



Behavioral Insights on Low Labor Force Participation of Swiss Mothers

Behavioral Insights for Policy Design

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Why part-time work is a costly compromise for women in Switzerland

Clare O'Dea - news@thelocal.ch • 16 Oct, 2022
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Why part-time work is a costly compromise for Swiss women. Photo by CoWomen on Unsplash

Women in Switzerland, not just mothers, are drawn to part-time work. The choice is almost twice as common in Switzerland as in the European average, but taking the part-time path comes at a price, Clare O'Dea writes. Is it worth it?

Mothers face double-edged sword in Swiss workplace culture

Debunked: What we thought was true about Switzerland

Why are Swiss mums assumed to be 'stay-at-home'?



▲ According to a Swiss government-commissioned study, 10% of women in the country take maternity leave. Martin Ruetschi/Keystone

Switzerland's part-time work options are now calling for an end to a workplace culture that is holding their mothers back.



▲ Since most women with children in Switzerland work part-time, they are in effect stay-at-home mums for part of the work week. Keystone / Walter Bierl

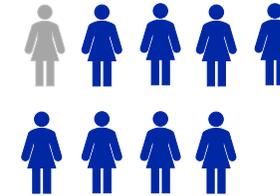


What is the problem?

1 OUT OF 9

Swiss mothers exit the labor market after their first child's birth

- 3% more resignation (under 12s)



60%

women active in labor force only work part time

- EU average: 30%

2nd

greatest difference in
OECD countries

Is it a big problem for Switzerland?

Skilled Labor Shortage

- Positive KOF Employment Indicator
- A clear majority of the 4,500 companies surveyed reckon low current staffing levels (2022)

14.3



Low



Increased Dependency Ratio

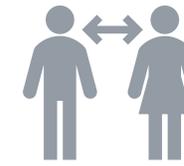
- Increased dependency ratio
- Male-female pension gap
- In 2029, pension system in deficit without reforms

64.8% - 82.6%



2020 2050

34.6%



GDP & Welfare Loss

- GDP gain by closing gender gap (Europe and Central Asia)
- Welfare gain by removing barriers to women in workplace

+ 14%



+ 0.9%



Who are we exactly talking about?



Women with at least one child



Women who worked full-time prior to pregnancy



Women who reduced working hours after pregnancy



Women who work in Switzerland's labor market

NOTE: There are a lot of players and behavioral insights but we only focus on the woman described on this slide

What is the Swiss government doing?

Social Issue

Can't leave children anywhere. Daycares are expensive.

GROSS CHILDCARE COST

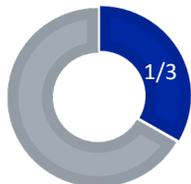
of average net household income for a family with 2 children



Physically impossible to work shortly after childbirth

No career advancement opportunities

DISCRIMINATION CASES:



pregnancy or maternity

80% of related lawsuits were dismissed

10% of executive boards consists of women

Government Response

PRICING:

Subsidies for childcare costs - 0.1% of Swiss GDP

REGULATORY & PRICING:

14 weeks paid maternity leave

REGULATORY:

- (1) More diverse Board of Directors
- (2) Allowing leaders to work part-time



Which behavioral mechanisms affect working mothers?

Motivation Problems

Intrinsic motivation

Mothers think that staying at home is best for their children

Social expectations

Women are expected to stay at home for their children by society

Social image concerns

Social pressure to remain part of the group who work part-time: full-time working mothers are viewed badly by their social circles

Self-Control Problems

Procrastination

Mothers **delay** returning to full-time work because it feels **comfortable** to stay in a part-time role

Limiting Mental Models

Women believe that they cannot **balance** motherhood/family with work life

Inattention Problems

Learning through noticing

Ignore examples of other successful women who work full-time around them

Cognitive load

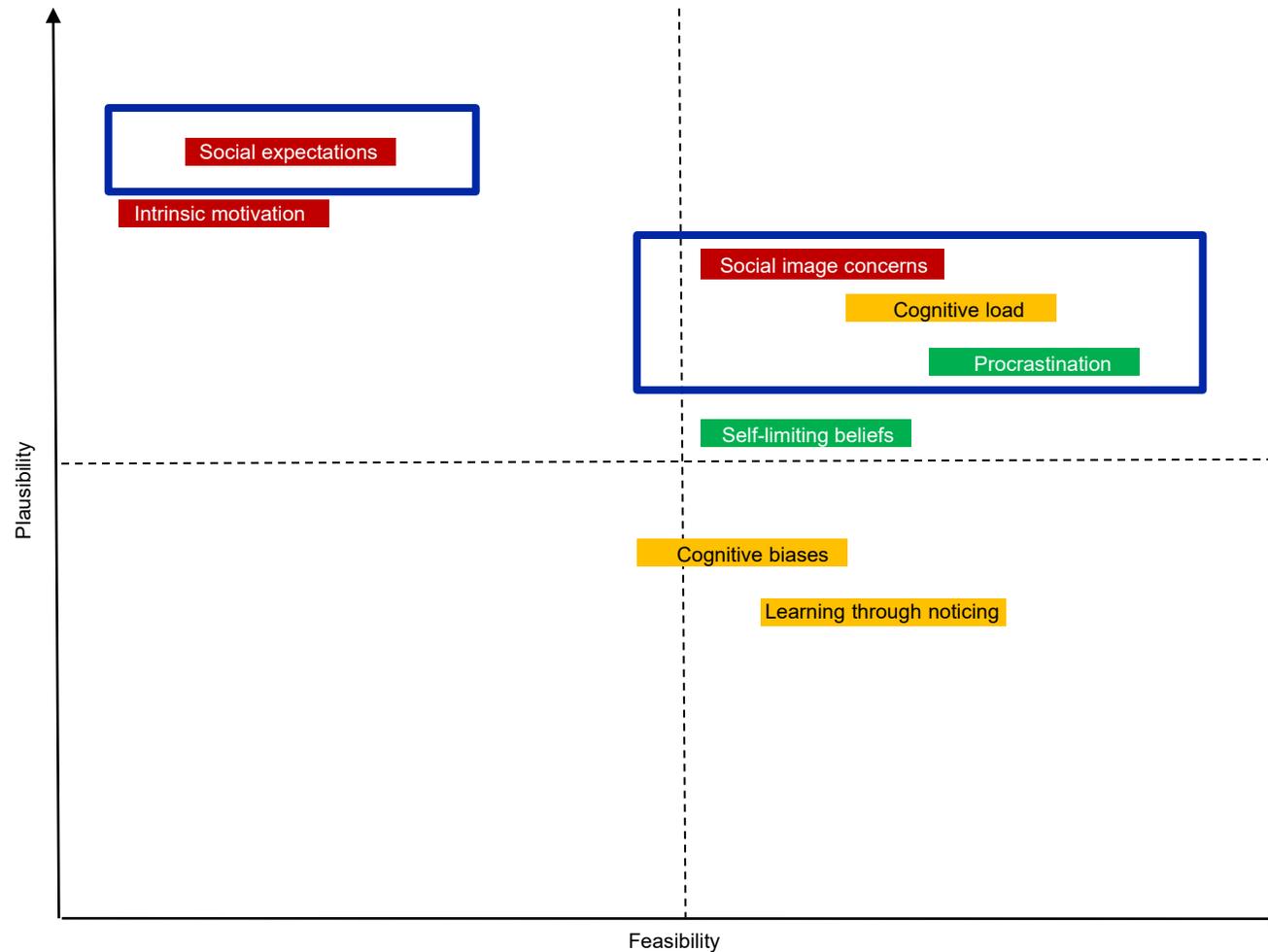
Women are overloaded with child and household duties so they can't focus on getting back to full-time work

Cognitive Bias

Status quo bias: Women **irrationally prefer current situation** over another situation (working part-time over working full-time)



Plausibility-Feasibility Matrix



Introduction of Survey & Methodology

But how plausible are the most promising mechanisms in practice?

- Method: Vignette experiment
- Idea: Survey respondents assess different scenarios where the MSI factor is built in
- Goal: Respondents put themselves into the situation of the character from the story
 - No social desirability bias



Control Version

Anna lives with her husband Tim and their daughter Lisa in Switzerland. Before getting pregnant, both Anna and Tim were working 100% in an office job. After the birth of Lisa, Anna is now working 40% at the same job, while Tim is still working 100%. The days when Anna is working, Lisa is visiting a daycare in her hometown. Lisa turns 4 years old and will start going Kindergarten (Ganztageschule).



Survey Stories

Control	Cognitive Load	Social Image	Procrastination
<p>Anna lives with her husband Tim and their daughter Lisa in Switzerland. Before getting pregnant, both Anna and Tim were working 100% in an office job. After the birth of Lisa, Anna is now working 40% at the same job, while Tim is still working 100%. The days when Anna is working, Lisa is visiting a daycare in her hometown. Lisa turns 4 years old and will start going Kindergarten (Ganztagesschule).</p>	<p>Anna lives with her husband Tim and their daughter Lisa in Switzerland. Before getting pregnant, both Anna and Tim were working 100% in an office job. After the birth of Lisa, Anna is now working 40% at the same job, while Tim is still working 100%. The days when Anna is working, Lisa is visiting a daycare in her hometown. Lisa turns 4 years old and will start going Kindergarten (Ganztagesschule). Even though Anna loves gardening, she noticed that in the last few weeks, some plants are dying because she forgot to water them.</p>	<p>Anna lives with her husband Tim and their daughter Lisa in Switzerland. Before getting pregnant, both Anna and Tim were working 100% in an office job. After the birth of Lisa, Anna is now working 40% at the same job, while Tim is still working 100%. The days when Anna is working, Lisa is visiting a daycare in her hometown. Lisa turns 4 years old and will start going Kindergarten (Ganztagesschule). After picking Lisa up from daycare on Wednesdays, Anna grabs dinner with the other mothers who also work 40%.</p>	<p>Anna lives with her husband Tim and their daughter Lisa in Switzerland. Before getting pregnant, both Anna and Tim were working 100% in an office job. After the birth of Lisa, Anna is now working 40% at the same job, while Tim is still working 100%. The days when Anna is working, Lisa is visiting a daycare in her hometown. Lisa turns 4 years old and will start going Kindergarten (Ganztagesschule). Anna has renewed her gym membership, but she has postponed going to the gym multiple times.</p>



Survey Questions

1. Please rank the following statements according to what you think Anna will most likely say.

- a. “Daycare costs are too expensive! I can’t afford more than two days.”
- b. “I am physically and mentally drained, I don’t have the energy to do what I like!”
- c. “All my friends are working 40%, why should I work more?”
- d. “I will increase my work hours when I have more experience as a mother.”

2. When Lisa goes to Kindergarten, what is going to happen to Anna’s work hours? (0-100%)

3. If Anna does decide to work full-time again, when will that most likely be?

- a. 4-6 – Lisa goes to Kindergarten
- b. 7-12 – Lisa goes to Primary School
- c. 13-17 - Lisa starts going to Secondary School
- d. 18+ - Lisa is of legal age
- e. Anna won’t ever return to working full-time

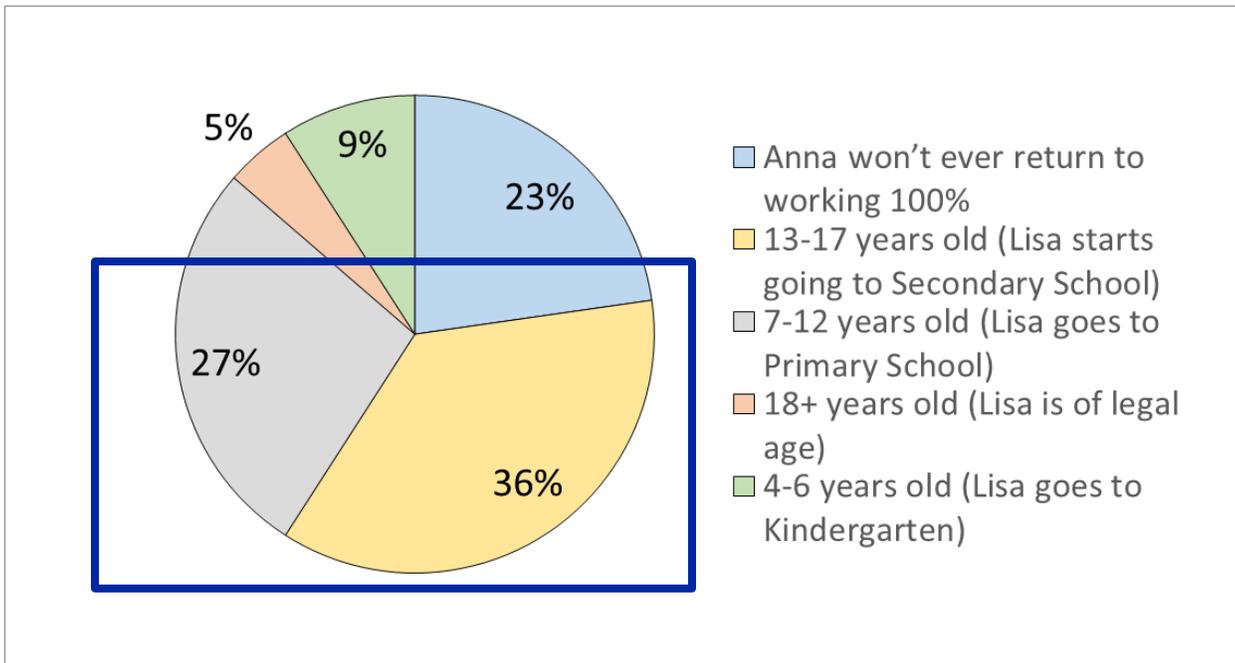


Sample Population

- Similar survey respondents as our target population: Women with children who work(ed) part-time
- Summary statistics:

	Cognitive Load	Social Image	Procrastination	Total
Number of respondents	9	6	7	22
Age	43	40.5	41	41.7
Number of children	1.30	1.67	1.30	1.40
Share working part-time	78%	83%	86%	82%
Share willing to go back to full-time	44%	50%	43%	45%

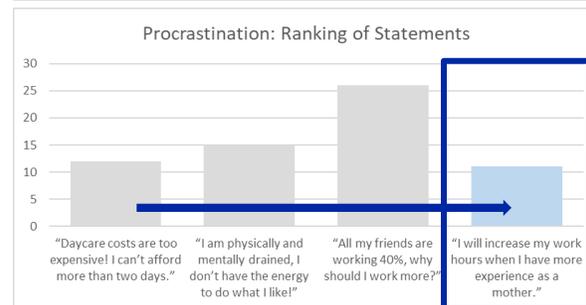
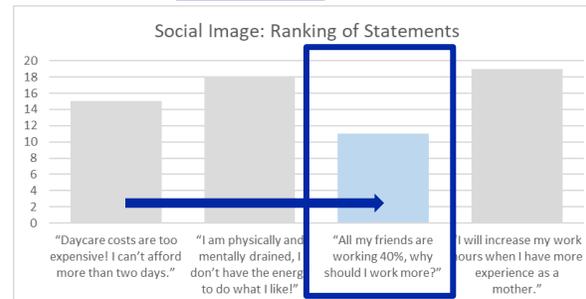
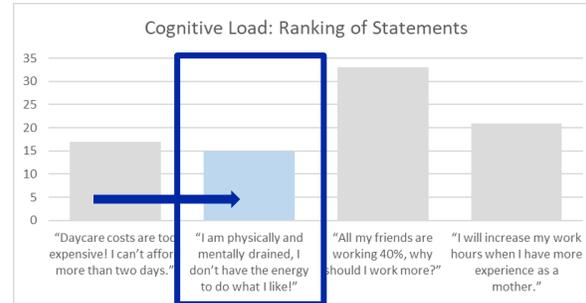
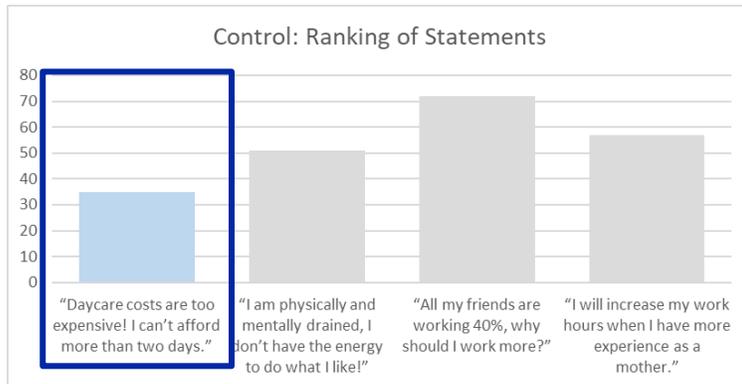
Takeaway 1: Women are expected to not return into full-time for years after childbirth



- 63% believe that Anna will return to full-time when Lisa is 7 to 17 years old
- 23% believe that Anna will never go back to full-time

Takeaway 2: Behavioral issues are real. Mothers can relate.

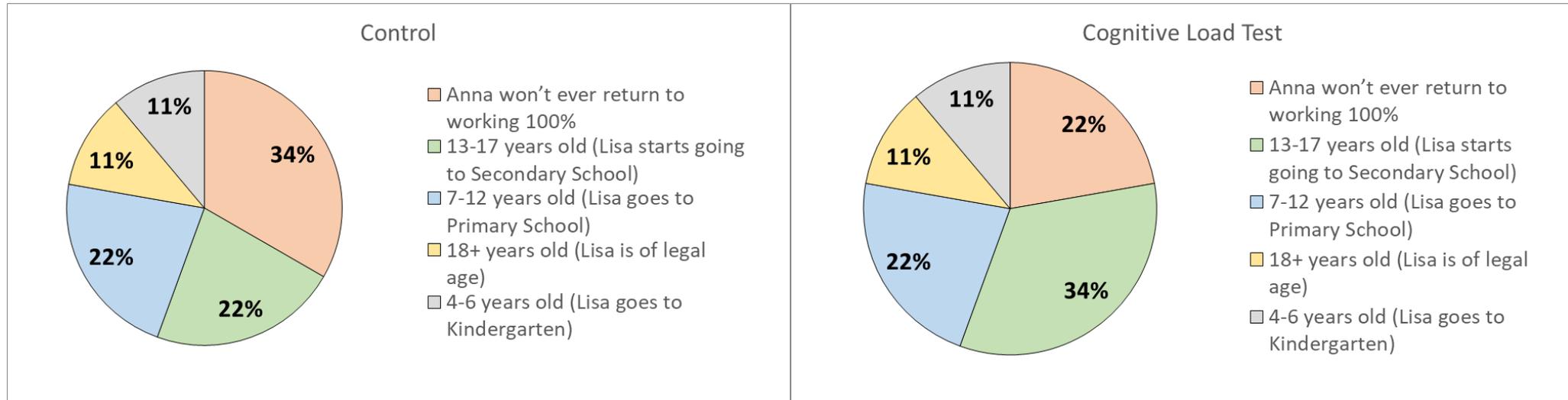
What would Anna most likely say?



- Mothers correctly ranked the described behavioral issue at #1
- Mothers relate to these situations
- Most accurately able to rank in Social Image

Takeaway 3: Lowering cognitive load can lead to going back to full-time

If Anna does decide to work full-time again, when will that most likely be?

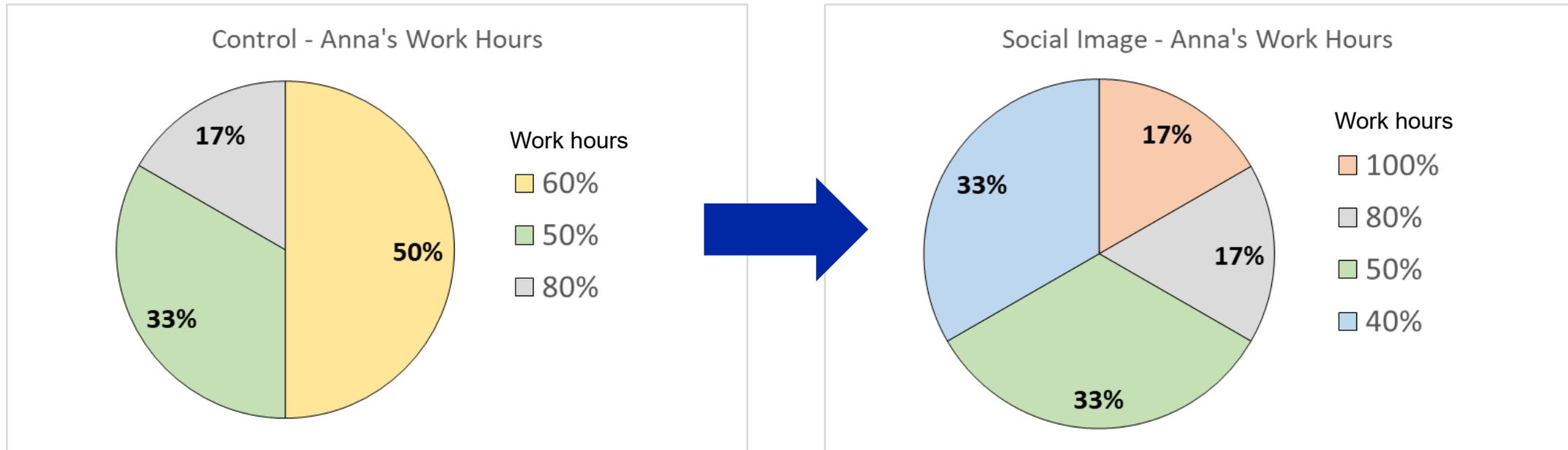


- Share of won't ever return to work dropped

- Interesting idea but not definitive – more study

Takeaway 4: There is pressure. Social circles affect decisions on work hours.

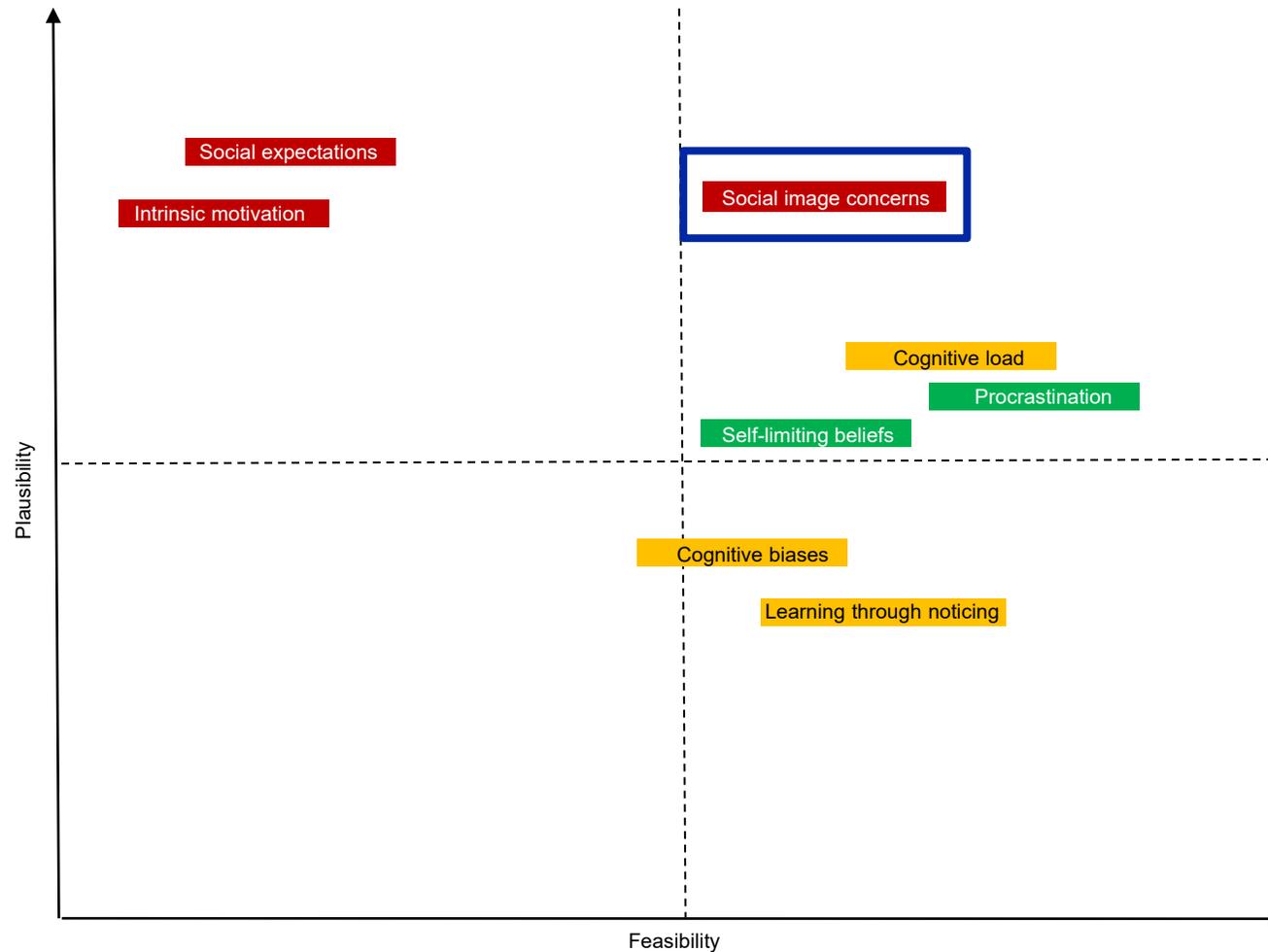
When Lisa goes to Kindergarten, what is going to happen to Anna's work hours? (0-100%)



- Downward pull due to social circle working at 40%



Updated Plausibility-Feasibility Matrix



Mothers Making Milestones Program

MSI Problem

Social image concerns:

Mothers may feel **pressured** to work part-time to fit in with their **social group**, as giving more importance to work might be judged as being a bad mother by other women. This could lead to changes in **dynamics of the group and different treatment** from other mothers.



Pillars



Augmented Pricing

Progressively **attractive offers** by daycares for mothers in groups **greater than three** to remove the stigma related with choosing to work more



Augmented Regulatory

Semi formal aperos led by women in the BoD to help build a **sense of community** and belonging. This could provide a **platform** for mothers in power to share their inspirational journeys



Concluding Remarks

- **Social problem:** Low Work Force Participation of Women in Switzerland

Use **MSI** framework to find potential
behavioral mechanisms

Apply **PRiX** framework to find possible
augmented policies



Conduct **vignette experiments**
with targeted audience to test our mechanisms

- **Experiment result:** **Social image** is the major behavioral problem at work
- **Structural problem & policy:**
 - Daycare costs is ranked one in all the control groups and two in all the treatment groups
 - Policies on reducing the cost of daycare and diversifying the BoD can be implemented together with behavioral augmentations
- **Why:**
 - Simple and easy to implement
 - Little to no cost involved



Sources

- <https://kof.ethz.ch/en/news-and-events/media/press-releases/2022/11/kof-beschaefigungsindikator-hat-hoehepunkt-vorerst-ueberschritten.html>
- <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/business/pensions-vote---the-reform-comes-at-the-expense-of-women-/47882872>
- <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/Staff-Discussion-Notes/Issues/2018/10/09/Economic-Gains-From-Gender-Inclusion-New-Mechanisms-New-Evidence-45543>
- <https://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/nationalrat-sagt-ja-zu-grosszuegigen-subventionen-nur-wer-soll-das-bezahlen-771382758558>
- <https://www.ahv-iv.ch/p/6.02.e>
- *All photos used in this presentation deck are from Google.com*



Appendix – Summary of the Presentation

Social Problem	Government Response	MSI Problems	Augmented PRI
Women do not work full-time because they cannot leave their children anywhere. Daycares are expensive so there is no place to leave children safely.	Subsidies for daycare costs	Women don't leave their children because they will look like bad parents in front of others (social expectation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attractive offers by daycares for women in groups greater than 3, with a progressive benefits aspect Require daycares to have free sessions for 1 week for each new child enrolled Post the discounts and prices of daycares in doctors' offices where visible to mothers (Changing visibility of prices) Tax subsidies for companies who provide on-site daycares for their employees
Women do not work full-time because it is physically impossible for them to do so. Women need time and resources to acclimate to their new living situation.	14 weeks paid maternity leave	<p>Women are so mentally bombarded with tasks and roles that they are expected to do at the same time (cognitive load, social expectation)</p> <p>Women take it upon themselves to fully do childcare because that is what their mothers did (intrinsic motivation)</p> <p>Women get pressured to remain part of the group who work part-time; if they choose career, they won't be able to maintain the same dynamics and will probably be treated differently by other women (social image concerns)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require first-time parents (both) to attend some child-rearing training sessions Increase exposure of full-time working moms: Information pamphlets, documentaries Information campaigns and workshops to educate women to the benefits Childcare subsidy advertised as if it were designed specifically for women with at least one girl child, with eligibility for all women Requiring companies to give awards and make promotions publicly (possibly with bonus)
Women do not work full-time because they do not see career advancement opportunities. There are no career advancement opportunities for women in top or management positions.	(1) Swiss companies are required to make the composition of the Board of Directors more diverse (2) Companies are looking into allowing leaders to work part-time	<p>Women believe that they cannot be both a good mother and a good employee (Limiting mental model)</p> <p>Mothers delay returning to full-time work because it feels comfortable to stay in a part-time role (Procrastination)</p> <p>Women ignore examples of other successful women who work full-time around them (Learning through noticing)</p> <p>Women irrationally prefer the current situation over another situation (working part-time over working full-time) (cognitive bias)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influential women can be made the face of information pamphlets, documentaries, etc. Information campaigns, workshops by employers to educate women to the benefits they already have, potential growth and welfare gains to the company, women's clubs, awards and bonuses they could get, etc. Opt out model of increase in part-time work hours contract, every year, for women with children <18, and every 6 months, otherwise.

Appendix: Current Pricing, Regulatory, Information Policies

Goal: To **reduce the frictions** concerning women's decision to return to the work force

Pricing

Issue to solve: Daycares are expensive and there is no place to leave the children safely

Solution: Subsidies for daycare costs

Issue to solve: Women need time and resources to acclimate to their new living situation in order to address the cognitive load they are experiencing

Solutions: 14 weeks paid Maternity leaves & 2 weeks paid Paternity leaves

Regulatory

Issue to solve: Women have lesser opportunities for career advancements especially for top positions

Solutions: **(1)** Swiss companies are required to make the composition of the Board of Directors more diverse **(2)** Companies are looking into allowing leaders to work part-time

Issues to solve: **(1)** Women need to adjust to the responsibilities of having a child and should have ample support **(2)** Social role of a man is only focused on financial support

Solutions: **(1)** 14 weeks paid Maternity leaves & 2 weeks paid Paternity leaves **(2)** Some companies allow for up to 20 weeks of Maternity leave **(3)** 28 weeks shared parental leave (being discussed in Parliament)

Information

6.02 Maternity benefit



Maternity benefit

Position as of 1st January 2023



Issue to solve: Women are not aware of the benefits they are entitled to

Solution: Official pamphlets available online that explains the benefits



Appendix – MSI Framework for Other Players (Partner, Employer, Society)

Inattention Problems

Learning through noticing

Employers **stay skeptical** about employing women even though there are many examples

Motivation Problems

Intrinsic motivation

Men watch their fathers go out to work and **barely help** in the household work, so it becomes a part of their belief system that the **man earns** for the family while the **woman takes care** of the house

Social expectations

Men don't allow their wives to work out of **conformity pressures** and **inaccurate social expectations** even if they believe otherwise

Social image concerns

Peer pressure on the father from other men who project themselves as head of the family and **major breadwinner** by not allowing their wives to work

Self-control Problems

Procrastination

Father delays **supporting wife** to go to work until children "grow up" because he doesn't believe it will work out simultaneously with childcare duties

Limiting Mental Models

Fathers/Employers believe that mothers cannot **balance** work and family both successfully

Employers do not entrust mothers with **high positions** because they do not believe they will dedicate their total **energy and attention** to the job



Appendix: Vignette Studie

Control	Structural	Cognitive Load	Social Image	Procrastination
<p>Anna lebt mit ihrem Ehemann Tim und ihrer Tochter Lisa in der Schweiz. Bevor sie schwanger wurde, arbeiteten sowohl Anna als auch Tim zu 100%. Seit der Geburt von Lisa arbeitet Anna 40% bei derselben Stelle, während Tim immer noch zu 100% arbeitet. An den Tagen, an denen Anna arbeitet, besucht Lisa eine Kita. Lisa wird 4 Jahre alt und kommt nächsten Sommer in den Kindergarten.</p>	<p>Lisa wird 4 Jahre alt und kommt nächsten Sommer in den Kindergarten. Der Bund erhöht die Subventionen für Kitas, daher zahlen Anna und Tim jetzt neu nur noch 60% statt 90% der Gesamtkosten.</p>	<p>Lisa wird 4 Jahre alt und kommt nächsten Sommer in den Kindergarten. Obwohl Anna gerne im Garten arbeitet, ist ihr aufgefallen, dass in den letzten Wochen einige Pflanzen eingegangen sind, weil sie vergessen hat, sie zu giessen.</p>	<p>Lisa wird 4 Jahre alt und kommt nächsten Sommer in den Kindergarten. Nachdem Anna Lisa mittwochs von der Kita abgeholt hat, trifft sie sich mit anderen Müttern, die ebenfalls 40 % arbeiten, zum Abendessen.</p>	<p>Lisa wird 4 Jahre alt und kommt nächsten Sommer in den Kindergarten. Anna hat ihre Mitgliedschaft im Fitnessstudio erneuert, aber sie hat den Besuch des Fitnessstudios mehrmals verschoben und ist bisher noch nie da gewesen.</p>



Appendix: Vignette Fragen

1. Was wird mit dem Arbeitspensum von Anna passieren? (0-100%)
2. Falls Anna sich dazu entscheidet, wieder Vollzeit zu arbeiten, wann wird das sein? (Lisas Alter zwischen 4-18 Jahren)
3. Bitte ordnen Sie die folgenden Aussagen nach dem, was Anna am besten charakterisiert.
 - a. "Die Kosten für die Kita sind zu teuer! Ich kann mir nicht mehr als zwei Tage leisten."
 - b. "Ich bin körperlich und geistig erschöpft und habe nicht genug Energie, um das zu tun, was ich mag!"
 - c. "All meine Freunde arbeiten zu 40%, warum sollte ich mehr arbeiten?"
 - d. "Ich werde mein Arbeitspensum erhöhen, wenn ich als Mutter mehr Erfahrungen gesammelt habe."

Results - Cognitive Load

1. Please rank the following statements according to what you think Anna will most likely say.

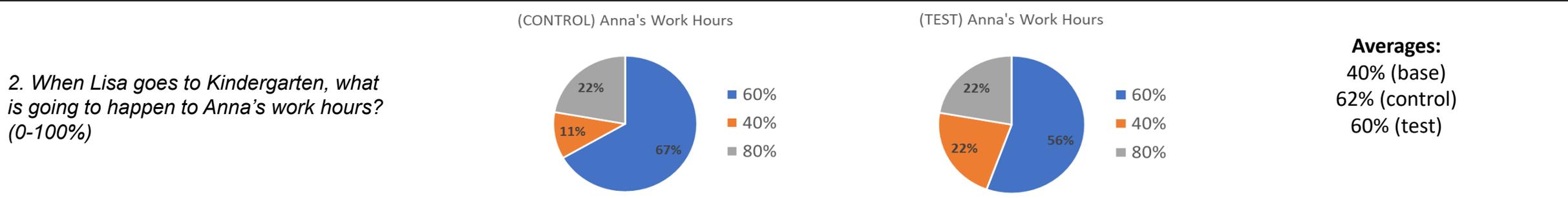
CONTROL

“Daycare costs are too expensive! I can’t afford more than two days.”
 “I am physically and mentally drained, I don’t have the energy to do what I like!”
 “I will increase my work hours when I have more experience as a mother.”
 “All my friends are working 40%, why should I work more?”



TEST

“I am physically and mentally drained, I don’t have the energy to do what I like!”
 “Daycare costs are too expensive! I can’t afford more than two days.”
 “I will increase my work hours when I have more experience as a mother.”
 “All my friends are working 40%, why should I work more?”



3. If Anna does decide to work full-time again, when will that most likely be? (Choose the answer based on Lisa's age)

CONTROL

Anna won’t ever return to working 100%



TEST

13-17 years old (Lisa starts going to Secondary School)

Takeaways:

1. Participants can pinpoint Anna’s mindset from scenarios (q1)
2. No change in work hours (exp. decrease) but open to return to full-time if cognitive load is lessened (q2 & q3)

Results- Social Image

1. Please rank the following statements according to what you think Anna will most likely say.

CONTROL

“Daycare costs are too expensive! I can’t afford more than two days.”

“All my friends are working 40%, why should I work more?”

“I am physically and mentally drained, I don’t have the energy to do what I like!”

“I will increase my work hours when I have more experience as a mother.”



TEST

“All my friends are working 40%, why should I work more?”

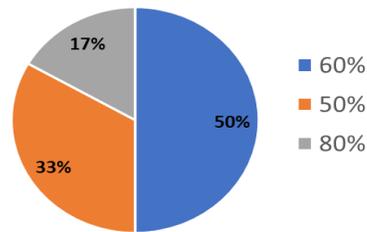
“Daycare costs are too expensive! I can’t afford more than two day

“I am physically and mentally drained, I don’t have the energy to do what I like!”

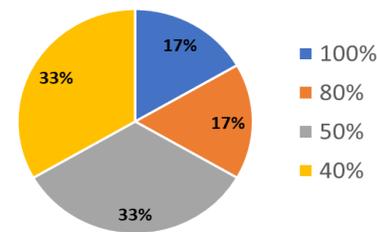
“I will increase my work hours when I have more experience as a mother.”

2. When Lisa goes to Kindergarten, what is going to happen to Anna’s work hours? (0-100%)

(CONTROL) Anna's Work Hours



(TEST) Anna's Work Hours



Averages:
 40% (base)
 60% (control)
 60% (test)

3. If Anna does decide to work full-time again, when will that most likely be? (Choose the answer based on Lisa's age)

CONTROL

13-17 years old (Lisa starts going to Secondary School)



TEST

13-17 years old (Lisa starts going to Secondary School)

Takeaways:

1. Participants can pinpoint Anna’s mindset from scenarios (q1)
2. Decrease in work hours but no change in likelihood of increasing work hours with child's age (q2 & q3)

Results- Procrastination

1. Please rank the following statements according to what you think Anna will most likely say.

CONTROL

“Daycare costs are too expensive! I can’t afford more than two days.”

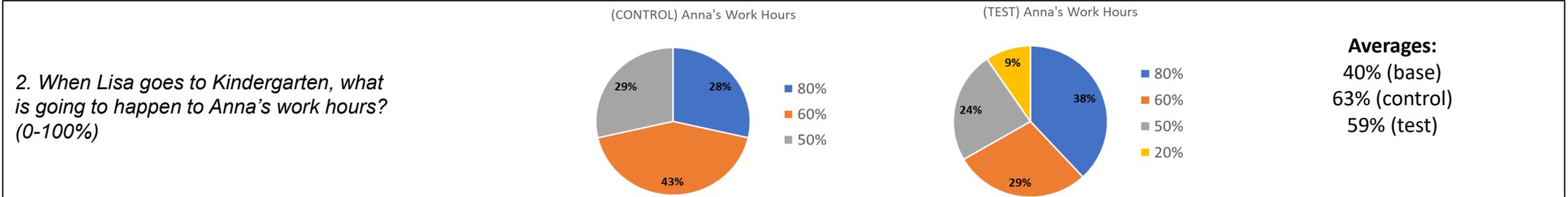
- “I will increase my work hours when I have more experience as a mother.”
- “I am physically and mentally drained, I don’t have the energy to do what I like!”
- “All my friends are working 40%, why should I work more?”



TEST

“I will increase my work hours when I have more experience as a mother.”

- “Daycare costs are too expensive! I can’t afford more than two day
- “I am physically and mentally drained, I don’t have the energy to do what I like!”
- “All my friends are working 40%, why should I work more?”



3. If Anna does decide to work full-time again, when will that most likely be? (Choose the answer based on Lisa's age)

CONTROL

7-12 years old (Lisa goes to Primary School)



TEST

7-12 years old (Lisa goes to Primary School)

Takeaways:

- Participants can pinpoint Anna’s mindset from scenarios (q1)
- No change in work hours (exp. decrease) and likelihood of increasing work hours with child's age (q2 & q3)



Appendix: Augmented Policies – Motivation Problems

MSI Problem

Intrinsic motivation:

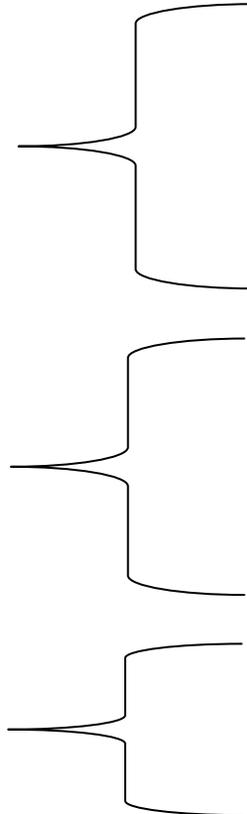
Women watch their **mothers sacrifice** their jobs and stay at home to take care of the family, and raising their kids any other way seems to **contradict** their **internal value system**

Social expectations:

Women are innately regarded as **caregiver** and mother, **appreciated** for **giving up career** for family. Conversely, a woman is a bad mother if she doesn't personally take care of her children

Social image concerns:

Pressure to remain part of the group who work part-time; if they choose career, they won't be able to maintain the same **dynamics** and will probably be treated differently by other women



Policy Description

The subsidy could be advertised as if it were **designed specifically for women with at least one girl child** – even if, in fact, all women are eligible for it

Influential women can be made the face of **information pamphlets, documentaries, etc.**

Information Campaigns, employer workshops, women's clubs, and awards to promote benefits and growth for women

Mandate child-rearing training for first-time parents before birth and first vaccination.

Influential women can be made the face of **information pamphlets, documentaries, etc.**

Information Campaigns, employer workshops, women's clubs, and awards to promote benefits and growth for women

Progressively attractive offers by daycares for women in **groups greater than 3**

Publicly award, promote, and broadcast bonuses in company magazine with pricing and policy information.

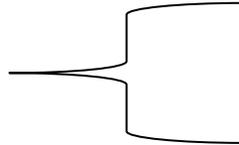


Appendix: Augmented Policies – Self-Control Problems

MSI Problem

Procrastination:

Mothers **delay** returning to full-time work because it feels **comfortable** to stay in a part-time role

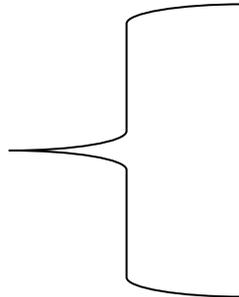


Policy Description

Opt out model of increase in part time work hours contract for women with children <18 annually, and every 6 months, otherwise.

Limiting Mental Models :

Women believe that they cannot **balance** motherhood/family with work life



Workshops for pregnant women which introduce mental strategies to increase self-control

Influential women can be made the face of **information pamphlets, documentaries**, etc.

Information Campaigns, employer workshops, women's clubs, and awards to promote benefits and growth for women



Appendix: Augmented Policies – Inattention Problems

MSI Problem

Learning through noticing:

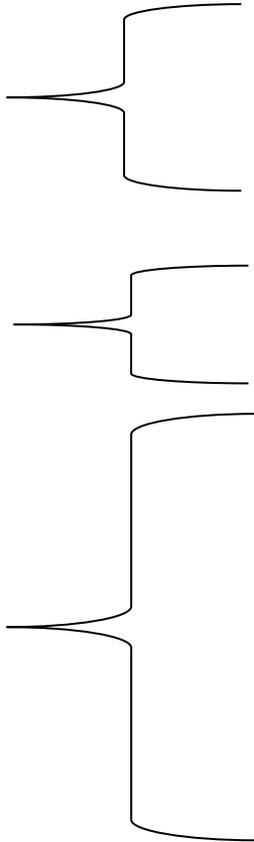
Ignore examples of other successful women who work full-time around them

Cognitive Bias:

Status quo bias: Women irrationally prefer current situation over another situation (working part-time over working full-time)

Cognitive load:

Worry about the child’s well-being so the mother is not able to work full-time



Policy Description

Putting posters on street (e.g. Take Charge of Your Future)

Display mental load infographics at workplace coffee areas to raise male awareness and encourage support for women's cognitive burden.

Opt out model of increase in part time work hours contract for women with children <18 annually, and every 6 months, otherwise.

Display daycare prices and discounts visibly in doctors' offices for mothers.

Tax subsidies for companies who provide on-site daycares for their employees

Require daycares to have 1-week free trial session for each new child enrolled

Mandate child-rearing training for first-time parents before birth and on first vaccination.

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