

Getting out or shifting to part time:

Gender disparities in the impacts of corporate restructuring

Abstract

This article looks at gender disparities during large-scale corporate restructuring. Whereas the literature focuses on discrimination in top-down processes, we analyze why employee self-selection still yields gender inequalities. Based on the personnel files of an airline company and 55 in-depth interviews, results show that men were more likely to opt out and less likely to shift to subsidized part-time. While women work part-time mostly to improve their work-life balance, men appear to be more sensitive to financial incentives and more prepared to retrain due to side activities. This suggests that restructuring amplifies existing vulnerabilities of women on the labor market, even in case of voluntary redundancy plans.

Key words: corporate restructuring, subsidized part-time, voluntary redundancy, layoffs, gender inequalities, turnover.

Introduction

Large-scale corporate restructuring has been increasing in most OECD countries¹ since the 1980s (Silva et al., 2019). Traditionally, restructuring plans were implemented in manufacturing due to sector-specific negative shocks, technological obsolescence, and business cycle downturns. By the 2000s, corporate restructurings were due to ‘competitive’ reasons linked to intensified global competition and search for greater profitability at the demand of shareholders, and affected both manual workers and managers (Foster et al., 2019).

Consequently, an important strand of research aimed at analyzing the forms, causes, and consequences of restructuring for both corporations and employees has gradually emerged (Halford and Savage, 1995; Kalleberg, 2011; Williams et al., 2012; Klevor, 2014). Most of these studies focus on the ex-post impacts of restructuring, either on displaced employees’ probability of reemployment or on the “survivors” who remain in the company. A more limited number of studies analyze age- and race-based inequalities during the selection of workers for downsizing, while only a small subset focuses on the gender issue. Finally, only few papers consider voluntary employee turnover, defined as a situation in which employees have the choice to leave or not (Regt and Molleman, 2012).

Our article contributes to this literature by analyzing within-company gender inequalities in restructuring plans that are based on self-selection rather than a top-down selection process. This case study is interesting because it allows us to examine men and women working in the exact same job, in the same company, at the same time, and facing a choice of whether or not leave the company in exchange for financial compensation. This restructuring plan included two activity reduction schemes: a voluntary redundancy plan (VRP) with a fixed staff reduction target and a subsidized part-time (SPT) plan. This setting enables us to examine whether we observe different

¹ For France, see data from the Statistics department of the French Ministry of Employment at <https://dares.travail-emploi.gouv.fr/donnees/les-dispositifs-publics-daccompagnement-des-restructurations>, accessed 3 March 2022.

outcomes for men and women at the extensive margin (measured by the probability of choosing to exit the company through the VRP) and at the intensive margin (measured by the probability of shifting to subsidized part-time work) and whether these choices reproduce the gendered choices usually observed in the literature regarding part-time work and work interruptions. A recent paper on the COVID-19 crisis suggest that outcomes at the two margins, intensive and extensive, may differ between men and women (Hupkau and Petrongolo, 2020).

Using exhaustive HR files from a major European airline, we were able to examine the characteristics of employees enrolled in the two different forms of activity reduction programs. A series of qualitative interviews with crew members from the same airline enabled us to interpret the observed differences by examining the motivations and reactions of men and women in relation to this restructuring plan. We aimed to test whether a theoretically gender-neutral restructuring process had gender-differentiated effects, potentially counteracting the gender equality policy implemented at the same time in the company.

We thus test two hypotheses. First, we test whether activity reduction plans based on self-selection can attenuate or eliminate the gender difference in the effect of restructuring by allowing women to decide about their employment. Previous studies have shown that, since women are overrepresented in administrative support positions and in precarious jobs, their employment is more vulnerable to budget cuts (Williams et al., 2012). Other studies have pointed out that even when labor market characteristics are accounted for, women and minorities are more likely to be displaced due to outright discrimination (Couch and Fairlie, 2010; Wilson and McBrier, 2005). Finally, Jolkkonen et al. (2018) show that women's chances of reemployment are lower than men's, and that they are more likely to leave the labor force when displaced. In this context, a voluntary redundancy plan may offer women the chance to avoid this higher risk of displacement and lower chances of reemployment. We test this by evaluating to what extent the worker's gender can explain the probability of choosing to exit

the company through the VRP. We show that men were more likely to opt for VRP than women. The motives for self-selecting into the VRP (outside pre-retirement) differ by gender. While men were more likely to start a business, women chose to decrease their participation in the labor force for family reasons.

Our second hypothesis is that the implementation of a subsidized part-time (SPT) plan may reduce gender inequality in the choice of part-time work. Across all industries, women are disproportionately likely to work part-time (about four times more likely both in France and on average in the EU, according to the 2020 Labor Force Survey²). Studies on major corporate restructurings in France in the 1980s (Maruani, 1996) showed that within the same company, men were more likely to experience a forced shift to a publicly subsidized *temporarily* part-time working scheme, while women were more likely to shift to *permanent* part-time work. Consequently, women were structurally underemployed and suffered a drop in salary that was not compensated by public subsidies, while men experienced a temporary drop in working time that was financially compensated.

In this paper, we test whether men are more likely than women to choose part-time regime when it is subsidized, and whether such a scheme contributes to reducing the gender gap. We then use our qualitative data to understand the gender-differentiated motivations behind the choice of part-time work. We find that while women were more likely to shift to this subsidized part-time regime than men, the gender gap in part-time work was the smallest within this type as well. This suggests that men might be more sensitive to financial incentives when choosing their working time regime, while women's decision to work part-time is more often driven by family constraints³, confirming the well-established results in the literature on work-life balance issues (Goldin, 2021; Beham, 2019).

² https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tepsr_lm210/default/table?lang=fr, accessed 3 March 2022.

³ In the EU in 2018, 36% of men who worked part-time reported that they did so because they had not found a full-time job, vs. 23% of women in part-time work. 29% of women in part-time work reported

1. Literature Review

The literature on gender inequality in the labor market is extensive. On the one hand, the extensive literature on gender inequalities relating to part-time work is an important support for understanding the shift to reduced working time and its different motives for men and women. On the other hand, the literature on restructuring (e.g. the processes of employee selection and displacement, and the long term outcomes of victims and survivors) is also useful to understand employees positions, yet only a limited number of studies focuses on gender⁴. Articulating these two strands of the literature allows us to formulate hypotheses on the differentiated gendered effects of a restructuring plan based on self-selection, and to contribute to the understanding of gender inequalities in the labor market.

Gender variation in the number of hours worked is a major focus of the literature on gender inequalities in the labor market. A large body of research shows that women are more likely to work voluntary part-time, mostly due to family reasons (Clawson and Gerstel 2014; Gauchat et al 2012; Kjeldstad et al. 2012; Pech et al. 2021). Moreover, Kjeldstad et al. (2012) recently showed for Norway that voluntary short part-time work was significantly less gendered than voluntary long part-time. Yet, women are not only more represented among voluntarily part-time workers. Recent research by Pech et al. (2021) shows that women are also much more likely than men to work in involuntary part-time positions due to occupational segregation and care work. This research suggests that both the types of part-time work and the characteristics

doing so in order to look after children or disabled adults, vs. 6% among men (Eurostat, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/fr/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20190918-1>, accessed 3 March 2022.).

⁴ For instance, the main OECD report on mass layoffs and corporate restructuring to date does not once mention gender as a variable of interest that may influence workers' subsequent employability (Silva et al., 2019).

of workers are important dimensions to take into consideration to better understand gender differences in the shift to part-time work.

The literature of restructuring explores inequalities in the risk of job displacement, and consider both outright and indirect discriminations in the labor market. Most papers find that minorities experience higher displacement rates during downsizing and mass layoffs than other workers (Helwig, 2004; Handwerker and Mason, 2012; Fairlie and Kletzer, 1996). While the gender dimension has not been explored as much as age education, Kalev (2014) highlights the role of both race and gender in displacement for management positions. She argues that standardized procedures (where layoff rules rely on hierarchical level or tenure instead of individualized evaluations) reduce management diversity since women tend to perform better on average in face-to-face relations. Moreover, restructuring processes can weaken the gender equality policies developed by large firms during periods of growth (Woodall et al., 1997).

Another strand of the literature has focused on the experience and impact of restructuring plans for the displaced workers. Sociological research has documented the subjective experience of workers facing displacement (Gabriel et al., 2013) and the role of woman in collective mobilization, although female manufacturing workers historically tend to be marginalized by major trade-unions (Clarke, 2011). Dealing with the impact of restructuring plans on displaced workers, the economic literature measures displaced workers' chances of finding a new job (Brandily et al., 2020; Lachowska et al., 2020; Halla et al., 2020). Certain categories of employees are found to face long-term unemployment after mass layoffs. This is particularly the case of older, low-skilled, and firm- or industry-specific workers (Lippmann, 2008; Huttunen et al., 2011; Oesch and Baumann, 2015). However, the impact of gender remains unclear because its effect depends on workers' level of educational attainment and on the period considered after displacement. For example men appear to be more likely to be displaced than women, but women lose more in terms of career stability and income in the long run (Kuhn, 2002) and are

more likely to leave the labor market and enter domestic work (Jolkkonen et al., 2018; Snorradóttir et al., 2015, Foster and al., 2019; Paulsen and al. 2005). Regarding non-displaced workers, the literature has shown that certain types of restructurings (mergers, acquisitions, and spin-offs) create new opportunities for qualified women in management, although they may never access top positions (Halford and Savage, 1995; Woodall et al., 1997; Pochic and Guillaume, 2009). The study of Halford and Savage (1995) in the banking sector and local government also showed that certain forms of restructuring appeared to be undermining traditional forms of managerial masculinity and allowing some scope for women to move into senior jobs.

Our article contributes to this literature by exploring a different organizational context. We focus on “voluntary” restructuring, defined as a downsizing plan with a fixed staff reduction target where workers can voluntarily choose to exit the company in exchange for financial compensation. While this institutional context reduces the role of outright discrimination, it generates a gendered self-selection effect among employees. Some of the results in the literature on restructuring are likely to be relevant in the case of voluntary departures. If women are less connected to and supported by unions, they may be less aware of restructuring plans and the associated financial opportunities and benefits. Moreover, the literature has shown that women are as much as or more affected than men by job loss and have fewer prospects for a quick return to work. This suggests that they are less likely to leave voluntarily, especially since women tend to be more risk-averse than men. On the contrary, the literature on gender inequalities in the labor market shows that women are more likely than men to interrupt their work for family reasons. Taken together, these elements lead us to propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Women will opt less than men for a reduction in activity at the extensive margin via the voluntary departure plan: i.e., they will be less likely than men to leave the company, but if they decide to leave the company, it will be for family reasons.

Our second hypothesis relates to the other part of the restructuring plan that we are studying: subsidized part-time work. Women are overrepresented in part-time work in most of European countries, both in chosen part-time (especially for family reasons) and in underemployment (i.e. people working part time because they cannot find a full-time job; Kamerāde and al., 2018). Moreover, research has shown that during restructuring, women are more often assigned to part-time work on a permanent basis, while men's assignment to part-time work tends to be short-term (Maruani, 1996). Finally, the literature has shown that women are more willing to reduce their working hours to keep their jobs (Calavrezo et al. 2020). Building on this literature, it could be expected that, when offered a subsidized part-time scheme, women will tend to adopt it more than men. This is because women may take the opportunity to use SPT work for family activities (the main reason women shift to part-time work) without suffering too large a financial penalty. Results from the literature suggest that women may prefer to reduce their activity at the intensive margin, i.e. to take subsidized part-time work rather than leave the company. Our second hypothesis is:

H2: Women will opt more for subsidized part-time work than for the exit plan; women's preference for reducing their activity at the intensive margin will increase the gender gap in part-time work.

2. Institutional Context

In the 2000s, major European airlines faced competitive restructuring as a consequence of the 2008 financial crisis as well as increasing competition from Gulf-based and low-cost airlines. In 2011, the company under study announced the implementation of a major restructuring plan to take place over a three-year period (2012-2014) to restore the company's profitability and improve its overall productivity by 20% by 2015. The restructuring plan involved a legally mandatory *employment protection plan*, a requirement since 2003 for companies in France with 50 employees or more that are laying off 10 or more employees within a 30-day period for

economic reasons. It includes a set of measures designed to limit the number of redundancies and to promote the redeployment of dismissed employees within the company or on the labor market.

The airline took various measures, such as a halt to growth investments, a change in cabin crew working conditions, a freeze on wage increases, and a reduction in back-office staff, in addition to the policy of non-recruitment of new crew members that began in 2009 and continued until 2015. More importantly, the restructuring plan also included a cabin-crew and flight-crew workforce reduction target, the first since the company's privatization in the early 2000s. Pilot overstaffing was estimated at 350 full-time jobs, and cabin crew overstaffing at 700 full-time jobs. Due to collective bargaining and powerful trade-unions (two-thirds of the cabin crew staff in the company were unionized, and more than 80% of the pilots), there were no forced departures. In line with the literature (Bryson, Barth & Dale-Olsen, 2013), trade unions played a moderating role by negotiating shorter working hours as an alternative to layoffs, and they agreed to "a minimum of 200 departures", along with other specific measures to be implemented in 2014, to reach this goal.

The workforce reduction objective was to be achieved through two mechanisms: a voluntary redundancy plan (VRP) to incentivize voluntary departures (extensive margin), and a subsidized part-time (SPT) plan to reduce working time (intensive margin). Moreover, because of the 2003 legal framework, the VRP included several support measures (access to training programs, assistance from a placement firm, etc.) and two main financial compensation measures: contract termination payments and an extra financial incentive of 10,000 - 15,000 euros for business creation or personal leave. The SPT plan consisted of a flexible schedule (monthly organization, reversibility) and financial incentives. Up to 30% of earnings lost due to the shift to part-time work were compensated by the employer. Finally, workers were also

encouraged to take unpaid leave, although the data we used show that the number of days of leave did not increase during the period of the restructuring plan.

There were very few eligibility criteria for the VRP. It was open to all crew members on permanent contracts. A tenure criterion only applied in case of an excessive number of applications for the plan. By 2015, the plan led to the reduction of the workforce by 270 flight crew members and 470 cabin crew members.

During the study period, the company also developed a gender equality policy, implemented between 2002 and 2014.

3. Data and methodology

We use a unique panel dataset that compiles all available information from the human resources department of a very large European airline. This data comes from a confidential research agreement in line with privacy protection laws. We have monthly information for the period 1998-2015⁵ on about 30,000 crew members,⁶ including both flight attendants and pilots. We use information from 1998, although the restructuring started in 2013, to obtain an overview of the workers' careers up to the time of the reform. The dataset contains information on the workers' sociodemographic characteristics (age, gender, number of children, etc.), job characteristics (tenure, entry and exit dates, reason for exit), and working conditions (full-time/part-time, hierarchical level, long-haul/short-haul flights, gross wages, number of flight hours, etc.).

We modified the data in several ways to deal with missing values. First, we include only workers employed by the company for at least one year during the period 1998-2015. Second,

⁵ Unfortunately, no data are available after 2015.

⁶ We are not authorized to disclose the exact number of workers.

we exclude workers who left the company at the end of the internship and probationary period as well as seasonal workers (short-term contracts are common during the summer). This selection decreased the sample by 22%. We then keep all observations with no missing values on employment type, hierarchical level, flight distance type, or entry/exit date. Missing occurrences represent only 5% of the total sample.

The final sample is composed of slightly under 25,000 workers observed monthly during 1998-2015, which adds up to more than 3,000,000 observations at the worker-month level. On average, 80% of workers were cabin crew (henceforth CC), including flight attendants and managers, and 20% were flight crew (henceforth FC), including captains and co-pilots. Table 1 reports some descriptive statistics by year and crew type. Several observations can be highlighted here. First, both cabin and flight crew show an ageing effect due to the company non-recruitment policy that began in 2009. Second, the share of women among CC members is large and stable, while among FC it is small but increasing. Third, we observe a significant decline in the share of full-time workers, among both CC and FC members. Finally, there is a very large wage gap between CC and FC, with pilots paid almost five times as much as flight attendants.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics (1998-2015)

	1998		2009		2015	
	CC	FC	CC	FC	CC	FC
Age	33.17	40.73	37.95	43.37	42.81	46.63
% of Women	67.42	3.06	66.39	6.17	66.39	7.17
Tenure (years)	8.44	11.39	11.81	13.3	16.56	16.87
CC1 Hostess/Steward (%)	79.94	0	74.54	0	74.86	0
CC2 Cabin Manager (%)	14.55	0	18.18	0	17.12	0
CC3 Chief Cabin Manager (%)	3.49	0	5.12	0	6.04	0
CC4 Director (%)	2.05	0	2.17	0	2.01	0
FC1 Co-pilot (%)	0	58.6	0	53.3	0	54.29
FC2 Captain (%)	0	42.27	0	46.89	0	46.15
Full-time (%)	74.84	91.19	58.09	81.1	54.21	78.28
Part-time (%)	25.33	8.84	42.06	19.06	46.33	21.88
Working time 50% (%)	5.15	0.28	11.09	0.51	11.52	0.5
Working time 66-92% (%)	20.22	8.57	31.05	18.43	33.69	17.86

Long-haul flights (%)	65.07	47.11	75.93	58.96	77.05	60.97
Short-haul flights (%)	35.76	54.25	25	41.74	22.99	39.4
Monthly gross wage (€)			3055	13252	3388	14837
Entry rate (%)	8.27	4.32	0.4	3.61	0	0
Exit rate (%)	0.01	0	1.06	3.37	1.5	2.39

Notes: CC stands for cabin crew (including flight attendants and managers) and FC stands for flight crew (including captains and co-pilots). Entry/exit rates are measured as the percentage of employees entering/exiting in a given year out of all employees. Monthly gross wages are only available for the period 2004-2015. Data from company HR files (1998-2015).

The first important variable is the reason for workers' exit from the company. This variable, which is of course only available for workers who left the company during the study period, can take the following values: death, retirement, end of contract, layoff, resignation, and voluntary redundancy program (VRP). Using these values, we construct three different indicators: the probability of leaving the company for any reason, the probability of leaving excluding retirement, and the probability of leaving the company under the VRP. All three take a value of zero for workers who were still working in the company in December 2015. We then look at how each indicator changed with the implementation of the VRP across crew types and genders.

To better understand the determinants of the probability of leaving the company under the VRP, we estimate a series of multivariate linear probability models. More precisely, we run ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions in which the outcome is the indicator for taking the VRP, which is regressed against a list of sociodemographic and employment characteristics. This model allows us to understand what factors are more strongly associated with the probability of choosing the VRP, and to what extent the employee's gender plays a role. The control variables we use are the employee's age, number of children, tenure, hierarchical level, proportion of career in full-time work, proportion of career on long-haul flights, monthly flight hours, and log of salary.

The second important variable studied in this paper is the kind of part-time regime that workers choose. This variable (which is specified for workers in part-time work in a given month) takes three different values: regular part-time, parental time, and subsidized part-time. We also use the percentage of workers in any category of part-time work in a given month. We then look at how the distribution of the different types of part-time work changed when the option of subsidized part-time work became available.

To supplement the quantitative analysis, we conducted in-depth interviews with 55 cabin crew and pilots who worked on permanent contracts at the time of the implementation of the VRP. The qualitative method is useful to address three limitations of our quantitative data. First, the in-depth interviews give access to individual perceptions of the global restructuring plan and its main measures (whether individuals took it or not), thus helping us to understand how the organizational context may be differently perceived by male and female employees. Secondly, the in-depth interviews allow us to consider not only position and resources within the company, but also various dimensions of the family resources outside the company (including the presence of a spouse, the profession of the spouse, the total income of the household, and housing conditions) that may be used by individuals in the decision process to exit the company or reduce their worked hours. Thirdly, the in-depth interviews provide a life-course perspective. Considering a longer time perspective than HR files helps understanding how the VRP was likely to impact the individual trajectory.

We selected individuals working for the same airline company so that we could compare employees subject to exactly the same working conditions and compare with quantitative results. In accordance with the Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (SRQR), respondents gave their prior oral consent to participate in the survey before the interview began. Contact was made through mutual acquaintances and then through a snowball effect. Data collection was carried out by white, middle-aged, both male and female interviewers.

Each interview contains information on organizational and individual factors that may have contributed to the decision of opting out or reducing working time: education and career path (within the company and before they entered the company), their working conditions (including worked hours, income, relations with colleagues and trade-unions), and their perception of the restructuring plan and its various measures (whether they used it or not). We also include specific questions on the family resources (presence of a partner, profession of the partner, total income, housing conditions, side-activities, and experience of work-family balance). All interviews were then anonymized, fully transcribed, and analyzed thematically.

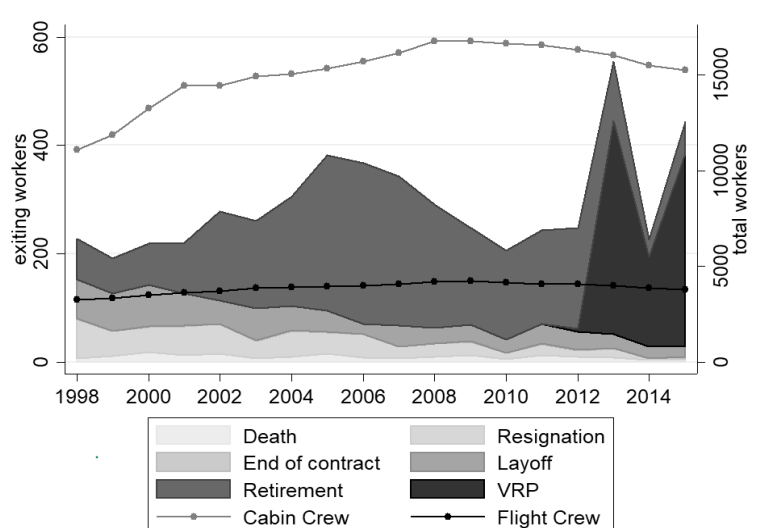
The composition of the final sample varies by sex (31 men, 24 women), by professions (31 cabin crew, 24 pilots), by age (from 32 to 56), and by family composition (single/partner, with/without children). Five of the 55 respondents took the VRP and left the company in 2015 (9%), which means that this group was overrepresented in our qualitative sample. Whereas the qualitative sample is not representative of the total cabin crew and pilots, it give insights on social and gender mechanisms that lead to the decision to opt out. The 50 others either took subsidized part-time work or did not change their work schedules. They all expressed their perception of the restructuring plan.

4. Men more likely to volunteer for redundancy

This section looks at how men and women responded to incentives to volunteer for redundancy. Figure 1 shows the evolution of the number of pilots and flight attendants during the study period. From 1998 to 2001 the number of employees increased sharply, particularly for CC. From 2002 to 2008, the stock of cabin crew continued to grow but more slowly. The peak in the company's workforce was reached in 2008, when the trend flipped and became negative. This occurred even before the voluntary redundancy plan (VRP) was implemented, as at that time the company had already stopped recruiting permanent staff (Lambert and Remillon,

2020). However, the decline in the number of employees was more pronounced at the end of the period as a result of the VRP.

Figure 1: Number of cabin crew and flight crew and number of exits by reason for leaving the company



Notes: The area graph plots the number of exiting workers by reason for departure. It should be read with the left vertical axis. The two line graphs plot the number of crew members by type over time: cabin crew (grey) and flight crew (black). It should be read with the right vertical axis. Data from company HR files (1998-2015).

Reasons for departure also changed over the study period. At the beginning of the period, three reasons were about equally frequent: resignations, layoffs, and retirements. In the first half of the 2000s, retirements became the top reason for leaving the company. From 2013 onward, exits via the VRP replaced retirements as the top reason for departure, while the number of departures increased sharply, as can be seen in Table 2. The VRP was thus effective in reducing the workforce.

Regarding gender differences, it is striking that both before and after the introduction of VRP, the monthly probability of leaving the company was higher for men than for women (Table 2). This gender gap was greater among pilots than cabin crew. The introduction of the

VRP seems to have reinforced the gender gap in the probability of exit, at least for CC, as men's probability of leaving increased more after 2013 than women's.

Table 2: Probability of leaving the company

Panel A: All reasons	CC		FC	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
2010-2012	0.014	0.016	0.002	0.021
2013-2015	0.025	0.031	0.012	0.033
Increase	×1.8	×1.9	×6	×1.6

Panel B: Without retirement	CC		FC	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Before 2013	0.007	0.007	0.001	0.007
After 2013	0.023	0.027	0.011	0.026
Increase	×3.3	×3.9	×11	×3.7

Notes: CC stands for cabin crew, FC stands for flight crew. Exit probabilities are computed for the periods 2010-2012 and 2013-2015. Panel A includes exits for all reasons. Panel B excludes retirements, the most common reason for exit before the VRP. Data from company HR files.

This result is confirmed by analysis of the profile of workers who opted for the VRP (Table 3). All else being equal, women were less likely than men to leave the company through the VRP. Children also had a negative effect on their likelihood of voluntary departure, especially for women, with workers with more children less likely to leave. Yet, the effect is not driven exclusively by women with children since the coefficient of women in column 3 (representing the effect of childless women) is still negative and significant. The probability of leaving the company between 2013 and 2015 under the VRP increased with age and tenure, for

both cabin crew and flight crew (the effect of tenure was even stronger for pilots than for flight attendants).⁷

Table 3: Probability of leaving the company under the voluntary redundancy plan

	CC			FC		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Women	-0.0003** (0.0001)	- 0.0007*** (0.0001)	- 0.0004*** (0.0002)	- 0.0009*** (0.0003)	- -0.0002 (0.0003)	- 0.0004 (0.0004)
Children		- 0.0003*** (0.0001)	- -0.0002** (0.0001)		- 0.0005*** (0.0001)	- 0.0004*** (0.0001)
Women × Children			-0.0002** (0.0001)			-0.0004 (0.0003)
CC1 Hostess/Steward	reference category					
CC2 Cabin Manager		- 0.0012*** (0.0002)	- 0.0012*** (0.0002)			
CC3 Chief Cabin Manager		0.0012** (0.0005)	0.0011** (0.0005)			
CC4 Director		-0.0012 (0.0008)	-0.0012 (0.0008)			
FC1 Co-pilot	reference category					
FC2 Captain					- 0.0027*** (0.0005)	- 0.0027*** (0.0005)
Tenure		0.0002*** (0.0000)	0.0002*** (0.0000)		0.0004*** (0.0001)	0.0004*** (0.0001)
Age		0.0002*** (0.0000)	0.0002*** (0.0000)		0.0002*** (0.0000)	0.0002*** (0.0000)
Constant	0.0014*** (0.0001)	- 0.0075*** (0.0011)	- 0.0074*** (0.0011)	0.0016*** (0.0001)	0.0154*** (0.0050)	0.0155*** (0.0050)
Observations	510,942	510,942	510,942	138,305	138,305	138,305

⁷ The effect of hierarchical level is more uncertain; among cabin crew, cabin managers (CC2) were less likely than stewards and hostesses (CC1) to exit under the VRP, whereas chief cabin managers (CC3) were more likely. Among pilots, the most senior (captains, FC2) were less likely to opt for the VRP than co-pilots (FC2).

Other controls		X	X		X	X
Mean VRP	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0015	0.0015	0.0015

Notes: CC stands for cabin crew, including flight attendants (CC1, reference category), cabin managers (CC2), chief cabin managers (CC3), and directors (CC4). FC stands for flight crew, and includes captains (FC2), and co-pilots (FC1, reference category). OLS regressions are estimated on a panel of worker-month observations for the period 2013-2015. Other controls include proportion of career in full-time work, proportion of career on long-haul flights, monthly flight hours, and log of salary. Data from company HR files (2013-2015).

This combined effect of tenure and age shows that voluntary departure was largely akin to early retirement (see also the age and tenure distribution of departures under the VRP in Figure A in the Appendix). In fact, early retirement had long been widely established in the company's culture at the time of the restructuring plan. In this sense, some late-career employees expected and even hoped for the type of option offered by the VRP. This can be explained by the fact that ageing is particularly difficult in the air transportation sector, due to difficult working conditions (lengthy periods away from home, nonstandard working schedules, jet lag) and desynchronization from ordinary social schedules.

More generally, in France, early retirement schemes have been widely used by large companies in various sectors, especially in the 1980s. More recently, public early retirement schemes have been replaced by other types of measures as the general trend of reforms moves towards the increase of the retirement age. Notably, layoffs of workers who are close to retirement are often scheduled so that they can receive unemployment benefits (which are more generous for older unemployed people than for younger workers) until retirement (Baguelin and Remillon, 2014). Leaving the company with the VRP at an advanced age may be partly linked to the mechanism of pre-retirement and could explain why women opted less than men for the VRP. At equal age, women are often further from retirement age due to career breaks associated with maternity (Bonnet and Hourriez, 2012), and they therefore have an interest in working longer to increase their pension benefits.

However, not all voluntary departures from the company represent early retirement. Some younger employees, who were far from retirement, also opted for voluntary redundancy (see Figure A in the Appendix). Younger workers' departures may be explained by a lack of promotion opportunities, or by the desire to retrain for another type of employment.⁸ The interpretation of the gender gap in opting for VRP may be linked to women's greater risk aversion compared to men (Croson and Gneezy, 2009) and to their lower chances of reemployment outside the company as seen in the literature section.

The qualitative interviews provide a better understanding of the uses of VRP for men and women in mid-career. The interviews show that male cabin crew and pilots were more often engaged in a secondary activity (in brokerage, real estate, banking, agriculture, etc.) during their non-working time, whereas women generally spent their non-working time on domestic work and family activities. Thus, men may be more prepared for possible reemployment, having accumulated more work experience, networks, and money. Men who took the VRP were already engaged in a professionalization process (in addition to their job in air transportation); they talk about immediate economic profitability.

- Last year, I had no interest in leaving for a bonus that wasn't higher than the severance bonus for being laid off. So I didn't take it. But I applied for it for this year. And now I'm going to apply for training leave financed by the state [FONGECIF]. I'm going to do a professional certificate in agriculture, with a project on animal husbandry.

(Didier, purser, married, 3 children, farmer)

⁸ Unfortunately, we cannot explore this hypothesis further since we are unable to follow departing workers after they left the company.

- I left in 2016. I created a small drone business. I trained as an operator and took all the exams. So, I have a small business as a drone operator. It's going to grow, there's work to be done!

(Jacques, steward, widower, no children, drone business)

In comparison, rather than aim for economic profitability, women opting for the VRP always see their new job as complementary to their family life. They plan to take a part-time job or a job situated somewhere between work and leisure.

- With the arrival of our fourth child... Let's say that it changes everything in terms of organization. So with this offer of the VRP, it was the chance to leave. And in any case even without a VRP I would have left the company.

[And did you have a project? How did it unfold?]

Let's say I was thinking about what I could do so that everything would be coherent, simpler to manage... And so I have a great passion, which is cooking. I always loved to cook, I always saw my mother cooking, my grandmother cooking, I always loved it, and so I said to myself why not. I'm doing a cooking workshop with classes. But it's really an activity that's complementary to my family life. I try to keep all the time for the family, the kids.

(Maité, married, 4 children, master degree, cooking classes)

To access the full financial compensation of the VRP, employees had to have a career or business plan. Interviews revealed that while men were already engaged in side activities or had clear ideas for career retraining, women often focused on activities in line with naturalized female skills (e.g. floristry, cooking). Women turned to domestic and leisure-type activities that they used to do (blogging, cooking, craftwork, etc.), and engaged in the so-called

“marketization of everyday activities” (Jourdain and Naulin, 2019). Moreover, interviews showed that women opting for VRP had already been working part-time for family reasons for several years and had a more distant relationship to employment.

- There were no purser positions available, and working half-time I had no chance. I couldn't switch to medium-haul because we were going to be moved to Nice. The kids were sick of it too, they couldn't handle it. So I took the VRP... I left. So as soon as the VRP was presented I worked on a plan and I submitted my application. (...) I had a real stroke of luck, a florist friend downstairs from me asked me for help for Mother's Day, and I did a vocational certificate in floristry in 2013... And so it was in his shop that the idea germinated and took shape (...).

But in fact I had nothing going for me but my willingness to put in the work. I had no experience with business, no experience with web marketing, no experience with web design; with flowers, or sales, or entrepreneurship.

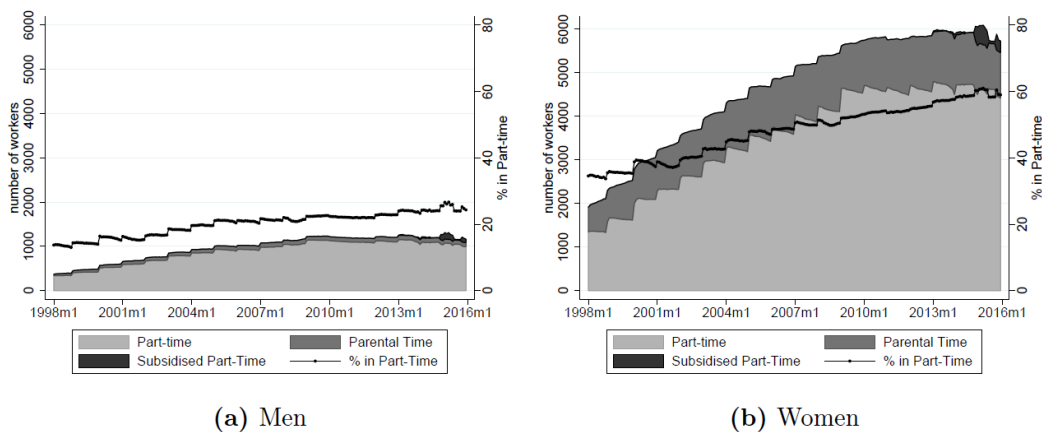
(Marie-Christine, 3 children, married, bachelor's degree, florist)

Marie-Christine formally initiated her retraining plans and gained access to full VRP compensation, but the activity never reached profitability, and eventually stopped. As women who took the VRP usually had a partner, they could rely on the resources of a spouse to cope with the loss of income. The VRP can be seen as an underemployment trap for women which undermines the dual-breadwinner model that has become dominant in Europe, especially in France, in contrast with Germany and the UK where the “one-and-a-half-earner” model has remained the dominant practice (Blaskó et al., 2020).

5. Subsidized part-time: more attractive for men than other forms of part-time work

This section investigates the role of the implementation of the subsidized part-time program in the shift from full-time to part-time schedules. For this part of the analysis, the sample was restricted to cabin crew members, as they were the only ones eligible for the SPT program. Figure 2 plots the evolution of the number of crew members working part-time by gender, and type of part-time work, between 1998 and 2015. There was a clear increasing trend in the number and proportion of crew members working part-time over the period, with larger increases for women than men. By the end of 2015, up to 60% of women worked part-time, while the figure for men was only 23%.

Figure 2: Number of workers in part time positions by gender, CC



Notes: The graph refers only to cabin crew (CC) members, by gender. The area graphs plot the number of workers in part time by type of part-time work (left vertical axis). The black line graphs plot the percentage of workers in part-time work, out of all cabin crew members (right vertical axis). Data from company HR files (1998-2015).

Despite the introduction of a new subsidized part-time option that should be more attractive to workers than regular part-time work, it does not lead to a large increase in either the number or the proportion of part-time workers. In Figure 2, we see that workers in the SPT (black area) represented a very small proportion of the total number of part-time workers. Remarkably, the company's goal of 30% of hours worked under the subsidized part-time regime was very far from being reached in 2015. This suggests that the availability of a SPT program was not a sufficient incentive to encourage workers to move to part-time work. One explanation might be that almost all workers with a propensity to choose part-time work had already done so, especially among women.

Another explanation for the low success rate of this measure is that SPT programs were implemented at short notice, with little information available on their duration and conditions for eligibility. Many of the interviewees reported that they did not know when the program was planned nor how to access it. For example, Beatrice, 40, a flight attendant, explained that she failed to obtain part-time work:

- The problem too is that there's no internal communication in the company. Here, they were looking for volunteers again to deal with interseason overstaffing, for unpaid [leave] in November. So I said, "It's pointless for me to ask for November, they're going to say no." You know, when you're looking, they say no. They're making it up as they go along. They're lost!

(Béatrice, 40, long-haul flight attendant, has a partner, no children)

This information was confirmed by the newsletter of the main union of flight attendants:

Management is distributing applications for the subsidized part-time regime one month at a time, depending on changes and different actors' decisions on the development of

[competing companies], etc. [...] In addition to the lack of longer-term information, this system, which is in complete contradiction with the principles enshrined in the texts, also prevents the expression of a preference on the positioning of the unpaid monthly period, as the timing is too tight. This disastrous management has unfortunately dissuaded many cabin crew from choosing this working time system, even though it was strongly supported.

Nonetheless, it is worth analyzing the gender differences in the take-up of the SPT regime. Table 4 reports the percentage of crew members in part-time work by gender, before and after the implementation of the program. For comparison, we chose the year 2012 as the reference period, since the subsidized part-time program started in mid-2013 and was further extended in 2015. We also report the ratio of the respective percentages of women and men in part-time work.

Table 4: Working time before and after the SPT plan, by gender

<i>Cabin Crew</i>	2012			2015		
	Women	Men	W/M Ratio	Women	Men	W/M Ratio
Full-time (%)	46.21	78.22	0.59	43.11	76.59	0.56
Part-time (%)	42.21	19.98	2.11	44.98	20.99	2.14
Subsidized part-time (%)	0	0	.	1.54	1.03	1.5
Parental time (%)	11.74	1.88	6.24	11	1.91	5.76

Notes: This table gives the distribution of workers by working-time regime and gender in 2012 and 2015. The W/M ratios should be read as follows: “Women are X times as likely to be in this time regime.” Data from company HR files.

In 2012, CC women were half as likely to be in full-time work as men, twice as likely to be in standard part-time work, and six times more likely to work in a parental time regime (a specific part-time regime for employees with children under the age of four). In 2015, 1.5% of women chose SPT vs. 1% of men. This shows that women were indeed more likely to choose

SPT than men. However, this is despite their much higher propensity to work regular part-time: while in 2015 women were 2.1 times more likely than men to be in part-time work, women were only 1.5 times more likely than men to work in the SPT regime. The gender gap in the choice to work part-time was thus much smaller when part-time work was subsidized, suggesting that men's choices are more sensitive to financial incentives and flexibility in work hours.

There are several possible explanations for why the SPT regime was proportionally more attractive for men than for women. First, it was flexible, i.e. temporary and reversible at any time. This means that its impact on workers' careers was limited. Given that men's working schedules are, on average, less linked to domestic/family management and the school calendar, flexibility is more valuable for men than for women. Second, men may have been more likely to shift to part-time simply because they were more likely to be on a full-time regime beforehand. Third, men are more likely to choose to work part-time to allow for personal activities and leisure rather than for family constraints. The data show that when men worked part-time, they did so later in their careers, and tended to be closer to full-time (83% or 92% of full time; see Figure B in the Appendix). One HR manager suggested in an interview that men took part-time for "a month off work dedicated to surfing". Monetary and flexibility incentives are more likely to be key deciding factors for leisure-driven choices (and hence, for men) than for family-driven part-time work. Lastly, as men were more likely to do paid work outside their main job, they faced a smaller drop in income, in proportional terms.

The results also show that SPT could be a way for workers who had spent their careers in full-time positions to experience part-time work for the first time. Out of all SPT workers, 68% had previously only ever worked full-time. This shows that the program managed to attract crew members who had never chosen to work part-time. Overall, while the company restructuring plan failed in substantially increasing the number of crew members in part-time,

it was able to persuade some full-time workers, especially men, to switch to regular part-time work after a period of SPT work. Out of the crew members who spent at least one month in SPT, 14% switched to standard non-subsidized part-time work.

The interviews provide insights into the uses of part-time and allow us to analyze how it varies by gender. Women applying for SPT were more likely to justify the choice to work part-time for family reasons. They wanted to spend more time with their children, either to supervise their schoolwork or to spend the summer holidays with them. More generally, they were trying to balance work and family engagements.

- They [management] sent an email, “We’re looking for volunteers for February.” I went to the Careers department to see if I could have June off, in fact. He told me, “No, that’s not possible. Your request is too restrictive.” But I would really like to have June off because next year is *la première*,⁹ so there’s the exam... These are important years for my daughter!

(Cécile, 50, long-haul flight attendant, married, one daughter aged 16)

- The part-time program allows you to handle the workload every month, it allows you to better organize your personal life, it smooths out your cash flow.

(Christelle, 40, long-haul flight attendant, married, 2 children)

Women rarely applied for part-time to pursue a complementary activity, for leisure, or for occupational training. When men chose to shift to part-time work, however, they took small amounts (working an average of 92% of full-time), either for leisure activities or to develop another paid activity. They rarely cited family reasons (except for some young men pilots who

⁹ In France, *la première* is the second-last year of secondary school, which ends with exams in June that prepare students for the *baccalauréat* examinations of the final year.

had just had newborns). When men worked alongside their main job as cabin crew members, they were self-employed in various types of activities (catering, brokerage, real estate, camping, coaching, etc.). However, men's part-time work was still a temporary practice that stopped after a few months or years.

- I always worked 100% (full-time), except during the last VRP where working time was split. It was something like 75% (of full-time) I think, we had seven days off per month. That was good, it really freed up some time on my schedule. That was a really good experience for me. After that I asked for some more, because some of the days off were paid. But because I was too young, I didn't get them. (Franck, 32, steward, single, no children)

I work 80% (of full-time), 11 days (per month) in fact. And on the side, in the last two years, I've started working with a mortgage broker. I'm an agent, so I bill for my services. I'm super independent. [And you weren't interested in the VRP...?] No, I'm too scared of not having a job after... I don't have the balls for a total career change, and for now what I've set up suits me well.

(Guillaume, 36, steward, medium-haul, has a partner, no children)

6. Discussion and conclusion

The consequences of restructuring for corporations and employees have received more and more attention in the literature due to the increase in restructuring plans in various industries. In this article, we contribute to the literature by analyzing within-company gender inequalities in a restructuring plan in the air transport industry. The restructuring plan under consideration consists of an activity reduction scheme through a voluntary redundancy plan (VRP) (extensive margin)

and a subsidized part-time plan (SPT) (intensive margin). Drawing on a mixed methods strategy, we used exhaustive HR-files and a set of in-depth interviews to test whether employees' choice and motive to opt out vary by gender in relation with individual and organizational factors.

The results validate the first hypothesis and confirm that women were less likely to opt out of the company through the VRP. The reason for choosing the VRP also differed by gender. While men chose to leave the company to start a new business, women who took the VRP tended to permanently leave the labor force, especially when they had children and could rely on their spouse's resources to compensate for income loss. Large-scale restructurings can be seen as an underemployment trap for women, leading to an increase in the gender employment gap and undermining the dual-earner model.

Moreover, we study the deployment of a subsidized part-time (SPT) scheme aimed at reducing the total number of hours worked (intensive margin). We consider whether employees' choice to work subsidized part-time vary by gender and analyze its impact at the individual level. Our results validate the second hypothesis stating that women are more likely to choose subsidized part-time than men, as a higher percentage of women opted for SPT. However, we also observe that the gender gap in SPT was smaller than with the other non-subsidized forms of part-time work. This result suggests that SPT was the most attractive part-time kind for men compared to other non-subsidized part-times, and that men are more sensitive to financial incentives when choosing their working time regime. The in-depth interviews provide further understanding of the gender mechanisms at stake by unveiling the reasons given by men and women for choosing SPT. While women chose part-time mainly to improve their work-family balance and meet their family needs, a reasoning which is in line with the literature on gender and part-time work (Crompton and Lyonette, 2005; Goldin, 2021), men chose it for career and leisure purposes. Our results also indicates that men see subsidized part-time work as temporary (which contributes to its

acceptability) and plan to return to full-time work. In line with Kjeldstad et al. (2012), our paper shows that when part-time is short-lived, the gender gap in part time is smaller.

In total, our article contributes to the extensive literature on part-time work and gender inequalities by providing new empirical evidence of the gendered uses and penalties of part-time work in a life-course perspective, (Hirsch, 2005; Lyonette, 2015). Our article also provides further understanding of how organizational policies (such as subsidized part-time) may both contribute to reduce gender inequalities in the short-run (by increasing the rate of part-time work by men) while fostering such inequalities in the long run (by increasing strategic use of part-time work on the male side).

Our results have important implications for the management of gender diversity and work-life balance policies. We show that, when restructurings are conducted on a voluntary basis, the employees' choices differ by gender. Women seem to anticipate a lower probability of reemployment and avoid leaving the company by self-selecting less often. When opting out, however, they retrain in activities with low economic profitability and in line with their domestic roles. These results call into question the gender distribution of the effects of measures implemented by either companies or governments to support business creation, and support improving access to lifelong learning for women. Similarly, a subsidized part-time plan has the potential of decreasing the gender gap in the choice of part-time work in the short run, since men seem to be proportionally more interested in this kind of part-time than in other non-subsidized types. A similar observation is often made about men's propensity to opt for parental leave, with a much higher take-up rate by fathers in countries where leave is well compensated (proportional to salary, as in Scandinavian countries) and a very low take-up rate in countries such as France where compensation is low and fixed. This finding can inspire reforms of the parental leave so that it becomes more evenly distributed between the two parents. Yet, a subsidized part-time scheme is not enough to reduce the part-time gender gap in the long term.

Finally, the ongoing economic context linked to the COVID-19 pandemic suggests that restructuring plans are likely to continue to increase – either in the form of top-down or self-selection processes – and they deserve further analysis (Alon et al., 2020). As women’s employment appears to be more vulnerable to economic downturns than men’s (Karamessini and Rubery 2014; Rubery and Rafferty, 2013), there is an urgent need to improve our understanding of how to better distribute paid work.

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Appendices

List of abbreviations

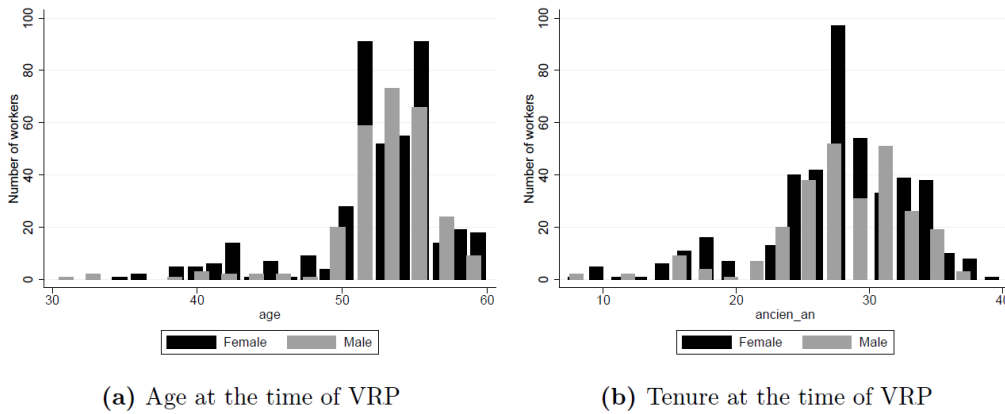
VRP : Voluntary redundancy plan

SPT : Subsidized part-time work

CC : Cabin crew

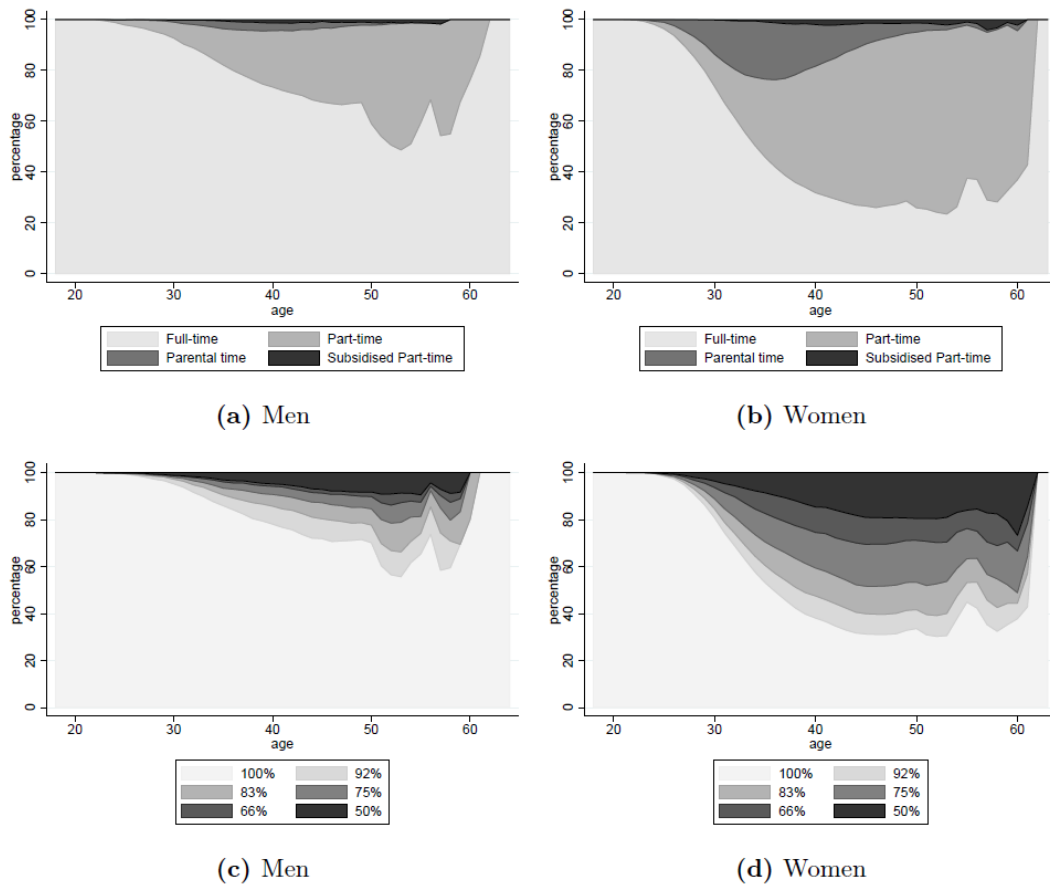
FC : Flight crew

Figure A: Distribution of age and tenure at the time of the VRP



Notes: These graphs plot the age and tenure distribution of workers who took the VRP. The sample used is composed of 688 workers, including 423 women and 265 men. Data from company HR files (2013-2015).

Figure B: Percentage of workers in part-time positions by age and gender, CC



Notes: The graphs refer only to cabin crew (CC) members, by gender. Area graphs plot the percentage of workers in part time positions by type (panels a and b) and intensity (panel c and d) of part-time. Data from company HR files (1998-2015).