

Part-time workers: some key differences between primary and secondary earners

Data from the Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the CPS indicate that the proportion of part-time workers who are primary earners has grown over the past three decades; part-time primary earners face numerous social welfare challenges, whereas part-time secondary earners have social welfare outcomes that compare well with those of full-time workers

H. Luke Shaefer

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) considers part-time workers to be those who “usually work less than 35 hours per week (at all jobs).”¹ Both the BLS and labor economists often classify part-time workers into those who work less than 35 hours per week for economic, or involuntary, reasons, such as slack business conditions or inability to find a full-time job, and those who work such hours for noneconomic, or voluntary, reasons, such as competing family obligations. Although there is some cyclical variation in the relative sizes of these two groups, a large majority of part-time workers each year reports voluntary reasons for working part time, even during economic downturns.

Knowing whether workers prefer part-time hours or work them involuntarily is important for drawing conclusions about the part-time workforce. For many outcomes, however, it also may prove analytically useful to divide part-time workers into primary and secondary wage earners. For primary wage earners, their job is the main source of income for themselves and their family, whereas secondary wage earners

depend on another worker for the majority of their family’s income. This article uses historical and current data from the March 2008 Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS) to divide the adult (ages 18 to 64 years) part-time workforce into primary and secondary wage earners. According to estimates presented here, the proportion of part-time workers who are primary earners has grown slowly, but steadily, over the past three decades, so that today they make up more than 36 percent of all part-time workers, well above the proportion who work part time involuntarily. Furthermore, part-time primary earners appear to make up a distinct group that is not highly correlated with either voluntary or involuntary part-time work.

Part-time primary earners appear to face numerous social welfare challenges, including a high risk of poverty and a risk of going without health insurance. Part-time secondary earners, in contrast, have social welfare outcomes that compare well with those of full-time workers. Thus, findings from this article suggest that their family’s wage-earning status may be a key mediating variable affecting the social welfare outcomes of part-time workers. Beginning with background information on

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research into part-time work, the article continues by presenting current and historical data on primary and secondary part-time earners and ends with some conclusions suggesting a path for future research.

Background

According to CPS annual estimates, part-time workers made up 17 percent of all employed persons 16 years and older in 2007, about the same percentage as in the previous few years. BLS estimates show that part-time workers tend to be younger than full-time workers, although they are also disproportionately likely to be older, near or of retirement age. Part-time workers are concentrated in the service sector, in industries such as retail, social services, and food services. Women are far more likely than men to work part time, with roughly one-quarter of all employed women usually working part-time hours. Research has shown that part-time workers are less likely than full-time workers to receive employer-based benefits, such as health care coverage or pensions.² Most studies also find that part-time workers earn less than comparable full-time workers, although some research suggests that this is not so for certain populations, such as highly educated women.³

One important characteristic of part-time workers is that most of them appear to favor their work arrangement over working full-time hours. The BLS classifies part-time workers into those who report noneconomic reasons for working such hours and those who report economic reasons for doing so. Economic reasons comprise slack work or business conditions, inability to find full-time work, and seasonal work. Noneconomic reasons include childcare problems, other family or personal obligations, and being in school, among other reasons. Researchers often consider noneconomic reasons to indicate voluntary part-time work, a hypothesis which assumes that workers choose their employment arrangement and would not prefer full-time hours. Economic reasons are often considered to indicate involuntary part-time work, a hypothesis which assumes that these workers would prefer full-time hours, given the opportunity to work such hours.⁴

Table 1 presents 2007 CPS data on workers' reasons for working part-time hours. Eighty-eight percent of those who usually worked part-time hours during 2007—almost 20 million of the 22 million part-time workers—reported reasons which indicated that they worked such hours voluntarily. Just 1.2 million part-time workers reported that they could find only a part-

Table 1. Reasons for usually working part-time hours (less than 35 hours per week), adults 16 years and older, 2007

[In thousands]		
Reasons	Total employed	Percent
All part-time workers	22,460	100
Economic reasons:		
Slack work or business conditions.	1,441	6.42
Could find only part-time work	1,210	5.39
Seasonal work	53	.23
Noneconomic reasons	19,756	87.96
Childcare problems	656	2.92
Other family or personal obligations	4,940	21.99
Health or medical limitations	853	3.80
In school or training	6,150	27.38
Retired or Social Security earnings limit	2,200	9.80
All other noneconomic reasons ...	4,956	22.07

SOURCE: CPS household data annual averages. Full table available on the Internet at www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat20.pdf.

time job, while nearly 5 million reported that they chose part-time hours because of other family or personal obligations. More than twice as many respondents said that they worked part time because they were “in school or training” (6.2 million) than reported all of the economic reasons combined (2.7 million). The relative size of the group of part-time involuntary workers fluctuates with economic cycles, growing during economic downturns. Recently, the BLS announced that this group grew substantially in the final months of 2008.⁵ In general, though, the group is a small one that has seen no consistent upward trend beyond cyclical fluctuations in the past few decades.

Many of the reasons included in the CPS that indicate voluntary part-time work are related to intervening family or personal factors (for example, childcare problems, other family or personal obligations, and health and medical limitations). Therefore, many voluntary part-time workers may choose such hours because intervening family or life circumstances rule out full-time hours or at least substantially raise the opportunity cost of full-time work. This situation is sometimes referred to as “constrained choice.”⁶ One study, for example, finds that many mothers of preschool-aged children manage the competing demands of employment and caregiving by working part-time hours.⁷ In other circumstances, these mothers might prefer full-time hours.

An alternative way to think about the part-time workforce is to divide workers into the aforementioned primary and secondary wage earners. Part-time work originally was designed to attract married women into the labor market

as secondary wage earners during the 1940s and 1950s. Before the post-World War II era, virtually all jobs required long hours with rigid arrival and departure times.⁸ During the postwar era, however, firms faced a declining supply of unmarried women because of increasing college enrollment and other factors. In response, firms began to offer part-time jobs in hopes of appealing to married women.

Because part-time jobs originally were designed for married women, most of those jobs did not offer fringe benefits such as health insurance or pensions, which typically were accessed through a spouse. Thus, part-time employment may continue to work well for secondary earners, for whom such employment originally was designed. In contrast, part-time employment may not work so well for primary earners, who might suffer from the lesser income and more limited access to social benefits that these jobs offer. Part-time primary earners thus may be a relatively vulnerable group in the U.S. labor market that may or may not overlap entirely with the group working part time involuntarily, in light of the preceding discussion of constrained choice.

The remainder of this article offers a method for dividing part-time workers, as defined in the CPS, into primary and secondary earners and compares the two groups on a number of labor market and social welfare outcomes.

Data and methods

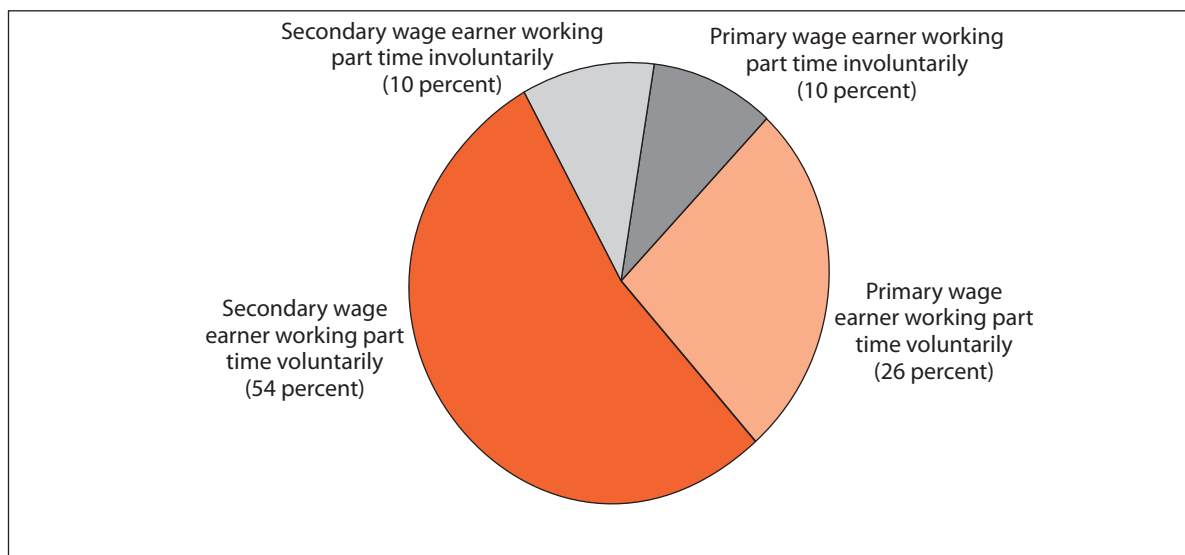
The CPS, a monthly survey of approximately 60,000 households, is conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the BLS and is a major source of labor market statistics for the United States. The CPS offers a nationally representative multistage stratified sample of the noninstitutionalized U.S. population. Detailed labor market and demographic data are collected on all adult respondents aged 16 years and older. The analyses that follow utilize the CPS Annual Social and Economic Supplement, which provides annualized data for the preceding year on numerous labor market and social welfare outcomes. Data were extracted from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, into which CPS data from the Annual Supplement between 1962 and 2007 were integrated and variables were “harmonized” (coded identically) to be consistent over time.⁹ The analyses were restricted to working-age adults (that is, adults aged 18 to 64 years), because workers older or younger than that face unique issues. The 2007 outcomes of 86,462 respondents who were employed (excluding the self-employed) were analyzed, of which 12,990 respondents were found to have usually worked part-time hours

during that year. Descriptive results are presented. Regression analyses were utilized to control for competing factors, such as differences in age and marital status, that might have caused descriptive differences.¹⁰

Identifying primary and secondary wage earners. A parsimonious method was employed to divide workers into primary and secondary wage earners. The stratified survey design of the CPS entails that earnings data be collected for all related family members within all households that are surveyed. All adult person-year observations were clustered by family in order to compute a total annual family earned income for each respondent (the total earned income by each family member aged 16 years or older). Then, the annual personal earned income of each individual worker was divided into the family unit’s annual earned income. Those respondents with earnings that accounted for 50 percent or more of their family’s earned income were considered primary earners. Those whose earnings accounted for less than 50 percent of their family’s earned income were considered secondary earners.

Chart 1 divides the part-time workforce into four groups: primary wage earners working part time voluntarily, primary wage earners working part time involuntarily, secondary wage earners working part time voluntarily, and secondary wage earners working part time involuntarily. As the chart shows, primary wage earners made up 36 percent of all workers who usually worked part-time hours during 2007, while involuntary part-time workers made up approximately 20 percent. Interestingly, involuntary part-time workers split evenly between the primary and secondary earner groups, suggesting that the two dichotomies—voluntary-involuntary and primary-secondary—are not interchangeable and should not be conflated with each other.

Robustness tests suggest that these proportions were not highly sensitive to the 50-percent decision point for identifying primary earners. When a 55-percent decision rule was used, primary earners made up 34 percent of part-time workers in 2007, and when a 45-percent rule was used, they made up 38 percent. Some researchers might argue that total family income should be used instead of total family earned income. Such an approach might exclude workers from the primary wage earner group who work part time because they are receiving a pension or have some other sources of unearned income. When total family income was used in this way, together with a 50-percent decision rule, primary part-time workers were found to have made up 26 percent of all part-time workers in 2007. This result suggests some sensitivity to the use of earned income as opposed to total

Chart 1. Percentages of part-time workers aged 18–64 years in 2007

SOURCE: Author's calculation from the 2008 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement. Data extracted from IPUMS-CPS (Miriam King, Steven Ruggles, Trent Alexander, Donna Leicach, and Matthew Sobock, "Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey: Version 2.0" [machine-readable database] Minneapolis, Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2004), on the Internet at www.ipums.org/cps.

income. Family earned income was chosen for the analysis presented in this article because using total family income in some cases would have led to some family units having no primary wage earners.

Chart 2 offers a historical time series that shows, over time, the proportion of part-time workers who are primary earners and the proportion who work their hours involuntarily. Both series appear to have some countercyclical variation: both groups grow in relative size during recessions. Unlike the involuntary part-time group, however, primary earners appear to be growing slowly, but steadily, as a proportion of all part-time workers over time: from roughly 30 percent of the part-time workforce in 1970, they grew to 36 percent in 2007. As might be expected, the relative size of the involuntary part-time group is extremely sensitive to economic cycles. However, beyond that sensitivity, the group appears to exhibit no upward trend. The proportion of part-time workers who worked their hours involuntarily in 2007 was almost identical to what it was in 1974, the first year for which these data are available. (It is worth noting, though, that the national unemployment rate in 1974 was 5.6 percent, compared with 4.6 percent in 2007.)

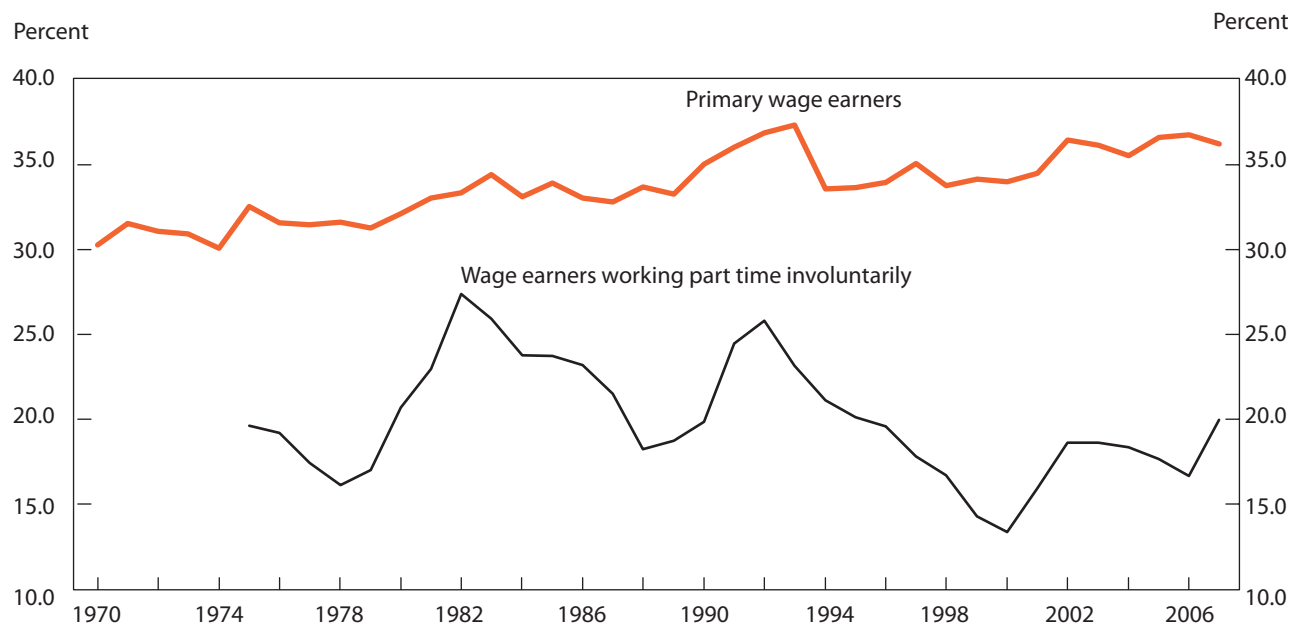
These figures lead to a few important conclusions. First,

working part time involuntarily or voluntarily should not be conflated with being a primary or secondary wage earner. These are different groups. The proportion of part-time workers who are primary earners is much larger than the proportion who work their hours involuntarily, and involuntary part-time workers split evenly between primary and secondary earners. Further, it appears that the proportion of part-time workers who are primary earners is trending upward slowly over time, with some cyclical variation.

Descriptive results for 2007

Table 2 presents 2007 descriptive means for demographic characteristics and social welfare outcomes for full-time workers, part-time primary earners, and part-time secondary earners. In assigning statistical significance, all descriptive statistics are clustered by household to adjust for the stratified design of the CPS. As expected, part-time workers are, on average, both younger and more likely to be women than are full-time workers. Within the part-time employed, though, primary earners are older, on average, with a mean age of 39 years, compared with 33 years for secondary earners, and are somewhat less likely to be wom-

Chart 2. Part-time workers aged 18–64 years in the United States, 1970–2007



SOURCE: Author's calculation from the 2008 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement. Data extracted from IPUMS-CPS (Miriam King, Steven Ruggles, Trent Alexander, Donna Leicach, and Matthew Sobek, "Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey: Version 2.0" [machine-readable database] Minneapolis, Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2004), on the Internet at www.ipums.org/cps.

en (65 percent instead of 72 percent). There are some slight differences by race and ethnicity among the three groups. First, part-time workers in both subgroups are slightly less likely to be of Hispanic origin than are full-time workers. Second, secondary earners are disproportionately more likely to be White and non-Hispanic than are workers in the other two groups. Third, part-time primary earners are more likely to be Black than are full-time workers and considerably more likely to be Black than are part-time secondary earners. Finally, less than one-third of part-time primary earners were married, and, surprisingly, a larger proportion of full-time workers were married (58 percent) than were part-time secondary earners (51 percent).¹¹

Differences in educational attainment are slight among the three groups. Sixty-one percent of full-time workers in 2007 had some college education, and the figures for part-time primary earners and part-time secondary earners were 60 percent and 63 percent, respectively. Roughly 10 percent of part-time workers in both groups had less than a high school degree, while the same was true of 8 percent of full-time workers. Part-time workers in their early twenties were far more likely to be enrolled in school than were their full-time counterparts. Among respondents between the ages of 18 and 24 years, 1 in 5 full-time workers were enrolled in school in

2007, while more than 50 percent of part-time primary earners were enrolled. Even higher was the proportion of part-time secondary earners in school, with more than two-thirds of those between 18 and 24 years enrolled in 2007.

With regard to the social welfare outcomes presented in table 2, full-time workers and part-time secondary earners in 2007 look quite similar to each other. The proportions of respondents in these two groups living in poverty were virtually identical, at roughly 4 percent. (The 2007 Federal poverty line was \$16,530 for a family of three.) About the same proportion of both groups received public welfare benefits during the year. (Included in this variable are benefits from cash assistance, food stamps, and public housing.) The two groups went without health insurance at similar rates as well: roughly 16 percent of full-time workers were uninsured in 2007, while about 18 percent of part-time secondary earners were uninsured. Table 2 also reports on family pension coverage. This variable indicates whether one or more members of the respondent's family were covered by a work-based pension program. To create the variable, CPS respondents again were clustered by family unit to determine whether respondents had some work-based pension coverage in their family—through themselves, a spouse, or another family member. Among

Table 2. Demographic and social welfare characteristics of U.S. workers aged 18–64 years, mean values, 2007

Characteristic	Full-time	Part-time primary earner	Part-time secondary earner
Age	40.0	¹ 38.8	² 33.3
Woman	44.1	¹ 65.4	² 72.4
White	66.9	³ 66.1	² 73.9
Black	12.5	¹ 15.3	² 8.3
Hispanic origin	14.5	² 12.6	² 11.9
Other race	6.1	6.1	5.8
Citizen	90.3	² 91.2	² 93.3
Married	57.6	¹ 29.9	² 51.1
Education			
Less than 12 years	8.0	¹ 10.7	10.1
12 years	31.7	² 29.2	28.5
More than 12 years	61.2	60.1	62.5
Income level			
Below the Federal poverty line ⁴ ..	3.6	¹ 29.0	4.3
Below 150 percent of the Federal poverty line ⁴	9.2	¹ 47.5	10.1
Family pension coverage	62.9	¹ 21.8	² 66.6
Uninsured	15.8	¹ 31.8	² 17.8
Public welfare participation	4.0	¹ 17.5	3.5
Lives in a metropolitan area	85.8	¹ 83.6	85.4
Region			
Northeast	18.2	³ 16.6	19.6
Midwest	22.4	24.4	² 27.0
South	36.6	¹ 33.1	² 29.1
West	22.9	³ 25.9	24.3
Student (respondents, 18–24)	20.2	¹ 56.5	² 68.9
Observations	73,472	4,476	8,514

¹ Statistically significantly different from full-time mean at $p < 0.05$ and from part-time secondary earner mean at $p < 0.05$.

² Statistically significantly different from full-time mean at $p < 0.05$.

³ Statistically significantly different from part-time secondary earner mean at $p < 0.05$.

⁴ The Federal poverty line is officially designated as \$16,530 for a family of three.

SOURCE: Author's calculation from the 2008 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Eco-

conomic Supplement. Data extracted from IPUMS-CPS (Miriam King, Steven Ruggles, Trent Alexander, Donna Leicach, and Matthew So-beck, "Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey: Version 2.0" [machine-readable database] Minneapolis, Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2004), on the Internet at www.ipums.org/cps. Standard errors are clustered by household to adjust for the survey's stratified design.

time primary earners lived below the Federal poverty line during 2007, and close to half of all part-time primary earners lived below 150 percent of the poverty line. Nearly a third of part-time primary earners were uninsured during 2007, and almost 18 percent of all part-time primary earners participated in a public welfare program. Just 22 percent of part-time primary earners lived in families in which at least one member was covered by a work-based pension program; the 22-percent figure was more than 40 percentage points less than that of either of the other reference groups. All of the outcomes described are statistically significant and substantially different from those faced by full-time workers and part-time secondary wage earners.

Perhaps surprisingly, table 3 highlights the fact that, on some key social welfare outcomes, part-time primary earners fared worse than nonworking adults in 2007. While 41 percent of nonworkers were under 150 percent of the Federal poverty line, almost 48 percent of part-time primary earners also were. Further, nonworkers were less likely to go without health insurance and more likely to have family pension coverage than were part-time primary earners. Finally, part-time primary earners appeared slightly more likely than nonworkers to access public welfare programs. Some of these differences are driven by differences in marital status: whereas 48 percent of nonworking adults were married in 2007, the same was true of only 30 percent of part-time primary earners. However, even when these social welfare outcome estimates are restricted to unmarried individuals in

both groups, results for the two groups prove to be similar to each other. In sum, part-time primary earners appeared to face numerous social welfare challenges—more so than did full-time workers, part-time secondary workers, and, in some cases, nonworking adults.

full-time workers, 63 percent had work-based pension coverage in their family, while about 67 percent of part-time secondary earners did.

Part-time primary earners appear to have substantial and statistically significant differences in their social welfare outcomes, compared with both full-time workers and part-time secondary earners. Almost 30 percent of part-

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Labor market outcomes. Table 4 reports on numerous labor market outcomes. Both part-time primary and

Table 3. Social welfare characteristics of part-time primary wage earners and nonworkers aged 18–64 years, mean values, 2007

Characteristic	Part-time primary earners	Nonworking adults
Below Federal poverty line ¹	29.0	28.9
Below 150 percent of Federal poverty line ¹ ...	47.5	² 41.0
Family pension coverage..	21.8	² 31.0
Uninsured	31.8	² 25.5
Public welfare participation	17.5	² 15.4
Married	29.9	² 48.0
Observations	4,476	28,300

¹ The Federal poverty line is officially designated as \$16,530 for a family of three.

² Statistically significantly different from part-time primary earner mean at $p < 0.05$.

SOURCE: Author's calculation from the 2008 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement. Data extracted from IPUMS-CPS (Miriam King, Steven Ruggles, Trent Alexander, Donna Leicach, and Matthew Sobek, "Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey: Version 2.0" [machine-readable database] Minneapolis, Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2004), on the Internet at www.ipums.org/cps. Standard errors are clustered by household to adjust for the survey's stratified design.

part-time secondary earners were about half as likely as full-time workers to be represented by a union. Both groups were similarly likely to be covered by a work-based pension program through their jobs, with about 1 in 5 enjoying such coverage. In contrast, more than half of full-time workers had pension benefits. Thus, the 67-percent rate of family pension coverage enjoyed by part-time secondary earners (see table 2) were a result of benefits obtained through another family member. As for employer-based health insurance coverage, table 4 suggests that part-time primary earners are nearly twice as likely than secondary earners to have an employer pay for some or all of their health insurance, even though they are far less likely than secondary earners to have any health insurance at all. This may be because part-time primary earners have a higher takeup rate for employer-based insurance that is offered to them, given that part-time secondary earners appear likely to be covered through another family member.

The two groups of part-time workers were similarly concentrated in the service sector, as measured by both industry and occupation, with the highest concentration in education, health, and social services,

followed next by arts, entertainment, accommodations, and food service, and then by retail trade. Secondary earners were slightly more likely to be in retail trade or in a sales or related occupation than were primary earners. Finally, roughly 44 percent in both groups of part-time workers worked for a firm with 100 or fewer employees, while 34 percent of full-time workers did the same. Fully a third of part-time workers in both groups worked for a firm with fewer than 25 workers, compared with 20 percent of full-time workers (not shown in table 4).

Are the poor social welfare outcomes of part-time primary earners related to their marginal attachment to the labor force? Within the part-time workforce, primary earners worked, on average, about 2 additional hours per week, and 1.6 additional weeks per year, compared with secondary earners. Also, primary earners appear to have made substantially more per year, with an average annual income of just under \$20,000, compared with \$12,500 for secondary earners. Dividing average annual earned income by average annual work hours¹² yields an approximate hourly rate of \$18.98 for primary earners and \$13.46 for secondary earners (compared with \$22.06 for full-time workers). These results suggest that primary earners worked more hours, and made more per hour, on average, than did secondary earners.

Other factors

It is possible that the differences in social welfare outcomes presented in table 2 are driven by demographic differences beyond being a part-time primary or secondary wage earner. Part-time workers, for example, are younger, on average, than full-time workers, so the results shown in the table may be driven by that demographic variable or other competing factors. In an effort to address this possibility, three probit regression models are reported in tables 5 and 6, to build on the descriptive estimates presented earlier. Parameter estimates are converted to average marginal effects and therefore can be interpreted similarly to output from linear probability models. These probit models will provide some evidence as to whether controlling for other demographic and environmental-related factors narrows the descriptive disparities in outcomes faced by part-time primary earners, compared with part-time secondary earners and the main reference group of full-time workers.

The dependent variables in tables 5 and 6 are dummy variables for the social welfare outcomes discussed in table 2. A set of mutually exclusive variables for work arrange-

Table 4. Job characteristics of U.S. workers aged 18–64 years, mean values, 2007

Characteristic, and industry and occupation	Full-time	Part-time primary earner	Part-time secondary earner
Annual earned income	\$47,034	¹ \$19,856	² \$12,477
Weekly work hours	42.9	¹ 23.4	² 21.5
Weeks worked in 2007	49.7	¹ 44.7	² 43.1
Employer paid for insurance	62.2	¹ 26.4	² 13.8
Union member	15.5	² 7.6	² 8.8
Received a pension	52.8	² 18.9	² 17.4
Worked for a small firm (100 or fewer employees)	34.4	² 44.1	² 44.7
Industry			
Utilities	1.1	² 1.1	² 1.1
Construction	7.6	¹ 4.2	² 2.5
Manufacturing	13.5	² 3.7	² 2.8
Wholesale trade	3.0	² 1.1	² 1.3
Retail trade.....	10.4	¹ 15.9	19.3
Transportation and warehousing ...	4.9	4.1	² 3.0
Information	2.7	1.6	2.2
Finance, insurance, and real estate.	7.4	² 3.6	² 3.7
Professional, scientific, and technical services	9.9	² 8.3	² 7.1
Education, health, and social services	20.9	² 30.8	² 29.6
Arts, entertainment, accommodations, and food service	10.6	² 23.9	² 26.1
Public administration	5.75	2.0	1.6
Other	2.2	.8	.7
Occupation			
Management, and business and financial operations	14.7	² 4.8	² 4.3
Professional and related	21.5	20.5	20.2
Food preparation and serving	4.1	² 14.0	² 15.2
Personal care and service	2.0	² 6.6	² 6.2
Other service	7.7	¹ 12.1	8.6
Sales and related	9.5	¹ 13.3	² 16.7
Office and administrative support	14.2	³ 13.5	² 17.7
Construction	6.6	¹ 3.8	² 1.6
Production and transportation	14.2	² 10.0	² 8.0
Other	5.6	² 1.7	² 1.5
Observations.....	73,472	4,476	8,514

¹ Statistically significantly different from full-time mean at $p < 0.05$ and from part-time secondary earner mean at $p < 0.05$.

² Statistically significantly different from full-time mean at $p < 0.05$.

³ Statistically significantly different from part-time secondary earner mean at $p < 0.05$.

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ment is included for (1) full-time work, (2) part-time primary earners, and (3) part-time secondary earners, with full-time work as the referent. Demographic control variables include sex, age (and age squared), race and ethnicity, and marital status. A dummy variable is included if the worker is between the ages of 18 and 24 years and is enrolled as a student. State dummy variables are included, as is an indicator for metropolitan or rural residence. All models are clustered by household, to correct for overly narrow standard errors that may result from the stratified sample design.

Other job characteristics are included in model 2 for each dependent variable, for each of the outcomes (in poverty, uninsured, family pension coverage), in the form of variables for detailed industry and occupation. These variables might be more easily thought of as outcome measures instead of independent variables; however, because of the specific aims of the regressions, it makes analytic sense to include them as independent variables in alternative models in order to see the extent to which they affect the results for part-time workers. Further, including them exerts a downward bias on the results for the variables used to identify part-time workers. Including other job characteristics in an effort to generate a conservative estimate of the impact of work-related characteristics on access to benefits is common in the literature.¹³

The results shown in table 5 suggest that other factors may account for some, but not many, of the differences in poverty rates and health insurance coverage separating part-time primary earners from full-time workers and part-time secondary earners. The descriptive

Table 5. Probit regression results (marginal effects) for social welfare outcomes for U.S. workers aged 18-64 years, 2007

Variable	In poverty		Uninsured	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Full time				
Part time × primary earner	¹ 0.187 (.00674)	¹ 0.152 (.00627)	¹ 0.136 (.00733)	¹ 0.103 (.00688)
Part time × secondary earner	−.000477 (.00182)	¹ −.00471 (.00136)	¹ 0.0387 (.00511)	¹ 0.161 (.0457)
Age .....	.000473 (.000322)	¹ .000810 (.000283)	¹ −.00275 (.000785)	−.00112 (.000754)
Age squared	¹ −.00002 (.00000402)	¹ −.00002 (.00000355)	.00000122 (.00000954)	−.0000112 (.00000919)
Man				
Woman	¹ .00868 (.000926)	¹ .00849 (.000967)	¹ −.0235 (.00214)	−.00346 (.00243)
White non-Hispanic				
Black	¹ .0256 (.00254)	¹ .0214 (.00227)	¹ .0460 (.00489)	¹ .0448 (.00478)
Hispanic	¹ .0286 (.00247)	¹ .0217 (.00211)	¹ .145 (.00554)	¹ .126 (.00529)
Other races	¹ .0142 (.00298)	¹ .0118 (.00263)	¹ .0774 (.00722)	¹ .0769 (.00714)
Education less than 12 years				
12 years	¹ −.0233 (.00114)	¹ −.0180 (.00103)	¹ −.0800 (.00325)	¹ −.0630 (.00320)
More than 12 years	¹ −.0665 (.00251)	¹ −.0434 (.00220)	¹ −.195 (.00491)	¹ −.129 (.00472)
Married, spouse present				
Married, spouse absent	¹ .0332 (.00659)	¹ .0243 (.00551)	¹ .184 (.0145)	¹ .158 (.0138)
Separated	¹ .0650 (.00651)	¹ .0510 (.00559)	¹ .158 (.0114)	¹ .136 (.0109)
Divorced	¹ .0370 (.00288)	¹ .0296 (.00254)	¹ .141 (.00576)	¹ .124 (.00552)
Widowed	¹ .0409 (.00884)	¹ .0315 (.00771)	¹ .152 (.0159)	¹ .133 (.0155)
Single, never married	¹ .0250 (.00195)	¹ .0195 (.00169)	¹ .137 (.00443)	¹ .123 (.00426)
In school (aged 18–24 years)	¹ −.00813 (.00180)	¹ −.00783 (.00148)	¹ −.0805 (.00333)	¹ −.0772 (.00300)
Metro area resident	¹ −.00997 (.00173)	¹ −.00858 (.00154)	¹ −.0199 (.00397)	¹ −.0201 (.00384)
Industry: utilities				
Construction	−	¹ −.0151 (.00248)	−	¹ −.0561 (.00899)
Manufacturing	−	.000409 (.00371)	−	¹ .0512 (.0111)
Wholesale trade	−	¹ −.0107 (.00215)	−	¹ −.0387 (.00667)
Retail trade	−	¹ −.0123 (.00209)	−	¹ −.0290 (.00828)
Transportation and warehousing	−	−.00266 (.00294)	−	.00800 (.00869)
Information	−	¹ −.0101	−	−.0119 (.00844)

See notes at end of table.

results presented in table 2 suggest that part-time primary wage earners are about 25 percentage points more likely to be living in poverty than are full-time workers. With other factors controlled, the probit results suggest that this gap falls to between 15 percentage points and 19 percentage points. Further, the probit results indicate that part-time secondary earners are no more likely to experience poverty than are full-time workers, and in model 2 they are actually slightly, but statistically significantly, less likely to experience poverty than are full-time workers. All these results suggest that, with numerous factors controlled, part-time primary earners are still far more likely to experience poverty than are full-time workers or part-time secondary workers, and the latter two groups experience similar levels of risk.

The results for models with a dependent variable of having no health insurance again show that the output does not differ dramatically from the descriptive results. Part-time primary earners are descriptively 16 percentage points more likely to go uninsured than are full-time workers. With other factors controlled, probit results indicate that this gap falls slightly, to between 10 percentage points and 14 percentage points. The models suggest that part-time secondary earners are slightly more likely (between 2 percentage points and 4 percentage points) to go uninsured than are full-time workers, but are far less likely to go uninsured than their primary-earner counterparts. Finally, table 6 suggests that the other factors included in the model appear to have a negligible impact on the disparities in family pension coverage experienced by part-time primary earners relative to full-time workers and part-time secondary earners. The part-time primary-earner variable is associated with more than

Table 5. Continued—Probit regression results (marginal effects) for social welfare outcomes for U.S. workers aged 18–64 years, 2007

Variable	In Poverty		Uninsured	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Finance, insurance, and real estate	–	¹ –0.00879 (.00291)	–	³ –0.0169 (.00964)
Professional, scientific, and technical services.....	–	¹ –.00680 (.00274)	–	¹ –.0300 (.00752)
Education, health, and social services	–	.00257 (.00358)	–	¹ .0311 (.00983)
Arts, entertainment, accommodations, and food service	–	³ –.00476 (.00288)	–	¹ –.0312 (.00737)
Public administration	–	.00367 (.00358)	–	¹ .0437 (.00998)
Other	–	¹ –.0166 (.00148)	–	¹ –.0776 (.00491)
Occupation: management, and business and financial operations				
Professional and related ..	–	¹ .0119 (.00315)	–	.00502 (.00522)
Food preparation and serving	–	¹ .0588 (.00668)	–	¹ .116 (.00842)
Personal care and service	–	¹ .0568 (.00729)	–	¹ .114 (.00962)
Other service	–	¹ .0646 (.00884)	–	¹ .138 (.0121)
Sales and related	–	¹ .0450 (.00588)	–	¹ .0784 (.00757)
Office and administrative support	–	¹ .0215 (.00385)	–	¹ .0388 (.00582)
Construction	–	¹ .0372 (.00767)	–	¹ .120 (.0111)
Production and transportation	–	¹ .0479 (.00584)	–	¹ .0931 (.00744)
Other	–	¹ .0331 (.00638)	–	¹ .0690 (.00886)
State fixed effects				
Pseudo R ² .....	.23	.25	.18	.21
Observations	86,462	86,462	86,462	86,462

¹ Statistically significantly at $p < 0.01$.
² Statistically significantly $p < 0.05$.
³ Statistically significantly at $p < 0.1$.

NOTE: Boldface entries are referents. Standard errors are in parentheses. Dash indicates variable not regressed in model 1.

SOURCE: Author's calculation from the 2008 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement. Data extracted from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series of the CPS (Miriam King, Steven Ruggles, Trent Alexander, Donna Leicach, and Matthew Sobek, "Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey: Version 2.0" [machine-readable database] Minneapolis, Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2004), on the Internet at www.ipums.org/cps. Standard errors are clustered by household to adjust for the survey's stratified design.

a 40-percentage-point reduction in the probability of being in a family with some work-based pension coverage, relative to the other two groups.

THE STANDARD PRACTICE of dividing part-time workers into voluntary and involuntary groups offers important information about the labor market. The size of the group working part time involuntarily is a good indicator of the health of the labor market. However, results presented here suggest that it is important not to conflate reasons for working part time voluntarily or involuntarily with being a primary or secondary earner. Evidence presented in this article indicates that part-time secondary earners fare quite well on the social welfare outcomes examined. They are no more likely to be in poverty than are full-time workers, they are only slightly more likely to go uninsured than are full-time workers, and they are actually more likely to live in a family in which one or more members is covered in a work-based pension program. On the whole, part-time work seems to work relatively well for secondary earners, the group for which such jobs originally were designed.

In contrast, part-time primary wage earners appear to face some serious social welfare challenges, with high rates of poverty and a high risk of going uninsured. This is despite the fact that, on average, part-time primary earners appear to have a stronger attachment to the labor force than secondary earners have, in that the primary earners work more hours per year, at a somewhat higher pay rate. Thus, these social welfare challenges are not the result of a marginal attachment to the labor force. Instead, they seem to result from differences in family composition. Probit regression results suggest that other factors controlled for in the model do not account for the descriptive differences in social welfare outcomes.

Table 6. Probit regression results (marginal effects) for family pension coverage for U.S. workers aged 18–64 years, 2007

Variable	Family pension coverage		Variable	Family pension coverage	
	Model 1	Model 2		Model 1	Model 2
Full time			Industry: utilities		
Part time × primary earner	¹ –0.414 (.00725)	¹ –0.397 (.00772)	Construction	–	¹ 0.202 (.0157)
Part time × secondary earner	¹ .0308 (.00660)	¹ .0639 (.00655)	Manufacturing	–	¹ –.0668 (.0158)
Age	¹ .0115 (.00128)	¹ .00820 (.00130)	Wholesale trade	–	¹ .0833 (.0127)
Age squared	¹ –.0000849 (.0000153)	¹ –.0000561 (.0000154)	Retail trade	–	¹ .0487 (.0157)
Man			Transportation and warehousing	–	.0166 (.0139)
Woman	² .00707 (.00289)	¹ .0207 (.00355)	Information	–	¹ .0808 (.0139)
White, non-Hispanic			Finance, insurance, and real estate	–	¹ .0520 (.0162)
Black	¹ –.0536 (.00747)	¹ –.0558 (.00760)	Professional, scientific, and technical services	–	¹ .0584 (.0139)
Hispanic	¹ –.168 (.00730)	¹ –.155 (.00738)	Education, health, and social services	–	¹ –.0444 (.0145)
Other races	¹ –.0897 (.00955)	¹ –.0888 (.00966)	Arts, entertainment, accommodations, and food service	–	¹ .0868 (.0130)
Education, less than 12 years			Public administration	–	¹ –.0758 (.0146)
12 years	¹ .164 (.00685)	¹ .137 (.00702)	Other	–	¹ .229 (.0102)
More than 12 years	¹ .292 (.00731)	¹ .211 (.00778)	Occupation: management, and business and financial operations		
Married, spouse present			Professional scientific and related	–	.00736 (.00697)
Married, spouse absent	¹ –.235 (.0158)	¹ –.220 (.0162)	Food preparation and serving	–	¹ –.136 (.00913)
Separated	¹ –.198 (.0127)	¹ –.181 (.0130)	Personal care and service ..	–	¹ –.110 (.0111)
Divorced	¹ –.157 (.00653)	¹ –.144 (.00660)	Other service	–	¹ –.169 (.0133)
Widowed	¹ –.162 (.0165)	¹ –.147 (.0168)	Sales and related	–	¹ –.113 (.00884)
Single, never married	¹ –.138 (.00587)	¹ –.125 (.00591)	Office and administrative support	–	¹ –.0405 (.00732)
In school (aged 18–24 years) ..	¹ .116 (.00926)	¹ .124 (.00914)			
Metro area resident .....	.00922 (.00648)	³ .0125 (.00657)			

See notes at end of table.

Table 6. Continued—Probit regression results (marginal effects) for family pension coverage for U.S. workers aged 18–64 years, 2007

Variable	Family pension coverage		Variable	Family pension coverage	
	Model 1	Model 2		Model 1	Model 2
Construction	–	¹ –0.0877 (.0125)	Other	–	¹ –0.0650 (.0106)
Production and transportation	–	¹ –.115 (.00846)	Sate fixed effects		
			Pseudo R ² .....	.12	.15
			Observations	86,462	86,462

¹ Statistically significant at $p < 0.01$.

² Statistically significant at $p < 0.05$.

³ Statistically significant at $p < 0.1$.

NOTE: Boldface entries are referents. Standard errors are in parentheses. Dash indicates variable not regressed in model 1.

SOURCE: Author's calculation from the 2008 Current Population Survey

Annual Social and Economic Supplement. Data extracted from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series of the CPS (Miriam King, Steven Ruggles, Trent Alexander, Donna Leicach, and Matthew Sobek, "Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey: Version 2.0" [machine-readable database] (Minneapolis, Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2004), on the Internet at www.ipums.org/cps. Standard errors are clustered by household to adjust for the survey's stratified design.

Historical evidence reported in this article shows that part-time primary earners have been growing slowly, but steadily, as a proportion of all part-time workers over the past few decades, with some cyclical variation. Perhaps surprisingly, most part-time primary earners choose part-time over full-time hours, and some do so for the advantages that those hours can provide, despite their restrictions on access to social benefits and their effects on social welfare outcomes. These workers may be trading access to social benefits for increased flexibility, among other things. However, the individual preferences that lead workers to select part-time employment are not necessarily the result of free personal choice among equally plausible alternatives. Most voluntary part-time workers

choose part-time hours because of competing demands such as school, childcare, or other family responsibilities. If they did not have these responsibilities, it is unclear whether they would choose part- or full-time hours.

Given the differences in these key social welfare outcomes faced by primary and secondary earners, research and policies aimed at the part-time workforce as a whole may prove inefficient. At least on the outcomes examined herein, part-time secondary wage earners fare comparably to workers with full-time hours. Thus, it makes more sense to target research and social benefits toward those who need them more, namely, part-time *primary* wage earners, than toward either all part-time workers or the relatively more well off part-time secondary wage earners. □

Notes

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¹ *Handbook of Methods* (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1997), p. 1.

² See Rebecca M. Blank, "Are Part-Time Jobs Bad Jobs?" in G. Burtless, ed., *A Future of Lousy Jobs?* (Washington, DC, Brookings Institution, 1990), pp. 123–64; Christopher Tilly, *Half a Job: Bad and Good Part-Time Jobs in a Changing Labor Market* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996); and Arne L. Kalleberg, Barbara F. Reskin, and Ken Hudson, "Bad Jobs in America: Standard and Nonstandard Employment Relations and Job Quality in the United States," *American Sociological Review*, April 2000, pp. 256–78.

³ Rebecca M. Blank, "Contingent Work in a Changing Labor

Market," in Richard B. Freeman and Peter Gottschalk, eds., *Generating Jobs: How to Increase Demand for Less-Skilled Workers* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1998), pp. 258–94.

⁴ *Ibid.*; see also Thomas Nardone, "Part-Time Employment: Reasons, Demographics, and Trends," *Journal of Labor Research*, summer 1995, pp. 275–92.

⁵ See "Involuntary Part-Time Work on the Rise," in *Issues in Labor Statistics*, Summary 08-08 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, December 2008).

⁶ Janet Walsh, "Myths and Counter-Myths: An Analysis of Part-Time Female Employees and Their Orientations to Work and Working Hours," *Work, Employment & Society*, June 1999, pp. 179–203.

⁷ Karen Fox Folk and Andrea H. Bellar, "Part-Time Work and

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⁸ Dora L. Costa, “From Mill Town to Board Room: The Rise of Women’s Paid Labor,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, fall 2000, pp. 101–22; Jeremy Atack and Fred Bateman, “How Long Was the Workday in 1880?” *Journal of Economic History*, vol. 52, no. 1, 1992, pp. 129–60.

⁹ Miriam King, Steven Ruggles, Trent Alexander, Donna Leicach, and Matthew Sobek, “Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey: Version 2.0” [machine-readable database] (Minneapolis, Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2004), on the Internet at www.cps.ipums.org/cps (visited June 1, 2009).

¹⁰ When a dichotomous outcome variable is used, probit or logistic regression models are preferable to linear probability models because probit models explicitly model the outcome as a probability and avoid problems of heteroskedasticity. Probit results in this article are linearized by conversion into marginal effects with the use of Stata software’s `dprobit` routine. Hence, probit results can be interpreted similarly to results from linear probability models, while not suffering from the same problems of bias.

¹¹ Note that, with data from the Annual Social and Economic Supplement, time-varying characteristics such as marital status and union membership pertain to the year the interview was conducted (2008 in this study) and may not be applicable during the reference period for annualized outcomes (2007 in this study). For example, if, during the interview in 2008, a respondent indicated that he or she was a member of a union, then the part-time job that the respondent held during the previous year may not have been the same job at which the respondent was a union member.

¹² That is, mean annual earned income ÷ (mean weekly work hours × mean weeks worked).

¹³ Kalleberg, Reskin, and Hudson, “Bad Jobs in America”; Anne E. Polivka, “Contingent and alternative work arrangements, defined,” *Monthly Labor Review*, October 1996, pp. 3–9; and Anne E. Polivka, Sharon R. Cohany, and Steven Hipple, “Definition, Composition, and Economic Consequences of the Nonstandard Workforce,” in Françoise Carré, Marianne A. Ferber, Lonnie Golden, and Stephen A. Herzenberg, eds., *Nonstandard Work: The Nature and Challenges of Changing Employment Arrangements* (Champaign, IL, Industrial Relations Research Association, 2000), pp. 41–94.