

Job sharing

Katherine Marshall

If two heads are better than one, then perhaps job sharing is the ideal work arrangement. Simply put, two people voluntarily share the responsibilities of one full-time job, allowing employers to retain valued employees who prefer to work part time (see *Data sources and definitions* and Singh, 1991). Job sharing may also help to introduce a broader range of skills and experience to the workplace while providing a framework for continuity in the tasks performed. It also means, however, less opportunity for career advancement and increased administrative procedures (see *Advantages and disadvantages*).

Although already established in Europe, job sharing first formally appeared in the United States in the 1970s, emerging as a means of offering part-time hours in career-oriented positions normally requiring full-time work. Teaching and nursing were among the first professional positions to be shared, filled largely by women wanting to combine career and family. The public sector and large private sector corporations also adopted job sharing as an option for their employees.

This article looks at who job shares in Canada, and considers how shared jobs compare with regular part-time jobs. The 1995 Survey of Work Arrangements is used in the analysis as it offers first-time national data on this alternative work option.¹

Job sharing on the rise?

Although no data exist to track the number of people job sharing over time, some trend information is available on organizations offering job

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Data sources and definitions

The Survey of Work Arrangements (SWA), a supplement to the November 1995 Labour Force Survey (LFS), collected, among other things, data on the work schedules of paid workers. The SWA asked respondents who worked part time (fewer than 30 hours) whether they did so "because [they split] the job with someone else (a job sharing arrangement)." A note on the questionnaire reminded interviewers to make sure respondents did not confuse job sharing with shift work. Since the question is new to the SWA, and the concept relatively unfamiliar, data quality cannot be tested. Full-time workers were not asked about job sharing because they were not likely to have such an arrangement.

The Bureau of Labour Information at Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) has maintained, since 1986, information on job sharing provisions contained in all major collective agreements in Canada. It includes all agreements (more than 1,000 in 1996) covering union membership of 500 and over.

The annual Compensation Planning Outlook Survey, administered by the Conference Board of Canada, covers mainly medium and large Canadian organizations operating in a variety of regions and sectors. The 10-page questionnaire covers issues in compensation, human resources management, industrial relations, and benefits and working conditions, and includes information on job sharing arrangements.

sharing as a work option. For example, the number of major collective agreements with job sharing provisions, and hence the number of employees formally entitled to this work option,

Paid worker: any person who receives remuneration, usually in the form of a wage or salary from an employer.

Part-time: the LFS assigns a part-time status to all persons who usually work fewer than 30 hours a week at their main or sole job.

Qualified data: all sample survey estimates, such as those in the SWA and LFS, will have some level of sampling error. Measurement of the standard error of an estimate is expressed as the coefficient of variation (CV), which is expressed as a percentage of the estimate. For the SWA, an estimate of 40,500 or more at the Canada level will have an acceptable CV of less than 16.5%. Estimates of 18,000 to 40,499 must be qualified, or used with greater caution, because their CV is likely to fall between 16.6% and 33.3%, which means the estimate is subject to high levels of error. Estimates between 10,000 and 17,999 are not reliable and are considered confidential, while those under 10,000 are not releasable.

Job sharing: refers to a voluntary arrangement in which employees (usually two), with the approval of their employer, share a single job on an ongoing basis. It is still largely an employee-initiated arrangement.

Work sharing: refers to any comprehensive arrangement requiring workers to accept reduced hours in order to avert layoffs. This situation occurs usually when a business, for reasons beyond its control, experiences a slackening demand for its goods and services in the short run.

rose from 3% of employees in 1986 to 12% in 1993 (Chart A), remaining relatively stable since then. (Other unionized employees may have had the option to job share, but official

Advantages and disadvantages

In 1982, the Commission of Inquiry into Part-time Work compiled survey results from 104 job sharers and 37 employers of job sharers (CIPW, 1983). Below are some advantages and disadvantages most often cited by job sharers and employers.

Advantages – employees

- * helps increase balance between work and family
- * have more energy and less stress
- * more flexibility with schedule
- * keeps skills current
- * more job satisfaction
- * chance to ease into retirement

Disadvantages – employees

- * more difficult to advance in career
- * less opportunity for training
- * lack of some benefits
- * less recognition as a career person
- * harder to change jobs
- * work time can extend into time off

Advantages – employers

- * productivity is higher
- * employees are more innovative
- * brings a wider range of skills to the job
- * greater organization and commitment to the job
- * more enthusiasm and less time off work
- * opportunity to keep valued employees

Disadvantages – employers

- * more supervision required
- * compensation costs can increase
- * increased discussion and communication needed
- * administrative procedures change
- * workspace difficulties
- * personal conflicts with co-sharer

8% said they shared a job with someone else. Of women working part time, almost one in 10 shared a job; just one in 20 male part-timers did so. Although women held the bulk of part-time jobs (72%), they occupied an even larger majority of shared jobs (84%).

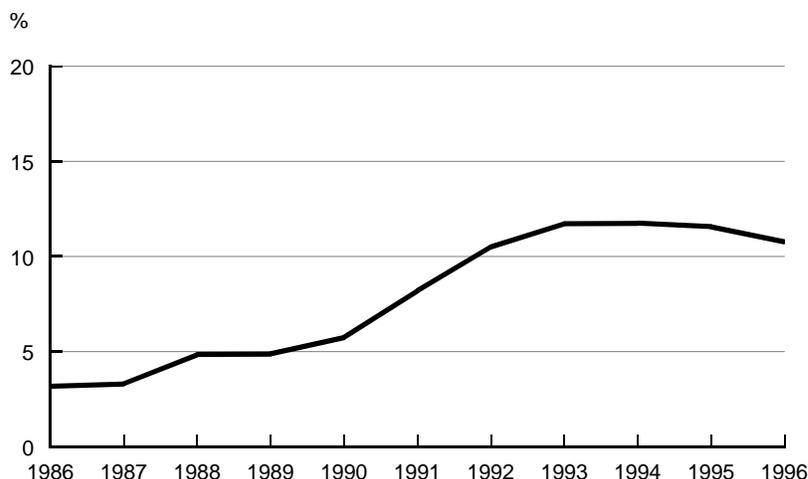
Compared with other part-time workers, people in job sharing positions tend to be older, better educated, and more likely to work in professional occupations. In 1995, more than half of job sharers were aged 35 and over, compared with 40% of regular part-timers; half of job sharers had graduated from college or university and 40% worked as professionals, compared with 37% and 25%, respectively, of regular part-timers (Table 2). Half of job sharers had children at home, versus 35% of regular part-timers. Although job sharers and regular part-timers worked roughly the same number of hours, more job sharers with pre-school aged children,

provisions had not been negotiated into their collective agreement.) Similarly, according to the Conference Board of Canada, the relative number of medium and large non-unionized organizations offering job sharing programs has risen. In 1994, the first year such organizations were asked about job sharing, 38% said they offered the option to some or all of their employees; in 1995 the proportion had increased to 41%, and by 1996, to 43%. Such figures show that job sharing has become more widely available in both unionized and non-unionized large workplaces.²

Who job shares?

Among paid workers in November 1995, one in 5 worked part time (19%). Almost one in 3 employed women worked part time, compared with one in 10 men (Table 1). Of all part-timers,

Chart A
One in 10 unionized employees * has access to job sharing provisions.



Source: Bureau of Labour Information, Human Resources Development Canada
 * Employees belonging to major unions only (membership over 500).

**Table 1
Paid workers by work status and sex**

	Both sexes	Men	Women
		'000	
Total employed	11,084	5,776	5,309
Full-time	8,968	5,192	3,776
Part-time	2,116 **	584	1,532
Job share	171	28 *	143
Non-job share	1,935	552	1,383
		%	
Total employed	100	100	100
Full-time	81	90	71
Part-time	19	10	29
Part-time	100 (100)	100 (28)	100 (72)
Job share	8 (100)	5* (16*)	9 (84)
Non-job share	91 (100)	95 (29)	90 (71)

Sources: Labour Force Survey and Survey of Work Arrangements, 1995
 Note: Distributions in parenthesis are to be read across.
 * Qualified data (see Data sources and definitions).
 ** This total includes the 10,500 part-timers who did not state whether or not they job shared.

given the choice, said they would keep their current working hours (64%); only 54% of other part-timers with young children would do so. These findings suggest that job sharing's original appeal – allowing career people with children to better balance work and family – continues today.³

The types of professional position shared have changed little since job sharing was introduced. Teaching and nursing made up 25% of all job sharing occupations in November 1995, compared with 14% of all other regular part-time work (Chart B). This finding is not surprising, given that these professions have been traditionally female-dominated.

Most common in Quebec

Although most part-time workers in 1995 were in Ontario (over 800,000), less than 7% of these (53,000) job shared. Quebec, on the other hand, was home to fewer part-timers (almost 500,000) but slightly more job sharers (55,000), who represented 11% of all part-timers in the province (Table 3).

Shared jobs are higher quality

The belief that people who job share are more likely than regular part-timers to work in the public sector, in large private sector firms and in urban areas is not fully supported by the findings. The SWA results show that slightly more job sharers than regular

part-time workers were public employees (19% versus 14%) (Table 4); however, virtually the same proportion of job sharers and regular part-timers worked in firms with 100 or more employees (one in 5). As well, over 80% of both lived in an urban area.

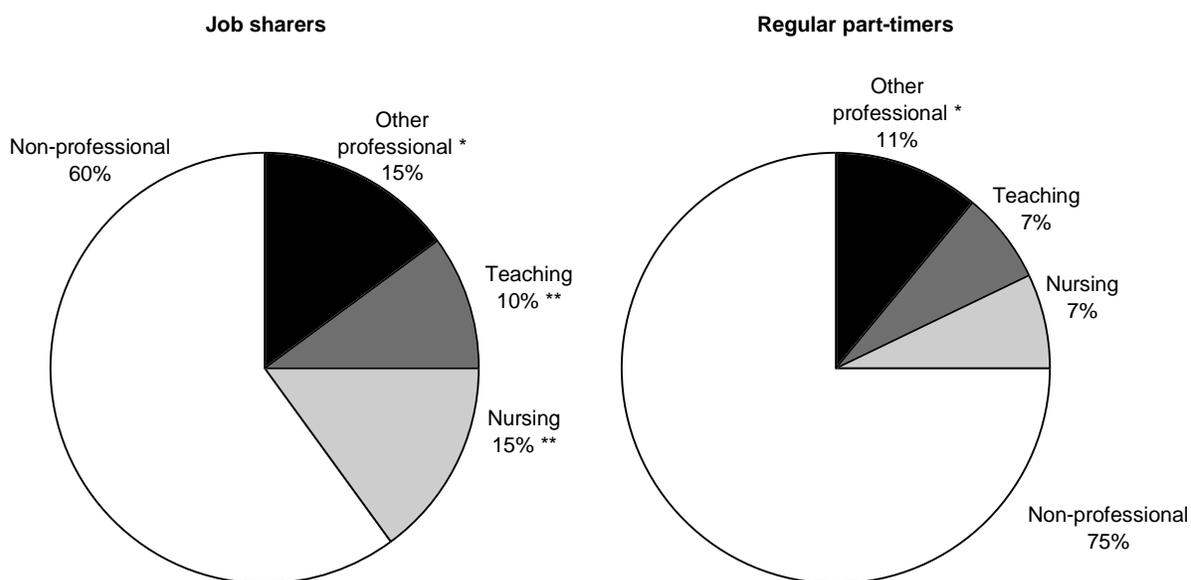
However, the attributes of shared jobs do differ from those of regular part-time work. In 1995, more than 80% were permanent and 36% unionized, compared with 71% and 23%, respectively, for regular part-time jobs. One in 5 job sharers had worked in the job for over 10 years, compared with one in 10 regular part-timers.⁴ The average hourly pay was better as well, at \$13.51 for shared and \$10.96 for regular part-time (a reasonable finding considering the educational and occupational attainment among these workers). Benefits offered to job sharers were also considerably better than those offered regular part-timers. For example, 45% of job sharers said they received paid vacation,⁵ compared with 29% of regular part-timers (Chart C). Approximately one in 3 job sharers was entitled to a supplementary health care plan, paid sick leave, dental plan, and private pension. Just under one in 5 regular part-timers enjoyed each of these benefits. Full-time workers were twice as likely as job sharers to be so entitled.

**Table 2
Selected demographic characteristics of job sharers and regular part-timers**

	Total part-time	Job share	Regular part-time
		%	
Aged 35 or over	41	54	40
Diploma or degree	38	49	37
Professional occupation *	26	40	25
Children <25 at home	36	50	35
Children <16 at home	40	48	40
Children <6 and prefer current hours	55	64	54

Source: Survey of Work Arrangements, 1995
 * Includes managerial and administrative; natural sciences, engineering and mathematics; social sciences; religion; teaching; medicine and health; and artistic, literary and recreational occupations.

Chart B
Four in ten job sharers are professionals.



Source: Survey of Work Arrangements, 1995

* Includes managerial and administrative; natural sciences, engineering and mathematics; social sciences; religion; other medicine and health; and artistic, literary and recreational occupations.

** Qualified data (see Data sources and definitions).

Summary

Findings show that 171,000 (8%) of part-time paid workers were job sharing in November 1995, and that most of these workers (84%) were women. Compared with regular part-time employees, people who job shared were much more likely to be university-educated, hold professional occupations, and have children at home. Also, shared jobs were more often permanent and unionized, and offered more benefits and higher pay than regular part-time positions. Quite simply, a shared job was more likely to be a “good” part-time job than was a regular part-time position.

Although it is still not a widely practised work arrangement, job sharing is becoming an increasingly

Table 3
Job sharers and regular part-timers by region

	All part-timers	Distribution	Regular part-timers	Distribution	Job sharers	Distribution	Job sharers as % all part-timers
	'000	%	'000	%	'000	%	%
Canada	2,116 *	100	1,935	100	171	100	8
Atlantic	142	7	133	7	--	--	--
Quebec	484	23	429	22	55	32	11
Ontario	814	38	758	39	53	31	7
Prairies	376	18	347	18	28 **	16 **	7 **
British Columbia	300	14	268	14	27 **	16 **	9 **

Source: Survey of Work Arrangements, 1995

* This total includes the 10,500 part-timers who did not state whether or not they job shared.

** Qualified data (see Data sources and definitions).

Table 4
Selected characteristics of job sharers and regular part-timers

	Total part-time	Job share	Regular part-time
		%	
Public employee	15	19	14
Firm size 100 +	19	21	19
Urban residence *	83	84	83
Permanent job	72	81	71
Job tenure >10 years	12	22	11
Unionized	24	36	23
		\$	
Hourly pay **	11.22	13.51	10.96

Source: Survey of Work Arrangements, 1995

* Population concentration of 1,000 or more and a population density of 400 or more per square kilometre.

** Derived average for all workers, including those salaried and paid by the hour.

sharing, was conducted during December 1995 and April 1996.

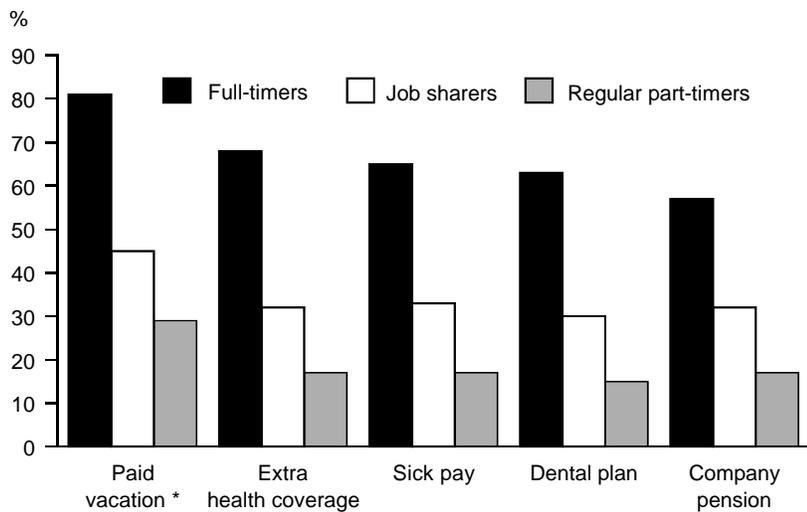
2 Neither HRDC nor the Conference Board survey covers smaller union or non-unionized organizations.

3 Another reason people may choose to work fewer hours is to attend school. Some 21% of job sharers and 34% of regular part-time workers gave school as the main reason for working part time.

4 This refers to the length of time the respondent had been at the current job, not to the length of time he or she had been job sharing. For example, for a high school teacher who had taught at the same school for 15 years but had shared the position for the last 5, job tenure would be 15 years.

5 Although employment standards and labour laws generally entitle employees to at least two weeks of paid vacation, some workers do not enjoy such a benefit. These include some contract, term, casual and on-call workers. It is possible that some workers who were expected to take pay in lieu of vacation time may have responded negatively to the related survey question.

Chart C
Job sharers are more likely to have employment benefits than are regular part-timers.



Source: Survey of Work Arrangements, 1995

* See note 5.

■ **References**

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important work option. More employers are offering alternative work arrangements as a way of keeping valued employees and creating a committed workforce. □

■ **Notes**

1 The Workplace and Employee Survey is currently being developed by Statistics Canada. A pilot test, including employee- and employer-related questions on job