified a link between flexible working time and increased productivity. Moreover, Konrad and Mangel (2000) claim that the effect is stronger in companies with a larger female share of employees. Another example is the study by Scandura and Lankau (1997), where a gender-driven connection between the productivity of work and flexitime was identified. They also find that offering flexitime leads to increased job satisfaction and dedication to work in the case of women in particular. This is explained by the appreciation that (female) employees show in response to obtaining flexible working time, and their consequent higher commitment to work.

## **Work arrangements may affect the well-being of women more than men**

Based on our study results, women employees were more prone to feel that work strongly limits their sleep regimen in comparison to men. Female creative R&D employees in our sample were considerably less likely than men to say that work does not restrict their sleep to any extent. It is curious that in our study men slept slightly longer than women, while it has commonly been found that women sleep longer (Burgard & Ailshire, 2013). In addition, we find that female creative R&D employees feel more tired than men. In Estonian families, caregiving and household tasks are unevenly tended to by women, even when both partners work full-time (Statistics Estonia, 2011). This could restrict the total amount of time women have for sleep and leisure. Therefore, women may suffer from the adverse effects of paid work on their sleep regimen more than men because they spend more time doing unpaid work.

The availability of more flexible working arrangements may have a considerable impact on improving individual well-being as well as work outcomes for creative R&D employees. Both employers and regulators should realise that women appear to have lower chances of using the benefits of flexible working time in Estonia.

This research brief is one in a series of short briefs on the effects of working time arrangements on work results, perceived health effects and individual wellbeing among Estonian creative R&D employees (see [www.ttu.ee/ta2](http://www.ttu.ee/ta2)) as well as other aspects of development in increasingly knowledge based societies. We believe that these can contribute to a better understanding of the institutional drivers of knowledge intensive development and the efficiency of R&D.

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