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From Policy to Practice: Unraveling Individual Uptake of Compressed Work Schedules

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ABSTRACT

Compressed work schedules, like full-time 4-day weeks, are widely advocated as promising work–life flexibility policies and attractive alternatives to female part-time work. Yet, individual characteristics and implementation factors associated with policy use are understudied. Drawing from the literature on work–life flexibility policies and nonstandard work schedules, this study investigates which individual characteristics and implementation factors are associated with policy use. Our quantitative results reveal that employees with longer daily working hours are significantly more inclined to use the policy and view it as a source of increased autonomy. Our qualitative findings elucidate that overworking employees often use the policy to regulate their chronic overtime via additional days off. Moreover, our findings indicate limited policy use as an alternative to part-time work and reveal that women transitioning from part-time roles may face increased work–life conflict when using the policy. These findings highlight that the policy should not be advocated as a one-size-fits-all solution and provide several implications for research and practice.

1 | Introduction

Compressed work schedules, like full-time 4-day weeks, have increasingly gained global interest as they are believed to offer multiple benefits for employees and their employers (Campbell 2023; Dutordoir and Struyfs 2024; International Labour Organization, 2023; Jahal et al. 2023; Su and Wang 2020). This policy allows workers to rearrange their exact amount of working hours into fewer days, thereby enjoying more days off (Bolino et al. 2021; Ronen and Primps 1981). Public advocates urge that the policy enhances employees' work–life balance while maintaining full-time availability for their employers (Kamer Van Volksvertegenwoordigers 2022; International Labour Organization, 2023). It is also believed to

stimulate full-time female labor participation by providing an alternative work–life solution to part-time work (Kamer Van Volksvertegenwoordigers 2022). Given these potential benefits, policymakers and organizations increasingly make compressed schedules available to workers (Jahal et al. 2023).

Yet, as with many work–life flexibility policies (Kossek et al. 2023), individual characteristics (i.e., personal and professional factors) and implementation factors (i.e., considerations regarding the policy) associated with the use of compressed schedules remain understudied (Bolino et al. 2021; du Bois et al. 2025). This “black box” of implementation knowledge (e.g., Lawrence 1997; Kossek et al. 2023) limits the policy's practical impact as well as our conceptual understanding

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surrounding the individual dynamics underlying policy use (Kossek et al. 2023). Without insights into the individual implementation of compressed schedules, their full potential is likely to remain unrealized (Kossek et al. 2023), and researchers do not fully understand why these policies succeed or fail in meeting their intended objectives (Bolino et al. 2021; du Bois et al. 2025; Kossek et al. 2023). For example, if the aim is to encourage greater full-time female labor participation, but part-time female employees show little inclination to adopt the policy due to certain barriers, its effectiveness in achieving this objective is likely to be limited.

Drawing from the broader literature on work–life flexibility policies (Kossek et al. 2023) and nonstandard work schedules (Bolino et al. 2021), this multistaged study answers the research question: “Which individual characteristics and implementation factors are associated with the use of full-time compressed work schedules?” We initiate this research by exploring hypothesized associations between policy use and factors like autonomy, career, and personal considerations. In doing so, we pay close attention to the potentially moderating role of factors like gender, prior work regime, and having children. Subsequently, as Bolino et al. (2021) recommended, we transition to more inductive methods to further examine why workers with specific personal and professional profiles decide to use the policy.¹

The reported research consists of a first quantitative attitudinal study of individual characteristics and implementation factors associated with individuals’ intended policy use, followed by a mixed-methods case study investigating actual policy use in a large organization introducing full-time compressed schedules as a work–life flexibility policy. The two studies complement each other, as the first one allows us to gather data on potential implementation factors and intended policy use across a representative sample of workers, and the second study allows us to elaborate on Study 1’s initial findings by examining policy use in practice and engaging in in-depth interviews with policy users and their managers to contextualize them.

This work makes several contributions to theory and practice. Theoretically, it deepens our understanding of individual characteristics and implementation factors associated with the policy use of compressed schedules. The findings advance the work–life flexibility literature by addressing the “black box” of implementation knowledge (Kossek et al. 2023) and answer the call for more research on whether and why certain workers feel more suited for compressed schedules than others (Bolino et al. 2021), thereby providing deeper insights into for whom compressed schedules might succeed or fail in meeting intended objectives and outlining fruitful avenues for future inquiry for scholars across academic disciplines.

On a practical note, the collective findings underscore that compressed schedules cannot be treated as a one-size-fits-all work–life flexibility policy and help identify workers for whom the policy may or may not offer the widely advocated benefits. By addressing the prevailing theory-empirical gap (e.g., Kossek et al. 2023), these findings also offer actionable advice for policymakers and organizations and implications for HR practitioners

who guide workers in choosing the most suitable work–life flexibility policy for their personal and professional profiles.

2 | Theory and Hypothesis Development

2.1 | Definition and History of Compressed Work Schedules

Prior research has defined the term *compressed work schedule* as an “alternative work schedule in which a trade-off is made between the number of hours worked per day, and the number of days worked per week, in order to work the standard number of weekly hours in less than 5 days” (Ronen and Primps 1981). The most common compressed work schedule is a 10-h day, 4-day week (Bolino et al. 2021; Ronen and Primps 1981). However, it should be kept in mind that the compressed work schedule describes the employee’s timetable, which may differ from the firm’s hours of availability for interfacing with its environment (Ronen and Primps 1981).

Historically, compressed schedules were typically imposed on workers by the organization (cf. Baltes et al. 1999; Ronen and Primps 1981 for overview studies) rather than being offered as optional work–life flexibility policies that give employees latitude over when, where, and how much they work (Bourdeau et al. 2019; Kossek et al. 2023). This traditional top-down implementation of compressed schedules was quickly critiqued and dismissed as a management fad (e.g., Beam 1989; Owen 1975), leading the schedules to largely disappear from the academic literature for several decades (cf. Bolino et al. 2021; Campbell 2023; Jahal et al. 2023 for recent reviews).

In recent years, however, academic and public interest in compressed schedules has rekindled to improve employees’ work–life balance (International Labour Organization 2023; Jahal et al. 2023) and combat challenges like female labor participation (e.g., Kamer Van Volksvertegenwoordigers 2022). For example, Belgium’s 2022 labor reform has legally allowed workers to work in compressed schedules like the full-time 4-day week (Kamer Van Volksvertegenwoordigers 2022; Jahal et al. 2023). This reform aims to enhance employees’ work–life balance while safeguarding their full-time availability for employers (Kamer Van Volksvertegenwoordigers 2022). Policymakers also reason that compressed schedules offer alternative work–life balance solutions to part-time work and, in turn, stimulate female labor participation (Kamer Van Volksvertegenwoordigers 2022).

In these contemporary implementations of compressed schedules, the arrangement is typically not imposed on workers but instead made available as a work–life flexibility policy that individuals can voluntarily use (Jahal et al. 2023). Since the empirical literature on compressed schedules is skewed towards the previous century, when the policy was typically imposed on workers (Bolino et al. 2021; Campbell 2023; Jahal et al. 2023), we still have limited insights into the individual characteristics and implementation factors associated with policy use (Bolino et al. 2021). Therefore, we will draw from the broader literature on work–life flexibility policies (Kossek et al. 2023) and

nonstandard work schedules (Bolino et al. 2021) to develop our hypotheses for this study.

2.2 | Compressed Work Schedules as Work–Life Flexibility Policy

Contemporary applications of compressed work schedules can be classified into the broader category of *enabling work–life flexibility policies* that give employees latitude over when, where, and how much they work (Bourdeau et al. 2019; Kossek et al. 2023). Within the taxonomy proposed by Kossek et al. (2023), we define compressed schedules as a *scheduling policy* because they provide temporal control over when work is performed.

Unlike *idiosyncratic deals (i-deals)*, which are tailored agreements between employees and employers that provide specific benefits based on individual negotiations, compressed work schedules are typically standardized policies available to employees (Kossek et al. 2023). This distinction is important because *i-deals* often arise from personal negotiations and vary widely among employees. In contrast, compressed schedules are typically made available as part of an organization's broader policy (Kossek et al. 2023). Thus, in contrast to *i-deals*, work–life flexibility policies are focused on adapting job structures to provide groups of employees with a form of “built-in autonomy” (Kossek et al. 2023).

However, it is important to note that individuals still differ in whether and how they utilize this autonomy made available to them (Kossek et al. 2023). Although many studies on work–life flexibility policies acknowledge the theoretical and practical relevance of studying such *individual implementation factors*—that is, the within-person ways in which individuals assess and enact individual decision-making regarding the use of work–life flexibility policies—only a few have done so (Kossek et al. 2023). Based on the available literature and contemporary policy expectations, we formulate three individual implementation factors potentially associated with using compressed work schedules.

2.3 | Individual Implementation Factors

2.3.1 | Policy Use Associated With Autonomy Considerations

As mentioned above, work–life flexibility policies are typically focused on adapting job structures to provide employees autonomy (Kossek et al. 2023), which is one of the three basic psychological needs outlined in the seminal self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan 2012). Although not all individuals may be explicitly aware of this universal need, they naturally experience affect in situations (e.g., work–life flexibility policy) in which this need is satisfied or thwarted and gravitate toward situations satisfying this need (e.g., policy use in this context) (cf. Deci and Ryan 2012).

Autonomy—that is, the need to feel in control of one's actions (Deci and Ryan 2012)—is highly relevant in the context of

compressed work schedules. Unlike traditional 5-day schedules, which are rigid in structure, compressed work schedules have the potential to increase one's sense of autonomy as they allow workers to cluster their work and leisure time to align with their preferences (Bolino et al. 2021; Ronen and Primps 1981) and engage in leisure activities that cannot be conducted in the traditional 2-day weekend (Maklan 1977; Jahal et al. 2023).

However, the older empirical literature on compressed work schedules suggests that personal factors, especially gender, may affect whether and to what extent autonomy considerations underlie policy use. Specifically, a pioneering review suggested that men favor the schedules for the autonomy they offer to cluster their work and leisure time, while women viewed compressed schedules through a family lens rather than a leisure lens (Ronen and Primps 1981). Although the past semicentury has seen a remarkable convergence of economic gender roles, family demands continue to impose differential demands on women's time compared to men's (Cortés and Pan 2023). Therefore, women may be less inclined to use the policy out of autonomy considerations compared to men.

Taken together, we propose that individual use of compressed work schedules will be associated with the belief that it would enhance one's sense of autonomy and that gender will moderate this association. Our first hypothesis reads as follows:

Hypothesis 1. *Individual policy use is associated with the belief that it would enhance one's sense of autonomy (H1a), and this association is weaker for women (H1b).*

2.3.2 | Policy Use Associated With Career Considerations

Second, individual policy use can also be associated with career considerations—that is, projections about one's future work-related opportunities that affect policy uptake (Kossek et al. 2023)—as policy use decisions tend to affect career opportunities (Kossek et al. 2023). As mentioned above, in the specific context of compressed schedules, ongoing policy discourse suggests that full-time compressed schedules provide an alternative work–life solution to part-time work (Kamer Van Volksvertegenwoordigers 2022, 199). As women are statistically more likely to opt for part-time systems, policymakers argue that offering full-time compressed work schedules stimulates women's labor market outcomes (Kamer Van Volksvertegenwoordigers 2022, 199).

In favor of this policy expectation, research indicates that compressed work schedules can significantly and positively influence women's career trajectories (Noback et al. 2016). Specifically, the study reveals that women who use compressed 4-day work schedules may experience a form of reward for their commitment to full-time work, which can enhance their sense of appreciation in the workplace (Noback et al. 2016).

Building on this evidence, we propose that policy use will be associated with the belief that compressed schedules may enhance one's appreciation for one's work. However, drawing from

Noback et al.'s (2016) findings, we argue that this dynamic may be more pronounced for part-time working women, who often face societal pressures to balance career aspirations with caregiving responsibilities (Kossek et al. 2023) and may be rewarded more for working full-time (Noback et al. 2016). Accordingly, our second hypothesis states:

Hypothesis 2. *Individual policy use is associated with the belief that it would enhance one's sense of appreciation for one's work (H2a), and this association is stronger for part-time working women (H2b).*

2.3.3 | Policy Use Associated With Personal Considerations

Third, although career considerations may play a role in individual policy use, a systematic review of nonstandard work schedules suggests that most workers tend to prefer compressed schedules for personal rather than professional reasons (Bolino et al. 2021). Specifically, by clustering leisure time (Ronen and Primps 1981; Bolino et al. 2021), full-time employees may find that the additional day off allows them to engage more fully in their personal relationships outside of work. For example, according to the systematic review, employees often appreciate the extra day off for family activities (Bolino et al. 2021).

Along these lines, ongoing policy discourse highlights that compressed work schedules provide substitutes for parental leave systems, allowing employees to spend more time with their children (Kamer Van Volksvertegenwoordigers 2022). Taken collectively, we argue that personal considerations, specifically the belief that compressed schedules would improve one's personal relationships outside of work, are associated with individual policy use and that this dynamic is more substantial for those with children:

Hypothesis 3. *Individual policy use is associated with the belief that it would improve one's personal relationships outside of work (H3a), and this association is stronger for those with children (H3b).*

2.3.4 | Other Personal and Professional Characteristics to Consider

Next to the hypothesized implementation factors and moderators above, the existing literature hints that other personal and professional characteristics may also be associated with policy use. First, compressed work schedules may reduce employees' number of commuting trips (Su and Wang 2020), which may attract workers with longer commutes to reduce their time, expenses, and effort related to going to work. Second, previous research also suggests that longer work days in compressed schedules may lead to commuting problems (Fottler 1977) and increased fatigue (Ronen and Primps 1981), making those with already extended daily working hours less inclined to use the policy. Along these lines, with worker fatigue documented as a potential consequence of compressed work schedules (Maklan 1977; Ronen and Primps 1981), it is also suggested that older employees may

find longer work days in compressed work schedules burdensome (Owen 1975). Therefore, we will also explore whether and how commute time, prior working hours, and age are associated with individual policy use.

3 | Study 1

3.1 | Methods for Study 1

3.1.1 | Research Setting and Sample

To test the starting hypotheses, we conducted an online attitudinal questionnaire among 1009 employees in the run-up to Belgium's 2022 labor reform, which would legally allow employees to work in full-time compressed work schedules like the full-time 4-dayweek (Kamer Van Volksvertegenwoordigers 2022; Jahal et al. 2023). The sample, representative of age and gender in terms of the Belgian working population, was gathered through a European leader in data collection with high-quality panels. The online questionnaire was administered through the Qualtrics XM platform, and digital written consent was obtained before the questionnaire commenced.

3.1.2 | Measures and Analyses

To make the concept of compressed work schedules tangible for participants, we introduced the concept through the most common example, that is, the full-time 4-dayweek (cf. Bolino et al. 2021; Ronen and Primps 1981). Specifically, the work-life flexibility policy was introduced to the participants via the following introductory text: "The federal government considers allowing Belgian workers to apply to split their full-time workweek into four longer working days instead of the classic shorter five working days. Specifically, for example, a 38-h workweek could be split into four longer days of 9.5 h instead of five days of 7.6 h."

Accordingly, participants were asked to what extent they were inclined to use the policy if given the opportunity by their employer. Specifically, full-time employees were asked, "If the opportunity were to arise, how likely would you be to work in the full-time four-day workweek system in the future on a scale of 0 (Very unlikely) to 10 (Very likely)?" to measure intended policy use. In contrast, part-time employees were asked: "If the opportunity were to arise, how likely would you be to (return to) work full-time in the future under the full-time four-day workweek system on a scale of 0 (Very unlikely) to 10 (Very likely)?" to measure intended policy use among this group.

To measure the three hypothesized individual implementation factors, participants were asked to rate the following statements on an 11-point Likert scale from 0 (totally disagree) to 11 (totally agree): (i) "I believe that a full-time four-day workweek would give me a greater sense of autonomy," (ii) "I believe that a full-time four-day workweek would give me more appreciation for the work I do," and (iii) "I believe that a full-time four-day workweek would improve my personal relationships outside work."

TABLE 1 | Quantitative results for Study 1—Intended policy use.

Dependent variable: Intended policy use (11-point Likert)	(1)		(2)	
	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
Independent variables				
Personal and professional factors				
Female	0.033	[0.271]	0.152	[0.387]
Children	0.121	[0.098]	0.228	[0.154]
Age in numbers	−0.054***	[0.010]	−0.026**	[0.008]
Part-time dummy	−1.074**	[0.418]	−1.144**	[0.337]
Daily working hours in numbers	0.148*	[0.064]	0.010	[0.052]
Commute time in minutes	0.000	[0.002]	0.002	[0.002]
Female (part-time)	−0.145	[0.519]	0.953	[0.534]
Individual implementation factors				
Autonomy considerations related to CWS			0.346***	[0.064]
Career considerations related to CWS			0.101*	[0.049]
Personal considerations related to CWS			0.437***	[0.057]
Interaction terms				
Female (autonomy considerations)			−0.033	[0.067]
Female (part-time) (career considerations)			−0.243**	[0.086]
Children (personal considerations)			−0.020	[0.025]

Note: $N = 1009$. This table presents regression results from the attitudinal questionnaire conducted among a sample of Belgian workers, representative in terms of age and gender. Regression coefficients are displayed along with their standard errors in square brackets. (1) represents the model without implementation factors, and (2) adds the hypothesized implementation factors and moderators to the model.

*** $p < 0.001$.

** $p < 0.01$.

* $p < 0.05$.

Finally, to examine the hypothesized moderating personal and professional factors (i.e., gender, work regime, children) and control variables (age, daily working hours, commuting time), we included items on these variables in the questionnaire. The included variables are displayed in Table 1 with their coefficients and standard errors from the linear regression analyses.

3.1.3 | Additional Information

Table A1 presents additional descriptive statistics of the variables, while Table A2 displays linear regression results for direct relations between personal and professional factors and individual implementation factors (autonomy, career, and personal considerations).

3.2 | Results for Study 1

The results in Table 1 indicate a significant positive association between autonomy considerations (i.e., the belief that compressed schedules enhance one's sense of autonomy) and intended policy use ($\beta = 0.346$, $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis 1a. However, we find no significant interactions between female gender, autonomy considerations, and intended policy use

($\beta = -0.033$, $p = 0.628$), suggesting that gender does not significantly moderate the relationship between autonomy considerations and intended policy use. Thus, Hypothesis 1b is not supported.

Career considerations (i.e., the belief that the schedules would enhance one's sense of appreciation for one's work) are positively associated with intended policy use ($\beta = 0.101$, $p = 0.049$), supporting Hypothesis 2a. Yet, this implementation factor shows the weakest relationship with intended policy use compared to the other implementation factors (i.e., autonomy and personal considerations). Moreover, the interaction term for part-time working women and career considerations related to the policy is significant and negative ($\beta = -0.243$, $p = 0.005$), indicating that the association between career considerations and policy use is weaker for part-time working women. A visual representation of this interaction can be retrieved in Figure S1 in the Supporting Information. This finding contrasts Hypothesis 2b, which predicted a stronger association between career considerations and policy use for this group.

Personal considerations related to the policy (i.e., the belief that it would improve one's personal relationships outside of work) are positively and strongly associated with intended policy use

($\beta = 0.436$, $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis 3a. Nevertheless, the interaction between children, personal considerations, and intended policy use is non-significant ($\beta = -0.020$, $p = 0.407$), suggesting that the presence of children does not strengthen the relationship as hypothesized in Hypothesis 3b.

Finally, analyses with the control variables show both expected and unexpected dynamics. On the one hand, consistent with expectations, age is negatively associated with intended policy use ($\beta = -0.054$, $p < 0.001$). On the other hand, contrary to expectations, we find (i) no significant associations between commuting time and intended policy use and (ii) a positive association between daily working hours ($\beta = 0.148$, $p = 0.020$) and intended policy use. Upon further inspecting the direct relationships between personal and professional factors and individual implementation factors in Table A2, we find the strongest associations between daily working hours and the implementation factor of autonomy considerations ($\beta = 0.182^{***}$, $p < 0.001$).

3.3 | Preliminary Discussion of Study 1's Results

This attitudinal study provides initial insights into the individual factors associated with the intended individual use of full-time compressed work schedules. As such, it takes the first step in addressing whether and why individuals intend to use this work-life flexibility policy (Bolino et al. 2021; du Bois et al. 2025; Kossek et al. 2023). The results reveal both expected and surprising patterns, which are summarized below.

First, consistent with the notion that work-life flexibility policies are typically built to provide employees with built-in autonomy (Kossek et al. 2023), the results confirm that intended policy use is significantly associated with the belief that the full-time compressed schedule would enhance one's sense of autonomy. Nevertheless, contrary to theoretical expectations, this association was not significantly weaker for women. These findings challenge traditional gendered assumptions in the compressed schedules literature (e.g., Ronen and Primps 1981). However, they tie well with more recent empirical findings that men and women tend to have similar attitudes towards the policy in recent years (du Bois et al. 2025, 3), potentially reflecting a convergence in economic gender roles (Cortés and Pan 2023; du Bois et al. 2025).

Yet, despite the past semi-century's converging gender roles (Cortés and Pan 2023) and the policy expectation that full-time compressed schedules stimulate full-time female labor participation (Kamer Van Volksvertegenwoordigers 2022, 199), we find no indications that part-time working women would be, particularly, inclined to transition to a full-time compressed work schedule. Along these lines, although compressed 4-day workweeks may benefit women's career advancement by rewarding them for working full-time instead of part-time (Noback et al. 2016), we find negative interactions between female part-time work, career considerations, and intended policy use. This result suggests that part-time working women may even be less inclined to use the policy because they believe the schedules would enhance their appreciation for their work. One potential explanation from the literature is that part-time workers are

significantly more likely to exceed their contractually agreed working time and perform unpaid overtime (e.g., Conway and Sturges 2014; Seibt and Kreuzfeld 2024). As transitioning to a full-time compressed schedule might formalize their unofficial hours, these would become part of the standard expectations rather than something they are appreciated for at work.

Second, consistent with theoretical expectations, we found that personal considerations (i.e., the belief that working compressed would improve one's personal relationships outside of work) are strongly associated with intended policy use. Nevertheless, contrary to expectations, the association between personal considerations and intended policy use was not more substantial for those with children. Interestingly, however, those already working longer hours were significantly more likely to believe the policy would improve their personal relationships outside of work.

Along these lines and most surprisingly, despite commuting problems (Fottler 1977) and increased fatigue (Ronen and Primps 1981) being documented as potential downsides of compressed schedules, we found that workers who already work longer days are significantly more inclined to use the policy. Upon further investigation, we found the most potent positive associations between daily working hours and the belief that the policy would give them greater autonomy. Taken collectively, while this study finds associations between the hypothesized implementation factors and intended policy use, dynamics with personal and professional factors show surprising patterns.

However, this study is bound by at least two important limitations. On the one hand, the fact that workers' actual policy use may differ from that found in attitudinal studies (e.g., Fottler 1977, 657) prompts us to further investigate associations between gender, work regimes, children, working hours, and policy use in a real-world setting where the policy is made available to employees by their organization. On the other hand, the study collected data from a single source and time, which may raise concerns regarding common method variance (cf. Bozionelos and Simmering 2022). To address these limitations and contextualize these initial insights, the second study will examine actual policy use in practice and add temporal, methodological, and source variation to the study.

4 | Study 2

4.1 | Methods for Study 2

Shortly after Belgium's 2022 labor reform, which legally allowed employees to work in full-time compressed work schedules (Kamer Van Volksvertegenwoordigers 2022; Jahal et al. 2023), we partnered with a large organization that would pioneer in making the policy available for its employees. Specifically, the organization would offer its employees—all knowledge workers—the opportunity to enter a full-time compressed work schedule if desired.

This collaboration allowed us to elaborate on the unexpected results emerging from Study 1 and address its limitations.

Specifically, we designed a mixed-methods case study with two objectives. On the one hand, we sought to map whether and how personal and professional factors like gender, work regime, children, and daily working hours were associated with actual policy use in practice. On the other hand, we aimed to deepen our understanding of why individuals with specific personal and professional profiles decided to use the policy. This dual approach was inspired by Bolino et al.'s. (2021, 204) call for mixed-methods research into nonstandard work schedules. By addressing this call, this second study aimed to provide richer insights into the dynamics of policy use.

4.1.1 | Quantitative Methods for Study 2

4.1.1.1 | Research Setting and Sample. In the run-up to the organization's implementation of the flexible work arrangement, we distributed a structured online questionnaire to their approximately 2000 Belgian employees via the organization's national newsletter. The academic research team managed this questionnaire via Qualtrics XM, independently of the organization where the study was conducted. Informed consent was obtained at the start of the questionnaire, outlining that the participants' data would only be accessible to the academic research team involved.

Given the organization's various branches across within-country language borders, we assigned certified translators for comparable English, French, and Dutch versions of the questionnaires to reach employees from all regions. To further encourage participation, we conducted a raffle of prizes totalling €399.7. Via this approach, 404 employees completed the survey, of which 45 indicated that they decided to use the policy. According to the information provided by the organization, 70 of their employees decided to use the policy. This implies that our quantitative questionnaire reached 64.285% of the organization's total policy users.

4.1.1.2 | Measures and Analyses. The questionnaire included items on several personal factors (i.e., gender, children, age) and professional factors (i.e., work regime, daily working hours, commute time, flexible hours) as independent variables and planned policy use (i.e., whether they decided to use the policy at implementation date) as dependent variables. For future policy users, we also included an item asking whether they wanted to participate in in-depth interviews with the research team.

Table 2 in the findings section displays an overview of measured variables, descriptive statistics, and coefficients from binary logistic regression analyses. Moreover, we calculated marginal effects to facilitate the interpretation of these logistic regression results.

4.1.2 | Qualitative Methods for Study 2

4.1.2.1 | Research Setting and Sample. To deepen our understanding of why employees with specific personal and professional characteristics opt for compressed work schedules, the quantitative questionnaire also included a call for policy users to participate in in-depth interviews with the research team (cf. supra). Following this call, we contacted the 24 policy users interested in participating in the online interviews. We emailed them additional information on the practicalities, a consent form with details on confidentiality, and an incentive for participation (i.e., a €15 gift voucher for each interviewee). Twelve policy users reacted to the e-mail, agreeing to participate in the interviews.

4.1.2.2 | Measures and Analyses. Given the scarce contemporary empirical research on individual factors influencing employees' adoption of compressed schedules (Bolino et al. 2021; Campbell 2023; Jahal et al. 2023) and the surprising patterns in Study 1, we chose a flexible semi-structured interview approach that primarily consisted of open-ended guiding questions and probing questions. The central guiding interview question was: "What was your main motivation to adopt a full-time compressed work

TABLE 2 | Quantitative results for Study 2—Policy use in practice.

Policy use [1 = yes, 0 = no]		Correlation (φ/r_{pb})	Log odds (β)	Marginal effects (ΔP)
Personal factors				
Female	[1 = yes, 0 = no]	0.024	0.399 [0.373]	0.035 [0.372]
Children	[Children in numbers]	−0.052	−0.118 [0.511]	−0.010 [0.510]
Age	[Years in numbers]	0.052	0.004 [0.863]	0.000 [0.863]
Professional factors				
Flexible working hours	[1 = yes, 0 = no]	0.068	0.512 [0.431]	0.045 [0.431]
Part-time	[1 = yes, 0 = no]	−0.156	−1.375* [0.035]	−0.120* [0.037]
Daily working hours	[1 = yes, 0 = no]	0.254	1.035*** [<0.001]	0.091*** [<0.001]
Tenure	[Years in numbers]	0.106	0.030 [0.126]	0.003 [0.124]
Commute time	[Minutes in numbers]	−0.046	−0.010 [0.218]	−0.001 [0.218]

Note: $N = 404$. This table presents results from the quantitative pre-implementation questionnaire among policy users ($n = 45$) and non-policy users ($n = 359$) in a large socio-legal knowledge work organization. (φ/r_{pb}) displays the pairwise correlation coefficient with the policy user condition depending on the variable type (phi coefficient or point biserial coefficient), (β) displays the coefficients of the binary logistic regression with their p -values between square brackets with all listed variables, and (3) reports the average marginal effects with their p -values between square brackets.

*** $p < 0.001$.

* $p < 0.05$.

TABLE 3 | Qualitative insights for Study 2—Sample matrix and implementation factors.

Interviewee	Personal profile	Professional profile	Implementation factor
Policy User 1	Early career (18–35 years) woman without school-going children	Worked full-time and performed extra hours before entering	Policy allows to regulate overtime via an additional day off.
Policy User 2	Early career (18–35 years) woman without school-going children	Worked full-time and performed extra hours before entering	Policy allows to regulate overtime via an additional day off.
Policy User 3	Early career (18–35 years) woman without school-going children	Worked full-time but did not report extra hours before entering	Policy allows to focus more, avoid traffic, and manage personal appointments.
Policy User 4	Early career (18–35 years) man without school-going children	Worked full-time and performed extra hours before entering	Policy allows to set boundaries between main job, side-activities and family life.
Policy User 5	Mid-career (36–54 years) woman without school-going children.	Worked full-time and performed extra hours before entering	Policy allows to regulate overtime via an additional day off.
Policy User 6	Mid-career (36–54 years) woman without school-going children	Worked full-time and performed extra hours before entering	Policy allows to regulate overtime via an additional day off.
Policy User 7	Mid-career (36–54 years) woman without school-going children	Worked full-time and performed extra hours before entering	Policy allows to regulate overtime via an additional day off.
Policy User 8	Mid-career (36–54 years) woman with school-going children	Worked full-time and performed extra hours before entering	Thought policy would help regulate overtime via an additional day off, but dropped out due to work–life conflict.
Policy User 9	Mid-career (36–55 years) woman with school-going children	Worked part-time and performed extra hours before	Thought policy would help regulate overtime financially, but dropped out due to work–life conflict.
Policy User 10	Late career (> 55 years) woman without school-going children	Worked part-time and performed extra hours before entering	Thought policy would help regulate overtime financially, but dropped out due to work–life conflict.
Policy User 11	Late career ($\geq$ 55 years) woman without school-going children	Worked full-time and performed extra hours before entering	Policy allows to regulate overtime via an additional day off.
Policy User 12	Late career ($\geq$ 55 years) woman without school-going children	Worked full-time and performed extra hours before entering	Policy allows to regulate overtime via an additional day off.

Note: $N = 12$. This table summarizes key qualitative findings from interviews with policy users. Policy users are clustered based on their personal profiles.

schedule?.” Accordingly, in line with Study 1’s strong associations between intended policy use and beliefs regarding improved autonomy and personal relationships outside of work, we decided to focus on these domains via the following questions: (i) “Are you currently experiencing more or less flexibility in your work schedule? Why?,” (ii) “How do you experience your family life now compared to when you worked a five-day week?,” and (iii) “How do you experience contact with friends and family now compared to when you worked a five-day week?”

The in-depth interviews were recorded and transcribed ad verbatim. To analyze the transcripts in relation to interviewees’ personal and professional profiles, we drafted a database in which we entered data from their quantitative questionnaires (i.e.,

gender, age, children, prior work regime, and prior daily working hours) together with recurring thematic codes identified via the *ATLAS.ti* software package for qualitative data analysis. Table 3 in the second study’s findings section displays an anonymized key summary of this database with clusters for personal and professional profiles together with thematic codes for key implementation factors mentioned in response to the central guiding question in the interview. These interview insights are also summarized and exemplified with quotes in the findings section.

Finally, we interviewed three managers to contextualize and challenge the quantitative and qualitative findings gathered among employees. These insights are also integrated into the findings section and exemplified with quotes.

4.2 | Findings for Study 2

4.2.1 | Personal Factors and Policy Use

As Table 2 shows, our quantitative analysis did not identify gender, age, and the presence of children as significant predictors of employees' entrance into full-time compressed work schedules. However, as illustrated in the quotes below, several interviewed policy users actively mentioned not having (school-going) children as a significant advantage in the context of their longer workdays, as they did not necessarily have to be home at a particular time.

"If I had a family with kids now ... Then you're indeed in a very important time for your children, and you're still working. But I don't have that now. Because no small child is waiting for me."

"I'm turning 50 next year. My kids are grown, and they have their driver's licenses. I don't need to take them to music school. I don't need to take them to swimming lessons. You know? If you have young children ... I have a colleague who asked me if I like it. Yeah, I love it. But she's about 30, I think. She's in the middle of having young kids. She's driving herself crazy, taking them to hobbies and activities. If you then impose on yourself to work 9.25 h a day, where you have to leave work every five minutes, so to speak, to go to music school, to soccer practice ... then I think you shouldn't start, because it's really a challenge when you have to cook every evening and still go to the store."

"I think once you have kids... I can't speak from experience, but it seems really difficult. Because then you already need a few hours a day for someone or something else."

Managers added to these findings by noticing that employees without school-going children primarily decided to use the policy. They explained that employees with school-going children were reluctant toward the policy and typically felt better suited for an 80% part-time regime or parental leave scheme. These qualitative insights align with the significantly lower uptake of compressed schedules among part-timers ($\beta = -1.375$, $p < 0.05$), hinting at a continued preference for their part-time regimes.

"Very typically—and this was also part of our prediction—it was people who don't have children or at least don't have young children who need to be taken to school and such. So, either those with children before or after the pre-school and elementary school phase."

"I notice that it's primarily the older colleagues who say they find having a day off in between very pleasant."

"I had expected it to be parents with young children, but they tend to opt for an 80% regime instead. They don't go for this arrangement."

Yet, we were able to interview two employees with school-going children who did decide to enter a full-time compressed work schedule. Notably, they had both already dropped out of the compressed work schedules at the time of the interviews because they experienced decreased schedule flexibility and increased work-family conflict in the arrangement. They explained that the compressed schedule made them less inclined to address their flexible working hours for family demands (e.g., driving children around, appointments at the veterinary or garage) because doing so would require adding "catch-up hours" to their already longer work days.

"In my mind, it all made sense until I actually started doing it. If there were days when I needed to go to the dentist during the day, or take my son to the doctor, or go to the tire shop, then I had to make up for that hour I was gone. I would start with a 9-h day and then have to add on the hours I took off during the day. It began to pile up."

"When my son would ask me, 'Can we drive there tomorrow?' I didn't dare say yes anymore like I used to. Because I knew: oh, then I have to spend another hour or half an hour catching up on my bookkeeping. So my balance ... It was actually out of balance for me because of it." "Because of those long days, those many hours, and the fact that I no longer dared to take the flexibility to do something else during the day."

"I noticed that when my children were home with me, we ended up being around them much later than usual. We also ate dinner later. These might seem like small things, but I found that they had a significant impact."

As exemplified in these quotes, they experienced decreased autonomy and personal relationships outside of work. Interestingly, they both transitioned to part-time regimes after dropping out. However, it is important to note that the vast majority of policy users did experience better personal relationships outside of work. They explained that the additional day off allowed them to spend extra time with friends and/or family members not tied to a fixed 5-day work schedule (examples given: grandchildren, older parents).

"So there's definitely more family time on Tuesday. Time that I did not have before. [...] I think it's fantastic, it's enriching. I have 8 to 9 hours of quality time with each grandchild a week. Many grandparents don't have that."

"I have friends, like my best friend who is a police officer, who works shifts, and it's pleasant to say: at 9 o'clock, I'll come and have a coffee with you. I must say that the arrangement teaches you to put things into perspective. In the past I was like: work, work, work for five days and I crammed my social life on Friday evenings. Now it's like: okay, we have seen each other on Wednesday morning and, to put it very rationally, we maintained that friendship. But you did. You did meet up with your friends."

"It's not that I'm going to take courses on my day off or anything, but I actually just spend some more time with family and my mum, and my friends who work part-time. Just doing nice things just actually, yes."

4.2.2 | Professional Factors and Policy Use

As displayed in Table 2, employees' prior daily working hours were significantly and strongly associated with their likelihood of entering full-time compressed work schedules ($\beta=1.032$, $p<0.001$). More specifically, our quantitative analyses suggest that each additional hour per day was accompanied by a 9.1 percentage point increased probability of choosing a full-time compressed work schedule ($\Delta P=0.091$, $p<0.001$). Closely related to these quantitative results, all but one interviewed policy user actively mentioned performing regular overtime before using the policy (cf. Table 3), making the compressed work schedule a natural transition for them.

"Because work was always running late anyway, I got into the scheme. With the idea of I'm doing all those extra hours anyway, let's try if that can't always be longer days."

"I always have long work days, always above what is expected or what is stated in my contract."

"Suddenly, the option came up. That's something for me! I work longer than the official hours anyway."

Even more so, for the overwhelming majority of interviewed policy users, their sustained overtime was a key implementation factor in their decision to use the policy (cf. Table 3). Specifically, in response to the central interview question, they explained that they saw the policy as a strategy to compensate for their unpaid Overtime via an additional day off.

"I was already working those hours. I was working an extra one to two hours every day. And then the opportunity came up: you can actually formalize it and then have an extra day off, right? So for me, that's actually limiting my extra hours."

"The number of daily hours I should be doing according to the compressed four-day work week, I'm already doing most of the time. Except now I'm going to have a day off, and I'm going to have my full pay left over."

"There were periods when I worked long days. Performing nine hours, ten hours on a work day was not unusual. Then I did the math and thought: yes, I can actually manage to do that in four days and have one day off for my grandchildren. So, yes, for me, it was an easy calculation to switch to that schedule, work four days, and have one day off while still maintaining my full-time hours over the other four days. It was an easy decision."

However, most policy users noted that their new schedule did not decrease their work pressure. Some policy users even suggested that their work pressure increased on working days or that working days felt busier because they had to perform the same amount of tasks in fewer but longer days.

"My work pressure has increased, but I think that's mostly due to myself because before that I was always systematically doing overtime and now I try not to do that anymore."

"Sometimes in my head I think it's even busier now. But then I always think: that's not true, because you actually always work the same. But ... It does feel long sometimes, the days. It's also just long. You can't ... It's just long too."

"That workload hasn't been reduced, has it? So actually something should be done about the range of tasks ... That should be reduced, I think. To reduce that work pressure."

During the wrap-up interviews with managers, they acknowledged that many employees regularly performed unpaid extra hours due to peak periods and persistent staff shortages. While they considered the potential drop in unpaid extra hours due to implementing the arrangement, they also recognized the unsustainability of the current workload expectations. Consequently, their initial concerns regarding a decline in unpaid extra hours did not keep them from proceeding with the implementation of the arrangement.

"That's actually a very good point you're challenging. It's not that I didn't want to share this, but we also asked ourselves in advance what the impact on those extra hours would be. During peak periods, like at the end of the month, extra hours increase. It's not that people are permanently working 40 hours in their four days; that might be an overstatement. But it's a question we considered: what will be the effect here? Will people indeed work less now? I can't say for sure."

“If you voluntarily work extra hours, you might think, then I get something in return for which I normally wouldn’t receive any compensation for those extra hours.”

“That’s indeed a consideration we made: what will the impact be? It’s not that we push people into extra hours, just to be clear, or that we plan our schedules to get the maximum out of them. That’s not the case. Why are there extra hours? It has to do with peak periods and also with the fact that, like other organizations, we have over 100 open vacancies in Belgium. So it’s not out of malice or that we calculate so tightly and squeeze them like lemons. We’re hiring a lot—we had 350 new hires last year—but they still need to be trained, etc. We also work proactively, but there’s definitely tension. We made this consideration ourselves and said that this shouldn’t be a reason not to implement the arrangement, and we shouldn’t misuse it. And if this comes up from the findings, then so be it.”

These quantitative and qualitative findings are integrated in Table 4. This table summarizes the key collective findings across studies and methods to provide a comprehensive picture of the main insights.

4.3 | Preliminary Discussion of Study 2’s Findings

The second study adds to the initial insights from Study 1 by examining policy use in a real-world setting where compressed work schedules were made available to employees. The collective findings, arising from employee surveys and in-depth interviews with policy users and their managers, largely align with the initial insights from Study 1 and help contextualize them.

First, consistent with the initial insights from Study 1, the second study does not identify significant associations between gender or having children and individual policy use. Yet, while having children is not directly associated with policy use, the qualitative findings highlight that not having school-going children is often perceived as a significant advantage in the context of the longer workdays in the schedules.

Along these lines and consistent with Study 1’s results, the findings suggest a low uptake of full-time compressed schedules among workers in part-time systems, which is a common strategy for handling family responsibilities (Beham et al. 2019; du Bois et al. 2023). In this context, our qualitative findings hint that employees with school-going children—who typically felt more suited for a part-time regime—could experience decreased schedule flexibility and increased work–family conflict in full-time compressed work schedules. These findings starkly contrast the policy expectation that compressed work schedules

provide substitutes for part-time and parental leave systems (e.g., Kamer Van Volksvertegenwoordigers 2022).

Second, the findings confirm and contextualize Study 1’s unexpected result that employees with longer prior daily working hours are significantly more inclined to use the policy. Specifically, our quantitative data reveals a strong positive association between prior daily working hours and policy use, and our qualitative data elucidates that the overwhelming majority of interviewed policy users systematically worked overtime hours before using the policy. Upon examining workers’ motivations to use the policy, the qualitative insights reveal that most policy users viewed it as a strategy to take control over their schedules and compensate for their sustained overtime.

However, since the study took place in the context of a single organization, the external validity of this finding should be evaluated in future research. For example, in jobs and industries where performing unpaid extra hours is less common (e.g., retail or manufacturing), the role of prior overtime in the decision to use the policy may be less pronounced. Therefore, we encourage researchers to replicate our second study in different organizations and work settings. Of course, it would be especially interesting to see researchers interview a broad sample of policy users across organizations and industries in a single study to document, compare, and cluster individual implementation factors associated with policy use.

5 | General Discussion

In response to the global and public interest in full-time compressed work schedules as a work–life flexibility policy (cf. Campbell 2023; International Labour Organization, 2023; Jahal et al. 2023; Su and Wang 2020), this study examined which individual factors are associated with policy use and why. To this end, we employed a multistaged approach comprising an initial attitudinal survey exploring implementation factors associated with intended policy use, followed by a mixed-methods case study examining actual policy use in practice. The key findings, which reveal both expected and surprising patterns, are summarized below.

Our quantitative results reveal that employees with longer daily working hours are more inclined to use the policy and view compressed schedules as a source of enhanced autonomy. Our qualitative findings elucidate that especially overworking employees decide to use the policy to take control of their schedules and compensate for their sustained overtime via additional days off. Moreover, contrary to policy expectations, we find no evidence that (female) part-time workers view the full-time compressed schedule as a particularly appealing or suitable alternative to part-time work. Quite on the contrary, our qualitative data hint that transitioning from part-time regimes to full-time compressed schedules could exacerbate work–life conflict, particularly for employees with school-going children. In the following subsections, we discuss how these findings advance research and practice on compressed work schedules in multiple ways.

TABLE 4 | Comprehensive summary of qualitative and quantitative findings.

Quantitative results		Qualitative results	Example quote
<i>Main finding 1. Policy use as a strategy to regulate chronic overtime</i>			
Prior daily working hours are positively associated with intended policy use (Study 1) and actual policy use in practice (Study 2).	The majority of interviewed policy users actively indicated that their prior overtime played a significant role in their decision to use the policy (Study 2).		“Because work was always running late anyway, I got into the scheme. With the idea of I’m doing all those extra hours anyway, let’s try if that can’t always be longer days.” –Policy user
Upon further inspecting associations between daily working hours and individual implementation factors, we find the strongest positive association between daily working hours and autonomy considerations (Study 1).	Many policy users explained that they saw the arrangement as a strategy to compensate for their unpaid extra hours via an additional day off (Study 2).		“I was already working those hours. I was working an extra one to two hours every day. And then the opportunity came up: you can actually formalize it and then have an extra day off, right? So for me, that’s actually limiting my extra hours.” –Policy user
<i>Main finding 2. Limited policy use as an alternative to part-time work</i>			
Part-time work is negatively associated with intended policy use (Study 1) and actual policy use in practice (Study 2).	Managers noticed that employees with school-going children typically feel better suited for a part-time regime and have a continued preference for a part-time regime rather than full-time compressed schedules (Study 2).		“I had expected it to be parents with young children, but they tend to opt for an 80% regime instead. They don’t go for this arrangement.” –Manager of policy users
	Policy users transitioning from part-time regimes experienced increased work–life conflict in compressed schedules (Study 2).		“I noticed that when my children were home with me, we ended up being around them much later than usual. We also ate dinner later. These might seem like small things, but I found that they had a significant impact.” –Policy user
	Policy users with school-going children experienced decreased autonomy (Study 2).		“[...] It was actually out of balance for me because of it. Because of those long days, those many hours, and the fact that I no longer dared to take the flexibility to do something else during the day.” –Policy user

Note: We integrated quantitative data regarding intended policy use (Study 1) and actual policy use (Study 2) and qualitative interview data (Study 2) to provide a comprehensive picture of our study’s main findings.

5.1 | Theoretical Implications

This study adds to the literature on flexible work arrangements and nonstandard work schedules by addressing the flexibility “black box” surrounding the dynamics of policy use (cf. Kossek et al. 2023) and filling the need for a better understanding of whether and why certain employees feel better suited for compressed work schedules than others (cf. Bolino et al. (2021, 204)).

First, in line with the notion that work–life flexibility policies focus on adapting job structures to provide employees with “built-in autonomy” (Kossek et al. 2023), the findings reveal autonomy considerations as a key implementation factor associated with policy use. Yet, we found that this was particularly the case for those with longer prior daily working hours, who saw the policy as a tool to gain control over their schedule and compensate for their sustained overtime with additional days off. This insight suggests that compressed schedules may function not only as a source of built-in autonomy (e.g., Kossek et al. 2023) but also as a useful tool for recovery from work (e.g., Sonnentag et al. 2022). The latter seems to be echoed in a recent empirical study identifying increased psychological detachment in individuals transitioning to compressed work schedules (du Bois et al. 2025).

Along these lines, for overworking employees, entering compressed schedules can act as a corrective measure to address existing imbalances between their working hours and rewards (whether financial compensation or free time). This finding moves beyond the simplistic work–life balance narrative and introduces a more granular understanding of how compressed schedules interact with work patterns. In doing so, our work hints that workers’ prior overtime could serve as an important moderator for studying the outcomes of compressed schedules.

Second, this study challenges longstanding gendered assumptions in the compressed schedules literature. While earlier research suggested that men favored compressed schedules for leisure benefits, whereas women perceived them as disruptive to family life (Ronen and Primps 1981), our findings reveal no significant gender differences in intended or actual policy uptake. Consistent with recent empirical findings that men and women have similar attitudes toward the policy (du Bois et al. 2025, 3), these dynamics could reflect the evolving convergence of gender roles (Cortés and Pan 2023).

Yet, despite converging gender roles (Cortés and Pan 2023) and the fact that women in compressed workweeks are rewarded for working full-time (Noback et al. 2016), our findings signal low policy uptake among (female) part-time workers. These findings contribute to debates on gender and work–life flexibility policies by underwriting the notion that such policies do little to improve women’s employability (Cortés and Pan 2023). Quite to the contrary, transitioning from part-time to full-time compressed schedules could even exacerbate work–life conflict, particularly for employees with school-going children.

Thus, paradoxically, while intended to address inequalities in the labor market, compressed schedules may sometimes breed work–family backlash, manifesting as heightened work–life

conflict. This resonates with broader critiques regarding the “dark side” of work–life policies that sometimes fail to deliver equitable outcomes and can even introduce new forms of disadvantage for certain groups of employees (e.g., Kossek et al. 2023; Perrigino et al. 2018). By revealing this unintended consequence within the specific context of compressed work schedules, we contribute to a nuanced understanding of the complexities and potential pitfalls of work–life policies.

5.2 | Practical Implications

By addressing the prevailing theory–empirical gap in the work–life flexibility literature (cf. Kossek et al. 2023), these findings also contribute to a practical understanding of why employees opt for full-time compressed schedules and provide actionable recommendations for organizations, HR practitioners, and policymakers.

In slight contrast with suggestions from public advocacy, our findings suggest that compressed schedules should not be treated as a one-size-fits-all work–life balance solution. Specifically, while compressed schedules hold promise as an appealing work–life policy or i-deal for overworking employees, workers with significant caregiving responsibilities may feel more suited for alternative work–life flexibility policies, like part-time work or flexible working hours, to address their unique needs.

Moreover, in the context of overtime, HR practitioners should note that workers’ requests to enter a compressed schedule could be an expression of excessive job demands. Yet, as most interviewed policytakers in this study indicated that their new schedule did not decrease their work pressure, HR practitioners should also consider offering more sustainable alternatives like a strategic workload reduction to improve these workers’ well-being. Conversely, suppose applicants just see the compressed schedule as a practical way to get compensated for their overtime, it might be more beneficial for both parties to provide financial compensation for overtime rather than a compressed schedule.

Taken collectively, in the rationale of cafeteria plans, organizations could consider offering a menu of feasible flexibility policies their workers can choose from. HR practitioners can then play a pivotal role in helping workers identify the most viable and suitable option for their unique personal and professional profiles while safeguarding the organization’s continuity. In doing so, we recommend considering each policy’s potential benefits and risks, not only for the policy user (e.g., increased work pressure or work–family conflict in compressed schedules) but also for the broader organization (e.g., increased pressure on direct colleagues to maintain availability for clients).

The latter leads us to our final yet crucial practical implication—the need for more informed labor market policy and communication. For example, as these initial findings regarding the potential increased work–family conflict for women transitioning from part-time suggest, it is blatantly worrying that policymakers widely promote full-time compressed schedules as a

suitable alternative to part-time work to improve women's labor market outcomes. We hope these findings inspire policymakers to invariably go for evidence-based labor market policy and communication in the future.

5.3 | Limitations and Future Research Directions

These contributions to theory and practice should be understood in light of several limitations. On the one hand, as we found no established scales directly capturing the nuances of how employees perceived the policy in relation to contemporary expectations of the schedules, the first study relied on single-item measures to study intended policy use. Therefore, we encourage researchers to develop new measures to study individual policy use of compressed schedules. On the other hand, although the qualitative interviews provided a very insightful triangulation point for our study, they took place within the context of a single organization. Therefore, we encourage researchers to extend this line of research across organizations and occupations.

Next to the aforementioned directions for future research, our findings provide additional fruitful avenues of inquiry for scholars across disciplines. First, building on these initial findings, organizational behavior scholars and organizational psychologists could further investigate whether work-related factors—like an imbalance between job demands-resources and/or the need for recovery—underlie workers' preferences for compressed schedules. In line with our practical implications, they could also examine how workers' preferences for compressed schedules relate to alternative policies like workload reductions or completely time-independent work. Second, upon evaluating the individual impact of this policy, they could examine whether prior overtime moderates the work–life outcomes (e.g., job demands-resources, recovery experiences, work–life balance) of compressed schedules.

Similarly, HRM scholars should consider the potential moderating role of workers' prior overtime upon examining organizational outcomes of compressed schedules like retention, absenteeism, and performance. In doing so, they could also investigate whether the arrangement affects non-policy users in terms of additional work pressure to maintain the organization's performance. Finally, in line with our practical implications, they could examine whether rewarding employees financially for extra hours would be more beneficial for the organization rather than offering compressed schedules.

6 | General Conclusion

“Work hard, play smart” appears to be the mindset of our study participants who adopted full-time compressed schedules. Our findings illustrate this by showing that employees with longer prior working hours are more inclined to enter full-time compressed work schedules, as they want to compensate for their unpaid extra hours via additional days off. Moreover, our findings indicate limited policy use as an alternative to part-time work and reveal that women transitioning from part-time roles may face increased work–life conflict when using the policy.

These findings challenge contemporary policy expectations and provide several implications for research and practice.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Endnotes

¹ “The policy” systematically refers to full-time compressed work schedules in this article.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.

Appendix A

TABLE A1 | Descriptive statistics and correlations among continuous variables from Study 1.

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Intended policy use	4.239	3.550							
2. Children in numbers	1.272	1.230	−0.057						
3. Age in years	46.042	12.308	−0.198*	0.415*					
4. Daily working hours in numbers	8.006	1.780	0.132*	0.013	0.064*				
5. Commute time in minutes	52.91	46.289	0.020	−0.085*	0.025	0.057			
6. Autonomy considerations (more autonomy)	4.580	2.846	0.557*	−0.074*	−0.162*	0.121*	−0.018		
7. Career considerations (more appreciation)	3.808	2.753	0.456*	−0.043	−0.164*	0.086*	−0.058	0.752*	
8. Personal considerations (better personal relations)	5.297	2.831	0.571*	−0.058	−0.160*	0.123*	−0.025	0.750*	0.614*

* $p < 0.05$.

TABLE A2 | Regression results for all three implementation factors from Study 1.

Implementation factors	Estimate	SE
Dependent variable: autonomy considerations (more autonomy)		
Independent variables		
Female	−0.060	[0.221]
Children dummy	−0.038	[0.080]
Age in numbers	−0.035***	[0.008]
Part-time dummy	0.104	[0.341]
Daily working hours in numbers	0.182***	[0.052]
Commute time in numbers	−0.001	[0.002]
Female (part-time)	−0.052	[0.423]
Dependent variable: career considerations (more appreciation)		
Independent variables		
Female	−0.234	[0.214]
Children dummy	0.041	[0.078]
Age in numbers	−0.040***	[0.008]
Part-time dummy	0.196	[0.330]
Daily working hours in numbers	0.123*	[0.051]
Commute time in numbers	−0.004	[0.002]
Female (part-time)	−0.054	[0.410]
Dependent variable: personal considerations (better relationships outside of work)		
Independent variables		
Female	0.139	[0.220]
Children dummy	0.022	[0.080]
Age in numbers	−0.034***	[0.008]
Part-time dummy	0.077	[0.340]
Daily working hours in numbers	0.167***	[0.052]
Commute time in numbers	−0.002	[0.002]
Female (part-time)	−0.473	[0.421]

Note: $N = 1009$. The table presents regression results from an attitudinal questionnaire conducted among a sample of Belgian workers, representative in terms of age and gender. Regression coefficients are displayed along with their standard errors in square brackets.

*** $p < 0.001$.

* $p < 0.05$.