

Voluntary Part-Time Employment and the Affordable Care Act: What Do Workers Do With Their Extra Time?

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Executive Summary

The main purpose of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) was to extend health insurance coverage to more individuals. Another potential benefit of the ACA, however, was to free up workers to find jobs that better fit their needs, by ending their dependence on employer-provided health insurance. There is considerable evidence indicating that before the implementation of the ACA, many workers stayed in jobs that they otherwise would have left solely because they needed the health insurance provided by the employer. This was likely to be especially true of workers with children, workers who either have a disability or have a family member with a disability, and older workers. By increasing access to insurance outside of employment, either through Medicaid or the health care exchanges, the ACA made it easier for workers to get jobs that better fit their needs.

There was a substantial increase in voluntary part-time employment in the years immediately after the main provisions of the ACA took effect, which is evidence of this effect on the labor market. The rise in voluntary part-time employment was largest among young people and was especially pronounced for young women.

This study uses data from the American Time Use Survey (ATUS) to assess how people voluntarily employed part-time use the time freed up from work. The ATUS relies on detailed time diaries compiled by respondents to determine how people use their time.

It found:

- Voluntary part-time workers in the youngest age group (ages 15–24) worked roughly 3.5 hours less per day than full-timers. For the men in this group, the extra time was roughly evenly split between leisure activities and personal care (mostly sleep). Women in this age group used the bulk of their additional time for leisure activities.
- Voluntary part-time women between ages 25–34 worked, on average, about 2.5 hours less per day than full-timers. Almost half of the time freed up was devoted to caring for family members, mostly children. Part-timers also spent substantially more time on education.
- Women ages 35–44 who worked part-time voluntarily put in almost 2.0 hours less each day working than full-timers. The largest chunk of their extra time, about 40 minutes, went to caring for children.

- There was almost a 3.5-hour difference in work time between full-time workers and those working part-time voluntarily for women between ages 45–54. The largest single use of this free time was leisure which accounted for 67 extra minutes a day on average. Household work accounted for another 53 extra minutes a day on average, with an additional 32 minutes spent on the care of household members.
- There was a gap of over 2.5 hours a day in time spent on work between full-time workers and those working part-time voluntarily for women ages 55–64. Household activities accounted for the largest portion of this time at 52 minutes a day. Leisure activities accounted for an additional 32 minutes and personal care for 22 minutes per day.

On the whole, it seems the biggest labor market impact of the ACA was allowing more young women to work part-time. This gave them the opportunity to spend more time caring for children and pursuing their education.

Introduction

An important, but largely overlooked, benefit of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) was to mitigate the effect of some forms of “job-lock” in the labor market. Job-lock is the situation in which a worker stays at an unsatisfactory job. One reason might be that they don’t want to risk losing their employer-provided health insurance. This is generally viewed as being a more serious problem among workers with children, older workers, and workers who either have a serious medical condition themselves or have a family member with a medical condition.¹

One issue related to job-lock is the situation of “hours mismatch,” in which the forces of job availability require a worker to work a number of hours which is different than their ideal. An especially important type of mismatch is where a worker takes on more working hours than they desire, especially those who work full-time hours when they prefer to work part-time. One reason this type of mismatch may occur is so a worker can qualify for employer-provided health care insurance which is available only to full-time workers. This is likely to be more impactful for the parents of young children, as well as older workers who find it difficult to work a full-time job.

By allowing workers to get more affordable insurance plans through the exchanges or get covered through Medicaid, the ACA reduced the extent to which workers may have felt dependent on their employer for health insurance. As a result, there was a large increase in voluntary part-time employment after the main provisions of the ACA went into effect in 2014.²

This paper takes advantage of the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ American Time Use Survey (ATUS) to analyze the difference in time-use between full-time and part-time workers, particularly among the demographic groups seeing the largest rise in part-time employment since the ACA was fully implemented. In effect, we are trying to answer the question of what the one million additional workers who chose to work part-time did with their extra time.

1 See, e.g. Garthwaite et al. (2013); Ceballos (2011); and Gruber and Madrian (2002).

2 Baker and Bucknor (2015).

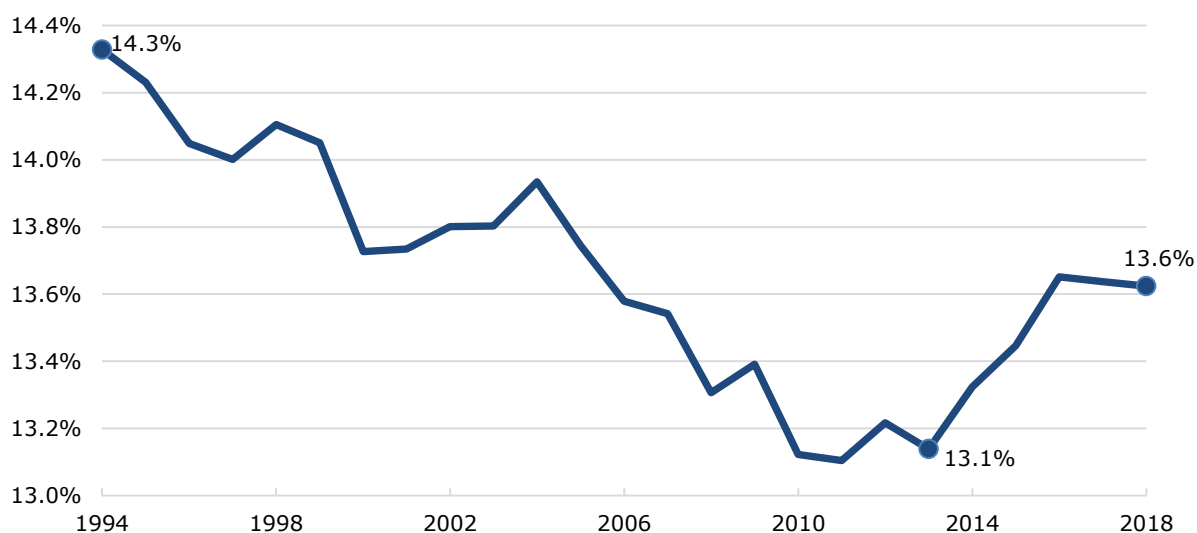
Trends in Part-Time Employment

In the years before the ACA was fully implemented there had been a slight downward trend in the percentage of the workforce that chose to work part-time. Voluntary part-time workers — who are defined as those workers who work less than full-time by choice, rather than those who are part-time for economic reasons (meaning that they would like to have a full-time job but could only find part-time work) — had accounted for 14.3 percent of total employment in 1994, the first year after the Current Population Survey (CPS) was redesigned.³ It had fallen to 13.5 percent by 2007, on the eve of the Great Recession.⁴ The number continued to edge downward, falling to 13.1 percent in 2013. This trend reversed with the ACA taking full effect. The share of voluntary part-time workers rose to 13.3 percent in 2014 and continued to rise in subsequent years, hitting 13.6 percent in 2017 and the first three months of 2018.

It is reasonable to believe that the downward trend would have continued had it not been for the ACA. If the decline had continued to follow its pre-2013 course, voluntary part-time employment would account for 12.9 percent of total employment in 2018. This pattern is shown in **Figure 1**. The difference of 0.7 percentage points between the actual number for 2017 and the continuation of the pre-2013 trend corresponds to more than 1.1 million more people voluntarily working part-time.

FIGURE 1

Voluntary Part-time Employment as a Share of Total Employment



Source and notes: Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018a).

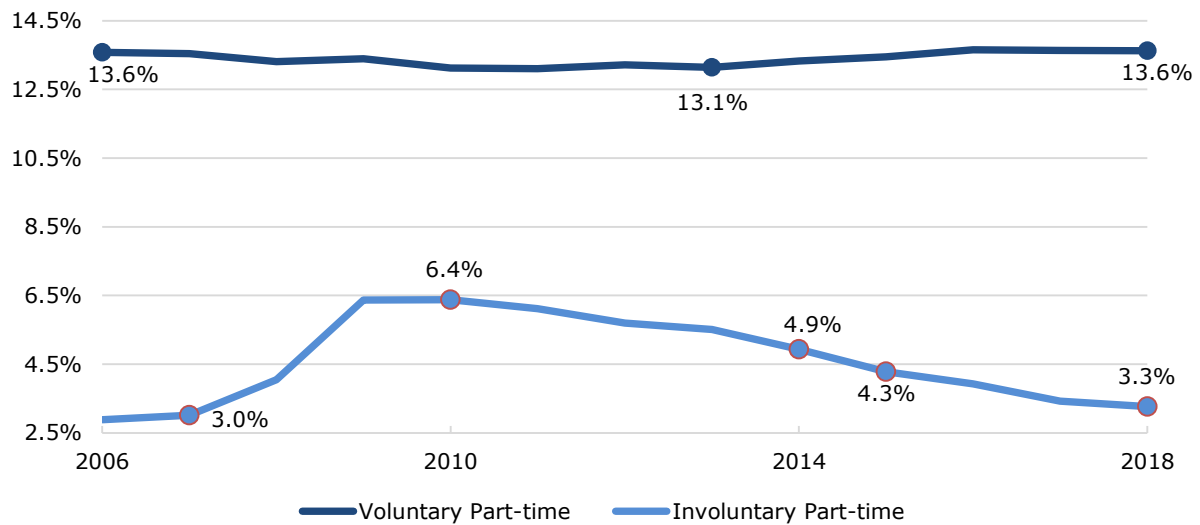
3 “Voluntary part-time” refers to people who report they are working part-time for non-economic reasons. This decision may not be entirely voluntary, since it may be due to factors like unavailability of child care or the need to care for another family member in bad health.

4 These data are taken from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018a).

The rise in voluntary part-time employment also coincided with a sharp decline in the percentage of the workforce that reported they were working part-time for economic reasons. The share of involuntary part-time in total employment had jumped from 2.9 percent in 2007 to 6.4 percent in 2009 and 2010, at the nadir of the Great Recession. The share had edged down to 5.5 percent by 2013 and then fell to 4.9 percent in 2014 and 4.3 percent in 2015. The 2.9 percent level for July of 2018 is back to the prerecession level. The changes in the shares of voluntary and involuntary part-time employment around the implementation of the ACA are shown in **Figure 2**.

FIGURE 2

Voluntary and Involuntary Part-time Employment as a Share of Total Employment



Source and notes: Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018a).

There is a plausible story in which these two trends could be linked. As workers voluntarily left full-time jobs for part-time jobs, since they no longer needed health insurance through their employer, they opened up more full-time positions for people who previously could only find part-time work but needed full-time employment. It would require further research to determine whether the rise in voluntary part-time contributed to the sharp drop in involuntary part-time employment, but the timing is notable.

The Composition of the New Voluntary Part-Time Workforce

Table 1 shows the trends in voluntary part-time employment and the changes from 2013 to 2017, by age group and for young women (ages 16–35) with and without children, and those with children ages 0–2 years.

The age group with the largest increase in part-time employment are those workers ages 16–35. Voluntary part-time employment increased as a share of total employment for this group by 0.50 percentage points, an increase of 2.9 percent. Measured as a share of the whole group (the non-institutionalized civilian population, not just the employed), voluntary part-time increased by 1.01 percentage points, which is 9.4 percent higher. This is arguably the more relevant measure since it shows the importance of the change in voluntary part-time employment to the demographic group as a whole. The rise in voluntary part-time employment was especially large among younger workers, in part because they had seen the largest fall in employment during the downturn. This jump in employment for young workers between 2013 and 2017 dilutes the impact of the increase in voluntary part-time employment among this group. The trends in voluntary part-time are shown expressed both as a share of total employment and the group as a whole for each category.

Measured as a share of employment, the increase in voluntary part-time employment is somewhat larger for men than women: 0.56 percentage points for men, compared to 0.43 percentage points for women. However, as a share of the group, voluntary part-time employment increased more for young women than young men: 1.18 percentage points for women, compared to 0.85 percentage points for men. In terms of percent change, men experienced a 4.54 percent increase in voluntary part-time work and women experienced a 1.76 percent increase as a share of those employed. This corresponds to an 8.9 percent increase for women and a 10.4 percent change for men in terms of the total in the age group. It is likely that more women than men were already in this group, accounting for women's relatively smaller percent change but larger percentage point change.

Surprisingly, there was not much difference in the increase for women without children and women with children, with the share rising 1.09 percentage points (7.5 percent) for women without children and 0.97 percentage points (8.8 percent) for women with children. If the group is restricted to women with children ages 0–2 years old, the increase in shares is 1.1 percentage points (9.6 percent).

TABLE 1

Change in Voluntary Part-time Employment by Demographic Group

(percent and percentage points)

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Difference, 2017–2013
Age 16+									
Total, share of employed	13.1	13.1	13.2	13.2	13.4	13.5	13.7	13.7	0.49
Total, share of group	7.7	7.7	7.7	7.7	7.9	8.0	8.2	8.2	0.50
Men, share of employed	8.0	8.1	8.3	8.2	8.3	8.4	8.8	8.8	0.56
Men, share of group	5.1	5.2	5.3	5.3	5.4	5.5	5.8	5.8	0.51
Women, share of employed	18.9	18.9	18.8	18.8	19.1	19.2	19.3	19.2	0.43
Women, share of group	10.1	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.2	10.3	10.4	10.5	0.50
Ages 16–35									
Total, share of employed	17.2	17.5	17.7	17.3	17.7	17.7	17.7	17.8	0.50
Total, share of group	10.4	10.6	10.9	10.7	11.1	11.3	11.5	11.7	1.01
Men, share of employed	12.2	12.3	12.6	12.3	12.4	12.7	12.9	12.9	0.56
Men, share of group	7.8	8.0	8.2	8.2	8.4	8.6	8.9	9.0	0.85
Women, share of employed	22.7	23.4	23.5	22.8	23.6	23.3	23.1	23.2	0.40
Women, share of group	13.1	13.3	13.5	13.3	13.9	14.0	14.1	14.4	1.18
Ages 16–35 with and without children									
Women without children, share of employed	25.6	26.2	26.4	25.2	26.0	25.9	25.1	25.3	0.06
Women without children, share of group	14.6	14.9	15.0	14.5	15.2	15.4	15.1	15.6	1.09
Women with children, share of employed	18.4	19.0	18.7	18.6	19.4	18.8	19.2	19.0	0.31
Women with children, share of group	10.7	10.9	11.0	11.0	11.7	11.5	12.0	12.0	0.97
Women with children 0–2, share of employed	20.7	21.3	20.7	20.8	21.7	20.4	21.2	21.3	0.53
Women with children 0–2, share of group	11.3	11.3	11.2	11.5	12.2	11.7	12.4	12.6	1.10
Ages 36–45									
Total, share of employed	8.1	7.8	7.7	7.8	7.9	8.1	8.1	7.8	-0.04
Total, share of group	6.2	6.0	5.9	6.0	6.2	6.4	6.4	6.2	0.16
Men, share of employed	2.3	2.3	2.4	2.4	2.6	2.8	2.7	2.8	0.40
Men, share of group	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.1	2.3	2.4	2.4	2.5	0.41
Women, share of employed	14.9	14.2	13.9	14.1	14.1	14.3	14.4	13.5	-0.63
Women, share of group	10.4	9.9	9.7	9.9	10.0	10.2	10.3	9.8	-0.09
Ages 46–55									
Total, share of employed	7.8	7.6	7.6	7.6	7.5	7.8	7.9	7.9	0.25
Total, share of group	5.8	5.7	5.7	5.7	5.6	5.9	6.1	6.1	0.40
Men, share of employed	2.7	2.7	2.8	2.7	2.8	2.9	3.0	3.1	0.34
Men, share of group	2.1	2.1	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.4	2.5	2.6	0.37
Women, share of employed	13.3	13.0	12.8	13.0	12.7	13.3	13.4	13.3	0.28
Women, share of group	9.3	9.1	8.9	9.0	8.9	9.3	9.5	9.5	0.46
Ages 56–64									
Total, share of employed	12.0	11.8	11.4	11.2	11.4	11.5	11.7	11.6	0.38
Total, share of group	7.2	7.1	6.9	6.8	7.0	7.1	7.2	7.2	0.42
Men, share of employed	6.9	6.6	6.6	6.2	6.2	6.2	6.7	6.5	0.32
Men, share of group	4.4	4.2	4.3	4.1	4.1	4.2	4.5	4.4	0.37
Women, share of employed	17.5	17.5	16.7	16.6	17.2	17.3	17.2	17.2	0.56
Women, share of group	9.9	9.8	9.4	9.4	9.7	9.8	9.7	9.8	0.48

Source and notes: Authors' calculations and analysis of the Current Population Survey (2018).

There was little increase in the share of voluntary part-time employment for the 36–45 age cohort. For the group as a whole, the increase was just 0.16 percentage points (2.7 percent change). The increase for men in this age group was 0.41 percentage points, an increase of 19.7 percent. Part-time employment for women in this age group actually fell by 0.09 percentage points, but that amounts to a drop of only 0.91 percent, so the change for women in this age group is essentially negligible.

There was a somewhat larger effect for the 46–55 age group, with voluntary part-time increasing by 0.4 percentage points (7.0 percent) between 2013 and 2017. There was little gender difference for this age group in terms of percentage points: the share for men increased by 0.37 percentage points, compared to a rise of 0.46 percentage points for women. However, this difference was more significant in terms of percent change, with men increasing by 17.0 percent, and women by 5.1 percent. This difference is again likely due to the fact that more women than men were already in this group — only 2.2 percent of men, versus 9.0 percent of women.

The impact on the oldest pre-Medicare age group (ages 56–64) was roughly comparable. For the group as a whole, voluntary part-time employment increased by 0.42 percentage points (6.2 percent). For men, the increase was 0.37 percentage points (9.1 percent). The rise for women in terms of percentage points was slightly larger, at 0.48 percentage points, but the percentage was smaller, at 5.1 percent.

These data indicate that the largest effect on voluntary part-time employment was among young workers. The impact was marginally greater among young women than men in terms of percentage points, and marginally smaller in terms of percentage change, since they were more likely to be employed part-time initially. There was little difference between women with children and women without children. There was noticeably less impact among the 36–45 age group, with voluntary part-time employment falling negligibly as a share of the group. Although in terms of men’s percentage change, it looks like a significant change. The percent of men in this group was so low that the change is negligible. The percent change among women in this age range is negative but also not large enough to be of any consequence. The older age cohorts showed an increase in voluntary part-time employment in terms of percentage points roughly equal to the overall average, again with percent change for women looking slightly lower as a result of them engaging in voluntary part-time work more often than men initially.

How Part-Time Workers Spend Their Time

To assess differences in time use between full-time workers and voluntary part-time workers we analyzed data from the American Time Use Survey (ATUS), and the Current Population Survey (CPS). The ATUS is a time use diary survey distributed to households that have finished their eighth and final interview for the CPS. One individual over the age of 15 is selected in each household and completes a time diary of one day, by minute, from 4 a.m. the day before the ATUS interview to 4 a.m. the day of the interview. ATUS also updates the household composition, and the labor force and employment statuses of the respondent and their spouse, if applicable, since the last CPS interview, which occurred two to five months prior to the ATUS interview.

For this paper, ATUS samples from 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015 were selected from the IPUMS database and then merged by the Current Population Survey ID (CPSID) at the person-level with the CPS. This was done to pull the labor force status from the CPS that includes part-time for economic reasons versus part-time for non-economic reasons, which is not specified in the ATUS interview data. The data was also cleaned to include every individual only once, in the event that they participated more than once. This resulted in a total sample of 12,247 observations, from which we pulled out individuals who worked full-time hours who usually worked full time (5,602 observations) and those who worked part-time hours for non-economic reasons and for whom those were their usual hours (777 observations). (The breakdown by year is given in **Table A1** in the Appendix.)

Table 2 shows time use patterns for the youngest age cohorts, workers ages 15–24, broken down by full-time and part-time status for men and for women. As can be seen and as expected, there is a large difference in the time spent working on an average weekday between full-time and part-time workers. Full-time men worked 205 minutes, or 3 hours and 25 minutes, more than their part-time counterparts, while women worked an additional 225 minutes, or 3 hours and 45 minutes.

There are some differences in how this free time is filled for this age group between men and women, and the respective ways that they spend their time in both categories differ significantly. For example, full-time men spend 16 minutes on the care of household members, and men working part-time voluntarily spend 7 minutes. Full-time women, on the other hand, spend 33 minutes on the care of household members, while voluntary part-time women spend 26 minutes on care for household members. For both men and women, the amount decreased, but the base for the change is significantly different. However, women in this group spend less time on the care of household members than women in any other group up to age 54.

TABLE 2**Time Use for Full-time and Part-time Workers Ages 15–24**

(minutes per weekday)

	Men			Women		
	Full-time	Part-time	Difference	Full-time	Part-time	Difference
Care of household members	15.9	6.6	9.3	32.8	26.0	6.9
Care of household adults	1.7	1.8	-0.1	1.6	0.3	1.4
Care of household children	15.9	1.4	14.6	23.3	19.2	4.1
Care of non-household members	21.0	3.1	17.9	6.1	7.5	-1.4
Care of non-household children	4.1	0.2	3.9	0.5	2.0	-1.5
Care of non-household adults	9.7	2.3	7.4	0.5	2.0	-1.5
Education	4.6	56.6	-52.1	16.0	81.4	-65.4
Food	69.0	50.9	18.1	74.7	61.7	13.0
Household activities	40.4	62.9	-22.5	67.0	59.0	8.0
Leisure	287.7	372.8	-85.1	218.9	343.4	-124.5
Personal care	541.0	636.5	-95.5	577.5	615.6	-38.1
Sleep	504.6	602.0	-97.4	515.1	569.0	-53.9
Social	7.3	5.2	2.1	1.3	3.3	-2.0
Work	407.0	202.5	204.5	394.4	169.3	225.0
<i>Sample size</i>	91	37		72	74	

Source and notes: Authors' calculations and American Time Use Survey (2018). See text.

Another notable difference is the time spent on household activities. In the case of men, voluntary part-time workers spent an additional 23 minutes per day on household activities. For women, the difference was 8 minutes per day in the opposite direction, with voluntary part-time workers spending slightly less time on household activities. These counterintuitive results may be, to some extent, due to those young people with families having to work full-time, meaning they spent more time working *and* taking care of children.

For both men and women, the vast majority of the time freed up is devoted to leisure and personal care (mostly sleep), although the additional amount for men is more than twice as large as the increase for women. Men working part-time voluntarily report spending an additional 85 minutes on leisure activities compared to full-time workers, and an additional 96 minutes on personal care. For women, the differences are an extra 125 minutes on leisure activities and 38 minutes on personal care.

Both men and women working part-time spent more time on education: 52 additional minutes a day in the case of men, and 65 minutes in the case of women.

Table 2b shows time use only for women ages 25–34. Full-time workers worked 158 minutes or 2 hours and 38 minutes a day more than part-time workers in this category. Women working part-time spent 72 minutes a day — a little over half of the time freed up from work was spent on the care of household members; overwhelmingly, this was for the care of children.

TABLE 2b**Time Use for Full-time and Part-time Women Ages 25–34**

(minutes per weekday)

	Full-time	Part-time	Difference
Care of household members	54.9	126.6	-71.7
Care of household adults	0.4	0.7	-0.2
Care of household children	48.0	111.2	-63.1
Care of non-household members	7.0	3.8	3.2
Care of non-household children	3.3	0.2	3.1
Care of non-household adults	0.7	1.9	-1.1
Education	6.6	27.4	-20.8
Food	67.8	73.9	-6.1
Household activities	85.0	105.0	-20.0
Leisure	214.8	204.3	10.4
Personal care	573.9	594.4	-20.5
Sleep	517.3	542.6	-25.3
Social	10.3	24.9	-14.6
Work	357.4	199.4	158.0
<i>Sample size</i>	508	103	

Source and notes: Authors' calculations and American Time Use Survey (2018). See text.

Voluntary part-time women also spent more time on education and household work, 21 minutes and 20 minutes a day, respectively. For this group, the differences between time spent on personal care and leisure went in opposite directions and were largely offsetting. The voluntary part-time workers spent an average of 21 additional minutes a day on personal care but reported 10 minutes less per day of leisure — an exchange of generally pleasurable activities.

Men working part-time voluntarily in this grouping spent about 15 minutes less per day on the care of household members, and almost 40 minutes less on household activities than full-time men. They spent an additional 1 hour and 38 minutes on education, 77 minutes more than the additional amount women spent. They also spent an additional half hour on leisure and an additional 93 minutes on personal care compared to full-time men.

Table 3 compares the time use for men and women, full-time and voluntary part-time, ages 35–44. We should use caution again when drawing conclusions from this data since the sample size for voluntary part-time men is small. The average time at work for voluntary part-time men in this age cohort is about 90 minutes (1.5 hours) less than for men working full-time. The majority of the time freed up goes to leisure activities (36 minutes) and personal care (32 minutes). There also were modest increases in the time spent on household activities (18 minutes), care of household members, and education (9 minutes each).

TABLE 3**Time Use for Full-time and Part-time Workers Ages 35–44**

(minutes per weekday)

	Men			Women		
	Full-time	Part-time	Difference	Full-time	Part-time	Difference
Care of household members	41.3	50.1	8.8	54.8	101.1	46.3
Care of household adults	1.2	11.3	10.1	1.1	1.6	0.4
Care of household children	33.5	27.7	-5.8	45.0	84.0	39.0
Care of non-household members	7.4	0	-7.4	6.3	6.8	0.5
Care of non-household children	1.3	0	-1.3	0.9	0.3	-0.5
Care of non-household adults	3.9	0	-3.9	2.3	3.6	1.3
Education	3.0	12.0	9.0	2.3	14.8	12.5
Food	72.6	56.4	-16.2	72.4	70.6	-1.7
Household activities	73.4	91.1	17.8	106.3	146.8	40.5
Leisure	230.7	266.7	36.0	224.6	196.0	-28.5
Personal care	523.1	554.8	31.7	557.6	570.6	12.9
Sleep	485.5	528.9	43.4	506.1	523.7	17.6
Social	14.4	10.2	-4.2	17.1	22.8	5.7
Work	432.0	345.4	-86.7	336.0	229.7	-106.3
<i>Sample size</i>	931	14		670	134	

Source and notes: Authors' calculations and American Time Use Survey (2018). See text.

The gap in time spent at work between full-time and voluntary part-time women in this age group was 106 minutes a day, or an hour and forty-five minutes. The largest chunk of this freed-up time, a little over 45 minutes, was spent caring for household members, almost entirely the care of children. The voluntary part-time women in the sample also spent an average of 41 minutes more per day on household activities than those working full-time in this category. They also modestly increased the time spent on education (12 minutes). There was a slight increase in time spent on personal care (13 minutes) but this was more than offset by a 29-minute decline in the amount of time spent on leisure activities.

Table 4 shows time use for full-time and voluntary part-time workers ages 45–54. The sample of men working part-time voluntarily is still quite small. There is a larger difference in time spent working between full-time and voluntary part-time workers in this case, with a gap of 149 minutes (2.5 hours a day) for men. The men working part-time voluntarily report spending almost half of this time (68 minutes more a day) on leisure. They also report spending an additional 35 minutes a day on personal care. There were smaller increases in the time reportedly spent on household activities (15 minutes), care of household members (9 minutes), and education (7 minutes).

TABLE 4
Time Use for Full-time and Part-time Workers Ages 45–54
 (minutes per weekday)

	Men			Women		
	Full-time	Part-time	Difference	Full-time	Part-time	Difference
Care of household members	16.9	25.4	8.5	18.2	50.2	31.9
Care of household adults	0.8	0.1	-0.6	2.7	13.7	11.1
Care of household children	12.3	15.7	3.3	10.0	25.1	15.1
Care of non-household members	7.9	5.9	-1.9	13.5	9.2	-4.3
Care of non-household children	1.1	4.9	3.7	4.7	1.3	-3.5
Care of non-household adults	4.2	0.4	-3.7	5.1	4.8	-0.3
Education	1.9	9.0	7.2	2.1	0.0	-2.1
Food	77.0	57.9	-19.1	66.5	72.9	6.4
Household activities	88.7	103.3	14.6	121.6	174.4	52.7
Leisure	263.5	331.1	67.5	217.7	284.9	67.2
Personal care	522.2	557.0	34.8	542.5	568.3	25.8
Sleep	484.3	510.5	26.3	486.3	513.7	27.4
Social	14.5	4.0	-10.6	20.4	21.7	1.3
Work	402.6	253.7	-148.8	370.6	164.9	-205.7
<i>Sample size</i>	783	17		613	102	

Source and notes: Authors' calculations and American Time Use Survey (2018). See text.

The voluntary part-time women in this age cohort worked on average 206 minutes (about 3.5 hours) less than their full-time counterparts. As with men, the largest single use of this free time was leisure, which accounted for 67 minutes a day on average. The amount of the additional time women spent on leisure instead of working was only 32 percent, compared to men's 45 percent. Household work accounted for another 53 minutes a day on average, compared to men's 15 minutes. The voluntary part-time workers in this age group spent an additional 32 minutes on the care of household members. They also spent an extra 26 minutes a day on personal care.

Table 5 shows patterns of time use among full-time and voluntary part-time workers ages 55–64. The sample size for men is once again small but larger than in the previous two cohorts. In this case, it shows a gap of 225 minutes (3 hours and 45 minutes) in work time between full-time and voluntary part-time men. The voluntary part-time workers spent the largest chunk of this difference on household activities, at 100 minutes (an hour and 40 minutes). They also spent an extra 56 minutes on personal care and 51 minutes on leisure activities. There was a reported average increase in time spent giving care to non-household members by 11 minutes.

The voluntary part-time women in this age group worked on average 150 minutes (2.5 hours) a day less than the full-time workers. Of this, household activities accounted for 52 minutes a day on average. Leisure activities accounted for an additional 32 minutes and personal care for 21 minutes per day. Care of household members and social activities each increased by 16 minutes.

TABLE 5
Time Use for Full-time and Part-time Workers Ages 55–64
 (minutes per weekday)

	Men			Women		
	Full-time	Part-time	Difference	Full-time	Part-time	Difference
Care of household members	3.9	2.0	-1.8	3.5	19.4	15.9
Care of household adults	0.5	0.0	-0.5	1.0	1.6	0.6
Care of household children	1.9	1.8	-0.1	1.7	11.2	9.5
Care of non-household members	10.0	21.4	11.4	12.4	12.4	0.0
Care of non-household children	3.4	0.9	-2.5	5.3	8.2	2.9
Care of non-household adults	3.2	14.8	11.5	3.6	0.6	-3.0
Education	0.7	1.8	1.1	5.0	2.7	-2.2
Food	84.7	82.8	-2.0	72.4	87.4	15.0
Household activities	88.4	187.8	99.5	122.7	175.0	52.4
Leisure	263.4	314.7	51.3	261.1	293.3	32.2
Personal care	514.9	570.2	55.3	532.7	554.7	21.9
Sleep	473.5	521.2	47.7	475.7	504.9	29.1
Social	7.9	19.6	11.6	14.8	30.9	16.1
Work	425.1	200.6	-224.5	351.7	197.0	-154.7
<i>Sample size</i>	549	36		464	94	

Source and notes: Authors' calculations and American Time Use Survey (2018). See text.

The Impact of the Affordable Care Act on How People Spend Their Time

The largest increase in voluntary part-time employment following the implementation of the ACA was among younger workers, ages 16 to 34. Due to the small sample sizes, it is difficult to use the ATUS to get a reliable assessment of how the men in this age group who choose to work part-time spend their additional hours. However, it is clear that the bulk of the time freed up for women in the 25–34 age cohort who voluntarily work part-time goes to caring for children, though for younger women it largely went to education, leisure, and personal care. In other words, the ACA gave many younger women the opportunity to work somewhat fewer hours so that they could spend more time with their children, or, as Colman and Dave suggest, on activities that young people find more fulfilling and thus increases their subjective well-being, such as education and various leisure activities.⁵

The amount of time spent on education among women working part-time voluntarily in the cohort 25–34 compared to full-time workers is also notably higher. This suggests that a substantial portion of the women working part-time rather than full-time saw it as an opportunity to at least take additional courses or training, if not to actually complete a degree, or that those who were already in school were

5 Colman and Dave (2018).

able to cut their work hours. Notably, men 25–34 spent nearly five times more additional time on education than women in the same age range.

It is worth noting that all of these numbers are year-round averages of the number of additional workers who are voluntarily working part-time at a point in time. If one million additional workers are voluntarily working part-time at any given moment, it means that many more workers will have taken this option at some point over the course of a year, as people file in and out of these part-time jobs. According to the Job Opening and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS), more than 3.5 percent of workers lose or leave their jobs every month.⁶ In lower paying jobs, like those in restaurants, which employ a disproportionate share of part-time workers, the turnover rate is more than 6.0 percent a month. This means that if one million additional workers were on average voluntarily working part-time due to the ACA at each point in time, the additional number in this category over the course of the year would have been considerably higher and possibly over twice as many.

Conclusion

The main goal of the ACA was to extend health care insurance coverage to the more than 50 million people in the United States who were not covered before its passage. One potential additional benefit of increasing access to insurance outside of employment was to give workers the freedom to leave jobs that they may have felt tied to because of their need for health care insurance or to cut their hours for the same reason. There was a substantial increase in voluntary part-time employment following the full implementation of the ACA in 2014, reversing a downward trend. This increase was most notable among younger workers and especially among young women. The analysis of time use by work status suggests that if women did choose to work part-time rather than full-time as a result of the ACA, they will have spent the majority of the time gained outside of paid work providing childcare, and perhaps on education and training.

⁶ Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018b).

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Appendix

TABLE A1

Observation per Survey Year by Full- or Part-time Status

(observations)

	Survey Year				<i>Total</i>
	2012	2013	2014	2015	
Full-time hours (35+)	1,483	1,363	1,407	1,349	5,602
Part-time for non-economic reasons	114	94	98	104	410
Not at work, usually	62	45	37	44	188
Full-time hours, usually part-time for economic reasons	2	0	2	3	7
Full-time hours, usually part-time for non-economic reasons	11	3	8	3	25
Part-time for economic reasons, usually full-time	13	12	13	9	47
Part-time hours, usually part-time for economic reasons	39	32	49	29	170
Part-time hours, usually part-time for non-economic reasons	197	204	184	192	777
Not at work, usually part-time	15	12	13	15	55
Unemployed, seeking full-time employment	52	40	49	29	170
Unemployed, seeking part-time employment	10	12	8	7	37
NIU, blank, or not in labor force	1,226	1,172	1,237	1,143	4,778
<i>Total</i>	3,224	2,989	3,105	2,929	12,247

Source and notes: Authors' calculations and American Time Use Survey (2018). See text.