

High Satisfaction Among Mothers Who Work Part-time

Both unions and employers often argue for the implementation of full-time employment on the grounds that this alternative can provide men as well as women with sufficient income. For unions and employers, full-time employment also appears to be the easiest alternative for the organisation of business activities. However, in Germany, nearly 30% of all women, particularly women who are also mothers, are employed part-time. As will be shown in this report, the life satisfaction of mothers in the years after the birth of a child is especially high when they return to part-time employment following the birth. These findings are based on data from the Socio-economic Panel, which is conducted by the German Institute for Economic Research Berlin in conjunction with Infratest Social Research.

The birth of the first child is almost always accompanied by an increase in the life satisfaction of mothers. However, this positive effect seldom persists in the long term. One year later, the life satisfaction of mothers has already declined. In comparison with non-employed and full-time-employed mothers, mothers who work part-time are the most satisfied. In contrast, mothers who work full-time are the least satisfied with their lives. With an additional birth, life satisfaction is generally lower than after the first birth, particularly for mothers who are employed full-time. In East Germany, mothers are considerably less satisfied with their lives than in West Germany.

In this report, it will become apparent that Germany is still not oriented to the equal participation of mothers and fathers in work and family. For a modern family policy to be successful, it must be formulated within the framework of equal opportunity policy.

Life satisfaction after birth

After the birth of the first child, the self-reported life satisfaction (cf. box) of women is considerably higher than prior to the birth (cf. figure 1). In the long run, however, the positive attitude to life does not remain at this high level. As mothers cope with their new situation, they frequently need to deal with challenges that can negatively impact their level of life satisfaction.¹

The life satisfaction of mothers is in fact already lower in the year following the first birth. Two years afterwards most mothers are even less satisfied than in

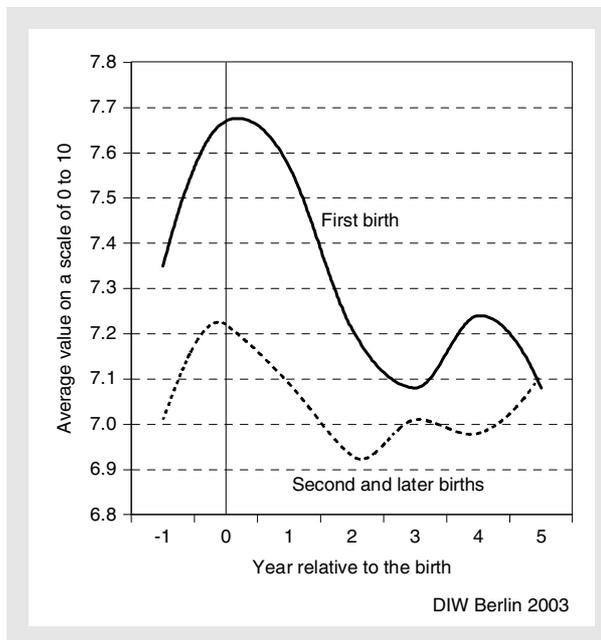
the year prior to the birth. In the third year, a temporary low point in life satisfaction is finally reached. These findings indicate that the changed circumstances after the birth of the first child are very burdensome for mothers.

In the year before and in the first year after a birth, mothers who give birth to a second child are considerably less satisfied with their life than are first-time mothers. Changes over time in life satisfaction after the second birth are, however, less marked than after the first birth. By the third year after the birth, life satisfaction has already increased; by the fifth year, it is even higher than in the year prior to the birth and approximately equal to the life satisfaction reported by mothers five years after the first birth.

Frequent reduction in hours or withdrawal from the labour market after the birth of a child

Balancing work and family responsibilities is a large problem, especially for mothers. A number of different

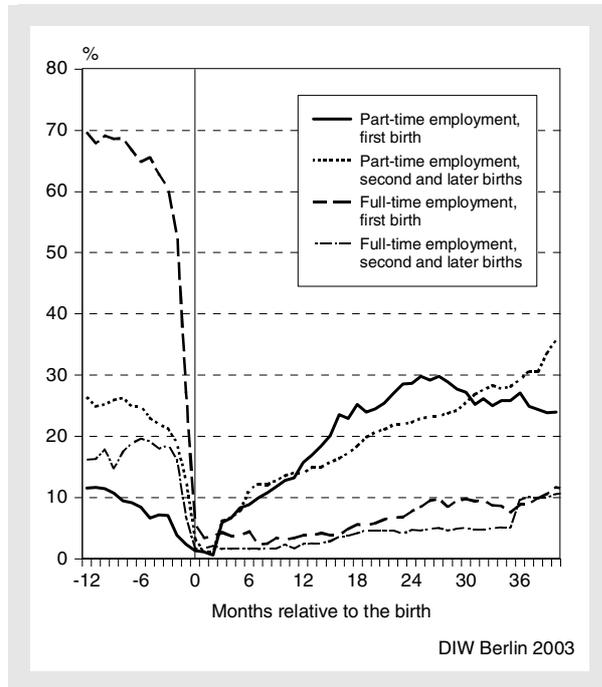
Figure 1
Life Satisfaction of Women, by Birth Number
Births, 1992 to 1998, weighted results



Sources: SOEP; DIW Berlin calculations.

¹ For information on the partnership problems that appear after the first birth, see Wassilios E. Fthenakis, Bernhard Kalicki and Gabriele Peitz: 'Paare werden Eltern. Die Ergebnisse der LBS-Familien-Studie.' Opladen 2002.

Figure 2
**Employment Patterns of Women
 Before and After Birth**
 Births, 1992 to 1998, weighted results



Sources: SOEP; DIW Berlin calculations.

strategies exist: work in the labour market can be given up completely, hours of work can be cut back, or work can be continued at the same level as before. In Germany, the employment pattern of women after the birth of a child corresponds – as in the past – to a traditional role model (cf. figure 2). Before the first birth, most women work full-time. In the first months following the birth, almost all mothers interrupt their labour market participation. Afterwards only some of the women return to paid employment, with most of these women returning to part-time rather than to full-time employment.² In the years immediately following the birth, full-time work is seldom the alternative chosen by mothers. Changes in the labour market status of women are found most notably in the periods surrounding the first birth. More than four-fifths of all mothers have a different labour market status three years after the birth of the first child than in the year prior to the birth. For mothers who give birth to a second or later child there are fewer changes in employment behaviour.³ This finding indicates that after the second birth more traditional roles in the household are more strongly brought into play.⁴

² Men, however, work more after the birth. See Fthenakis et al., op. cit.

The life satisfaction of mothers is next compared over time on the basis of these three labour market strategies – full-time, part-time, and non-employment. The third year after the birth is used as the reference point for the employment strategy chosen by the mother after the birth.⁵ Following the first birth, life satisfaction levels for employed and non-employed mothers largely show similar patterns of change. Life satisfaction climbs in the year after the birth, but then sinks again (cf. figure 3). Clear differences exist, however, in the levels of life satisfaction. Mothers who work part-time are far more satisfied than are mothers in the other two groups. This result is in accord with the 'modernised breadwinner model',⁶ which enables women to combine work and family responsibilities through reduced labour market participation – without changing the traditional division of responsibilities within the household. Non-employed mothers are less satisfied with their life than are women who work part-time. The least satisfied are full-time-employed 'new' mothers. The difference between them and mothers who work part-time is especially wide. On average, mothers still have lower levels of life satisfaction five years after the birth than in the year before the birth – this result holds for all mothers, regardless of whether they are working full-time, part-time, or not at all in the labour market.

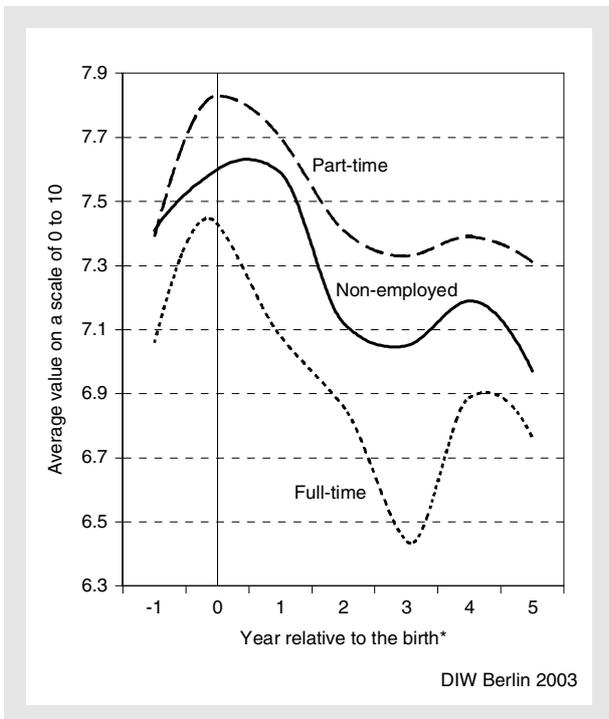
³ Only one-tenth of all women are employed full-time both in the year before and in the third year after the first birth; less than 4% are employed part-time and only 3% are not employed in both periods. Among mothers who bear another child, 54% are in the same activity status before and after the birth: 35% are not employed both before and after the second birth; 4% are employed full-time and 15% are employed part-time both before and after the second or higher order birth. For more information on the labour market status of mothers before and after the birth of a child, see also Petra Beckmann and Beate Kurtz: 'Erwerbstätigkeit von Frauen. Die Betreuung der Kinder ist der Schlüssel.' *IAB Kurzbericht*, no. 10/2001. Nürnberg 2001; Walter Bien and Jan H. Marbach (eds.): 'Partnerschaft und Familiengründung. Ergebnisse der dritten Welle des Familien-Survey.' Opladen 2003.

⁴ The same result was also found by Fthenakis et al., op. cit.

⁵ Parental leave (*Erziehungsurlaub*), which is the dominant employment status for women following the birth of the first child, also expires after three years.

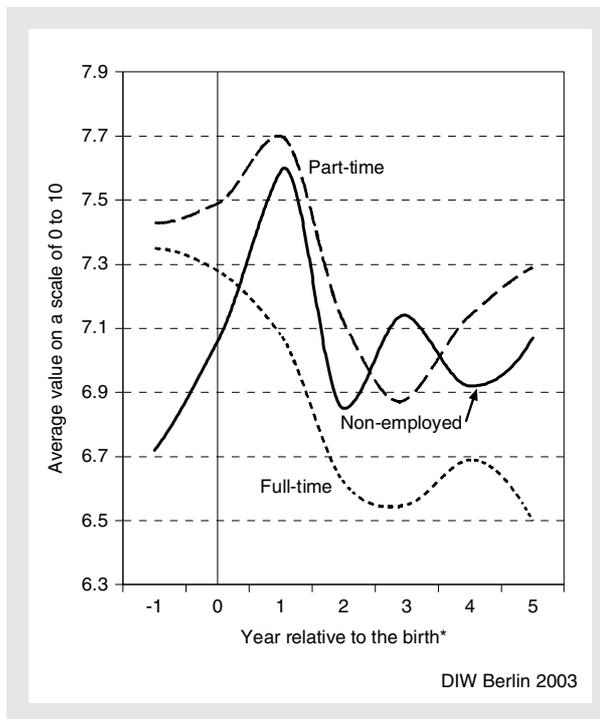
⁶ In this wide-spread model, which is also referred to today as the 'Reconciliation Model of the Breadwinner Marriage', the husband is employed full-time and the wife is engaged in part-time employment. In the previously dominant single-earner model, a rigid division of work in the household prevails; the husband works full-time in the market, while the wife specialises in home production and is not employed in the labour market. For more a more detailed discussion of the 'Reconciliation Model of the Breadwinner Marriage', see Birgit Pfau-Effinger: 'Arbeitsmarkt- und Familiendynamik in Europa – Theoretische Grundlagen der vergleichenden Analyse.' In: Birgit Geissler, Friederike Maier and Birgit Pfau-Effinger (eds.): 'FrauenArbeitsMarkt – Der Beitrag der Frauenforschung zur sozioökonomischen Theorieentwicklung.' *SAMF-Reihe Sozialwissenschaftliche Arbeitsmarktforschung*. NF, issue 6. Berlin 1998, pp. 177-194.

Figure 3
**Life Satisfaction of Women,
 by Employment Status**
 First birth, 1992 to 1998, weighted results



* Reference employment status: three years after the birth.
 Sources: SOEP; DIW Berlin calculations.

Figure 4
**Life Satisfaction of Mothers,
 by Employment Status**
 Second and later births, 1992 to 1998, weighted results



* Reference employment status: three years after the birth.
 Sources: SOEP; DIW Berlin calculations.

After the birth of a second or later child, women who work part-time are also more satisfied than non-employed mothers, who in turn are more satisfied than mothers who work full-time (cf. figure 4). In contrast to the pattern following the birth of the first child, however, life satisfaction for non-employed mothers begins to climb considerably in the very first year after the birth. It is striking that women in this group were considerably less satisfied with their lives in the year prior to the birth than were women in full-time employment. Apparently the difficulties and burdens experienced by the mother prior to the birth of the second child lessen to a certain degree after the child is born. In the second year after the birth, the life satisfaction is lower than in the previous year; however, it remains higher than in the year before the birth. This pattern continues in the third year following the birth. In contrast, the life satisfaction of mothers who are employed full-time declines in the same year as the birth of a second or later child occurs. Although mothers who work part-time at least exhibit a higher level of satisfaction in the year after the birth, the life satisfaction of full-time-employed mothers declines and remains at a low level.

Higher levels of education important for life satisfaction

Even after other variables, such as age, family status, education, household income, and region (east versus west Germany), are controlled for, the employment status of mothers continues to exert a strong influence on life satisfaction. Three years after the birth of a child, mothers in Germany who are employed full-time report lower levels of life satisfaction than do mothers who work part-time or who are not employed. In addition, first-time mothers are more satisfied than mothers who bear a second or later child. The negative influence of full-time work is exactly as large the positive influence of being married. The analysis also underscores the importance of a higher level of education; however, this result is especially noteworthy only in west Germany. Furthermore, household income has a significant positive effect – additional financial resources apparently provide flexible assistance in household and family work.

As in the past, women in east Germany have a higher attachment to the labour market than do women

Table

Factors that influence the life satisfaction of mothers three years after the birth of a child

Births between 1992 and 1998

	Germany	West Germany	East Germany
Education (in years)	0.052**	0.057**	0.020
Age	-0.088	-0.228**	0.277
Age ²	0.001	0.004***	-0.004
Married	0.488*	0.746*	0.066
Religion ¹			
Protestant	-0.149	-0.275***	0.007
Catholic	0.090	-0.007	0.552
Moslem	-0.615	-0.743	-0.670
Ln (Household income/ 10 000)	0.324*	0.355*	0.122
Lives in east Germany ²	-0.550*		
First birth ³	0.209***	0.176	0.374
Labour market status three years after the birth ⁴			
Non-employed	-0.023	0.084	-0.525***
Unemployed	-0.303***	0.271	-0.585***
Employed full-time	-0.473*	-0.407**	-0.767**
Memo item:			
Constant	6.997	8.916	2.012
Number of cases	930	710	220
Adjusted R ²	0.087	0.065	0.058

Significance: * ≤ 0.01; ** ≤ 0.05; *** ≤ 0.10.

¹ Reference group: other. — ² Reference group: lives in West Germany. —

³ Reference group: second and later births. — ⁴ Reference group: employed part-time.

Sources: SOEP; DIW Berlin calculations.

in west Germany.⁷ Finally, with the background of the difficult labour market situation in east Germany, the life satisfaction of mothers is generally considerably lower in east than in west Germany. Mothers who work part-time are – as in west Germany – the most satisfied with their life; non-employed and unemployed mothers are significantly less satisfied. Particularly dramatic is the strong negative effect of full-time employment. Marital status (married) has moreover no significant effect; in

⁷ Cf. 'Arbeitsmarkt 2002'. In: *Amtliche Nachrichten der Bundesanstalt für Arbeit*, vol. 51, special edition, 2003, p. 35 ff.; with specific reference to mothers: Felix Büchel and C. Katharina Spieß: 'Form der Kinderbetreuung und Arbeitsmarktverhalten von Müttern in West- und Ostdeutschland.' *Schriftenreihe des Bundesministeriums für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend*, issue 220. Stuttgart 2002 (www.diw.de/deutsch/publikationen/forschungsergebnisse/docs/diw_kinderbetreuung_arbeitsmarktverhalten.pdf).

west Germany, the influence of this variable is very high and considerably stronger than the effect of full-time work.

Background conditions

With regard to subjective life satisfaction, the results presented here seem to suggest that under the current conditions, job opportunities in part-time employment are preferred over full-time opportunities by young mothers who are raising children. Naturally these results cannot predict how mothers would assess their life satisfaction under a different set of conditions for combining work and family.

For mothers, the first years after the birth are tied up with major challenges, although leave from work in the form of parental leave – now referred to as time for parents (*Elternzeit*) – is intended at least to provide support for the less strongly employment-oriented mothers. It is, however, necessary to consider the possibility that many mothers suffer under the loss of employment.⁸ Continued employment is difficult, however, because caring for a small child is especially complicated and costly. In Germany, women are frequently unable to find suitable childcare. Most notably in west Germany, the availability of childcare places for infants is inadequate. This situation does not improve until the child's third year, when the age for kindergarten is reached.⁹ At this age, most children can find a childcare place; however a shortage continues to exist in the availability of full-day childcare slots. In the case of half-day childcare places lunch is often not provided. Mothers who work in full-time employment are especially dependent on well-functioning and flexible childcare arrangements.

The results presented here show that above all women who want or need to work full-time must frequently expect to encounter major challenges if they decide to have children. They are often forced to make the choice between 'Child' and 'Career'. In many cases, the two strategies of postponing of childbearing until such time as 'secure' labour market integration is achieved and the alternative of childlessness appear to be strategies of conflict resolution.¹⁰

Declining birthrates and the major population declines that are expected to occur at the latest by 2030 have focused attention on this problem. In international research studies, fertility rates are more and more frequently considered in conjunction with conditions that

⁸ Cf. Fthenaiks et al, loc. cit.

⁹ Cf. Felix Büchel and C. Katharina Spieß, loc. cit.

¹⁰ See also the results of the new family survey of the DJI: Walter Bien and Jan H. Marbach (eds.), loc. cit.

surround women's labour force participation.¹¹ The hindrances that create obstacles to the combination of family and work are viewed as important causes of the low fertility rates.

For many years, most of the western industrialised countries have registered declining birthrates (cf. figure 5). In contrast, countries that have explicitly promoted labour market participation by women, particularly mothers – for example, Finland, Denmark, and France – exhibit higher or even rising fertility rates in many cases. However, in countries that cut back their social welfare system – such as Sweden in the first half of the 1990s, fertility declined again. Particularly striking are the persistently low fertility rates in countries with strongly traditional gender-specific role patterns – for example, Italy, Spain and Greece.

(West) Germany is often viewed as a conservative welfare state that is based on the principle of subsidiarity that relegates women to unpaid labour in the family.¹² The provision of public services, for example, full-day child care facilities, is correspondingly underdeveloped. The provision of these kinds of services could contribute to a reduction in the stress facing women and to a freer and less restricted decision for women concerning entry into employment and the conditions of this employment. With a fertility rate of 1.3 children per woman in the year 2000, Germany belongs to the same group as Greece, Italy and Austria at the lower end of the scale (Spain is lowest with 1.2 children per woman). In west Germany, the increase in the proportion of women who are childless is a long-standing phenomenon. Among women born in 1965, almost a third remain childless (in east Germany, the proportion is approximately one quarter).¹³ Alarmingly, it appears that most notably women with an academical education (*Fach-/Hochschulausbildung*) live in a childless household (over four tenths). 'Apparently under the current conditions, more highly qualified women find it especially difficult to combine their career demands and ambitions with the needs and expectations of motherhood.'¹⁴ Although mothers who work part-time after the birth of a child are in general more satisfied than other mothers, it appears that many other women – particularly highly qualified women – do not view this form of combining work and family as an attractive arrangement for their lives.

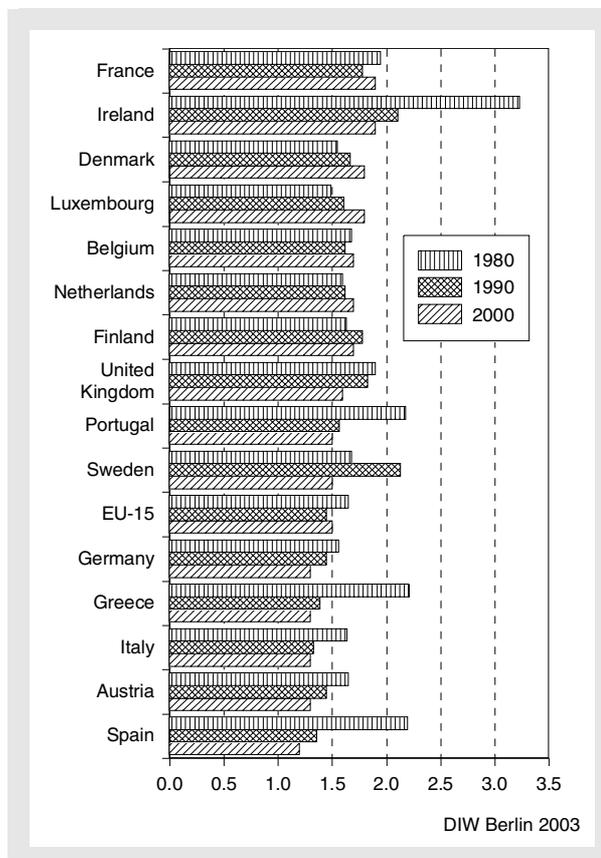
¹¹ Cf. for instance OECD: 'Balancing Work and Family Life: Helping Parents into Paid Employment'. In: OECD Employment Outlook. Paris, Juni 2001, pp. 127-164.

¹² Gosta Esping-Andersen: 'The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism.' Princeton, N.J. 1990, p. 224.

¹³ Cf. Heribert Engstler and Sonja Menning: 'Die Familie im Spiegel der amtlichen Statistik.' Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend. Extended new edition. Bonn 2003, p. 73.

¹⁴ Heribert Engstler and Sonja Menning, loc. cit., p. 76.

Figure 5
Development of Total Fertility Rates
in the 15 EU Countries, 1980, 1990, 2000



Source: European Commission: 'The European Observatory on the Social Situation, Demography and Family.' Brussels, July 2003 (www.europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/eoss/selectstatcountry_en.html); Office for Official Publications of the European Communities: 'The life of women and men in Europe – A statistical portrait.' Luxembourg 2002; own presentation.

Economic and social policy consequences

Analyses of the life satisfaction of mothers suggest that women, especially those who want or need to work full-time, must frequently confront the decision on 'Child or Career' as a result of the anticipated challenges and demands that result when work and childbearing responsibilities are combined. The declining birthrate can be viewed as an expression of the results of this dilemma. The most recent policy initiatives in Germany concentrate on the combination of work and family by means of reduced labour market participation. For example, the most important feature of the law regulating the provision of parental benefits and parental leave (time for parents)¹⁵ is the legal right to part-time work

¹⁵ Cf. Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (ed.): 'Erziehungsgeld.' Bonn 2001.

Database and definition

This report examines the life satisfaction of mothers in Germany before and after the birth of a child. The goal is to determine the subjective stress and strain associated with a birth and to examine to what extent life satisfaction over this period depends on employment status. The data source for the analysis is the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP).¹

At the centre of the analysis are mothers with German nationality, who bore a child in the time period 1992 to 1998. Their life satisfaction is analysed a year before and three to five years after the birth. The level of life satisfaction is based on the question: "Finally, we would like to ask about your overall level of life satisfaction. Please answer again according to the following scale, '0' means completely and totally dissatisfied; '10' means completely and totally satisfied. How satisfied are

you at the present time, all things considered, with your life?" The answers are evaluated as the average value of the 11-point scale.² The bases of the analysis are 765 births observed in the survey, of which 329 were first births³ and 436 second or later births. The employment status of the mother, that is, full- or part-time employment as well as non-employment, is based on the employment status given by the mother in the survey interview that occurred in the third year after the birth of a child.

¹ Cf. SOEP Group: 'The German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP) after more than 15 years – Overview.' In: Elke Holst, Dean R. Lillard and Thomas A. DiPrete (eds.): 'Proceedings of the 2000 Fourth International Conference of German Socio-Economic Panel Study Users (GSOEP2000).' In: *Vierteljahrshefte zur Wirtschaftsforschung*, vol. 70, no. 1, 2002, pp. 7–14.

² Such specifications have been used not only in psychology, but also increasingly in economic research. See, e.g. Richard E. Lucas et al.: 'Reexamining Adaption and the Set Point Model of Happiness: Reactions to Changes in Marital Status.' In: *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 84, no. 3, 2003, pp. 527–539; Alois Stutzer and Bruno S. Frey: 'Does Marriage Make People Happy, Or Do Happy People Get Married?' *Working Paper*, no. 143. University of Zurich 2003; Bruno S. Frey and Alois Stutzer: 'What Can Economists Learn from Happiness Research?' In: *Journal of Economic Literature*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2002, pp. 402–435.

³ This group contains also contains mothers who bore another child within five years of the first birth.

during the period of parental leave; the part-time work law, which was also enacted on 1 January 2001¹⁶ follows the same approach.¹⁷ It is questionable whether these changes will lead to realisation of the desire for children among highly educated, employed, but childless women. It is also doubtful that such measures will lead to increases in the life satisfaction of women who intend to be employed full-time after the birth of a child.

Today, most women in Germany want to be employed.¹⁸ However, the country is not yet prepared for the equal participation of women and men, mothers and fathers in work in the market and in the household. As in the past, women bear the primary responsibility for household and family work. The relative lack of sat-

isfaction of women who work full-time indicates that a reduction in the stresses they face is urgently needed.

Equal opportunity for women and men requires that full-time-employed mothers must also be able to accommodate work and family without facing large trade-offs. In order to accomplish this goal, substantial efforts are required. These include both improvements in the opportunities for women in the economy and relief from stresses of family obligations through greater involvement of the partner and improvements in the state incentive system and the basic conditions affecting work and family issues. If a modern family policy is to be successful, it must be formulated within the framework of equal opportunity policy.

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¹⁶ See: Elke Holst and Jürgen Schupp: 'Förderung von Teilzeitarbeit durch gesetzlichen Rechtsanspruch – Reform oder Hindernis für mehr Beschäftigung?' In: *Wochenbericht des DIW Berlin*, no. 49/2000, pp. 825–832.

¹⁷ A discussion of both initiatives is found in Elisabeth Haines: 'Grußwort des Bundesministeriums für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend.' In: Jürgen Dorbritz and Johannes Otto (eds.): 'Familienpolitik und Familienstrukturen: Ergebnisse der gemeinsamen Jahrestagung der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Bevölkerungswissenschaft und der Johann-Peter-Süßmilch-Gesellschaft für Demographie.' Berlin, 21 to 23 June 2001. In: *Materialien zur Bevölkerungswissenschaft des Bundesinstituts für Bevölkerungsforschung*, issue 108. Wiesbaden 2003.

¹⁸ The tendency for women to be employed in Germany continues to increase.

The female employment rate in Germany in 2002 was 64%; five years before, the rate was 62.8%. Cf. 'Arbeitsmarkt 2002', loc. cit., p. 35 and p. 41.