



## Program on Gender, Work & Family

*"Reshaping the workplace  
around the values people hold  
in family life."*

### FAIR TREATMENT FOR PART-TIME WORKERS

**Many women work far less than a full-time schedule.** Seventy percent of the part-time workforce is female, compared to 44 percent of the full-time workforce. Motherhood is the reason for much of this part-time work: 85 percent of women become mothers during their working lives, and two out of three mothers work less than 40 hours per week during their key career-building years. Recent studies also show that 51 percent of mothers working full-time, as well as 52 percent of mothers not working at all, would rather be working part-time.

**Many other constituencies also depend on part-time work.** Seniors who wish to continue working after retirement but who are limited by health concerns often seek part-time positions. Among workers 65 and older, nearly one-half of employed men and 60 percent of employed women work part-time. Similarly, part-time work is an important option for individuals with disabilities who are unable to work a full-time schedule. Workers who care for elderly family members also find that part-time work is often their only option to balance their job with caregiving responsibilities.

**Part-time work carries hidden penalties for workers.** Part-time workers not only tend to earn lower wages when performing the same work as full-time workers, but also are excluded from important benefits such as health insurance, pensions, sick leave, and unemployment insurance. Part-time workers also face a "glass ceiling" for career opportunities, as they are seen as less committed to employment and therefore less deserving of good assignments, training and promotions. However, many individuals who work part-time do not lack commitment or see work as "optional." Rather they may be unable to find full-time work, they may suffer from a physical or mental impairment that renders them unable to work full-time hours, or they may need to balance work with family care responsibilities.

**Part-time parity would provide important benefits for these workers.** Parity for part-time workers would guarantee that someone who works 75 percent of a full schedule would earn 75 percent of the pay of a full-time worker, as well as pro-rated benefits and opportunities for advancement. This would ensure that part-time workers -- many of whom are the most vulnerable in the job market -- are not unfairly penalized based on their part-time status. Part-time parity could also be combined with tax breaks to encourage employers to provide full health benefits.

**THE PROGRAM ON GENDER, WORK & FAMILY** is a research and advocacy organization, based at American University, Washington College of Law, that seeks to restructure the workplace around the values held in family life. Please visit our website at <http://www.wcl.american.edu/gender/workfamily> for more information about the program.

<sup>1</sup> Vicky Lovell and Catherine Hill, "Today's Women Workers: Shut Out of Yesterday's Unemployment Insurance System" (Washington DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Joan Williams, *Unbending Gender: Why Work and Family Conflict and What To Do About It* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>3</sup>"Mother's Work Status Preferences" (Sloan Foundation 2002, forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> American Association of Retired Persons, "Beyond 50: Report to the Nation on Economic Security" (Washington DC: AARP, May 2001), <http://www.aarp.org/beyond50/2001home.html>.

