

Anna-Maija Lehto

Changes in working conditions over time – results from 40 years of Finnish quality of work life surveys

Eurofound conference "Changing Working Conditions in Europe"
23–24 November 2015

Viewpoints:

- Employment
- Structure of the labour force
- Economic situation
- Working conditions
- Change in the use of labour
- Research, development work
- Publicity

The 1970's

- big change in the occupational structure: from agriculture to services and manufacturing
- the educational level still low: 55 per cent with only basic level of education
- the oil crisis 1973 and 1979
- a comprehensive school-reform was carried out, developments in social security and social services
- work physically exhausting and monotonous for many employees
- working hours inflexible, though 40 hours' working week begins
- research on working conditions not common, only concerning male workers
- work very tayloristically organized, although criticism begins
- in Scandinavia the reforms of labour protection and industrial democracy: the idea of "good work" comes to Finland

The 1980's

- public services increase with 200 000, private 100 000
- employment of women in increase – public services
- Reagan and Thatcher pave the way for deregulation, reductions in taxes and social security, neoliberalism etc. Finland is influenced by these.
- mental strain and time pressure are in increase
- workplace conflicts and competitive spirit increase remarkably
- the employee's viewpoint coming important, “the quality of working life”
- socio-technical methods, in Nordic thinking some qualities of work are highly valued: security of work relationships, long term planning opportunities, commitment to work, deepening one's skills, participation and teamwork.
- the research on gender equality in work begins (1984 survey)
- publicity supporting optimism in employment and working life development

The 1990's

- the big recession began 1991, resulted quickly in massive growth of unemployment, in 1995 almost 400 000 employed persons less than 1990
- retiring accelerates during the recession (only every 10th to normal retirement, nowadays about 70 %)
- plenty of firms go bankrupt, the support to banks is financed by public means which leads to big savings in public economy
- time pressure and fixed-term employment in increase
- municipal sector begins to suffer
- “flexible firm” methods in full use: fixed-term, work on overtime
- “productivity” an important keyword which influences also negatively: continuous monitoring of work results – individual pay.
- age programmes, “good work” an important concept
- EU-cooperation begins, research on to international level
- discussion on short-term employment and precarity begins
- publicity with good results: control over fixed-term employment, increase of low-paid jobs avoided, time pressure eases (2000-)

The 2000's

- employment grows until 2008 with 200 000 persons
- the main drop in employment begins in 2009, in two years by 90 000 persons, half of which were students
- employment of the elderly grows rapidly, the average age rises
- the financial crises spread to Finland at the end of 2008
- 2008 a turning point for Nokia also, the downhill begins
- outsourcing, transferring work to low-wage countries
- contradictions culminate: employees' own orientation towards stable work contracts and on the job training runs repetitiously into changes where individuality is emphasised instead of cooperation, mobility instead of commitment and negative flexibility instead of flexibility dictated by employee's own needs
- new ways of organising work are developed: team work, new forms of remuneration, consulting, working time flexibility, mobile work, telework, "wellbeing at work" becomes a common concept
- publicity quite positive, Nokia still strong until 2008

The 2010's

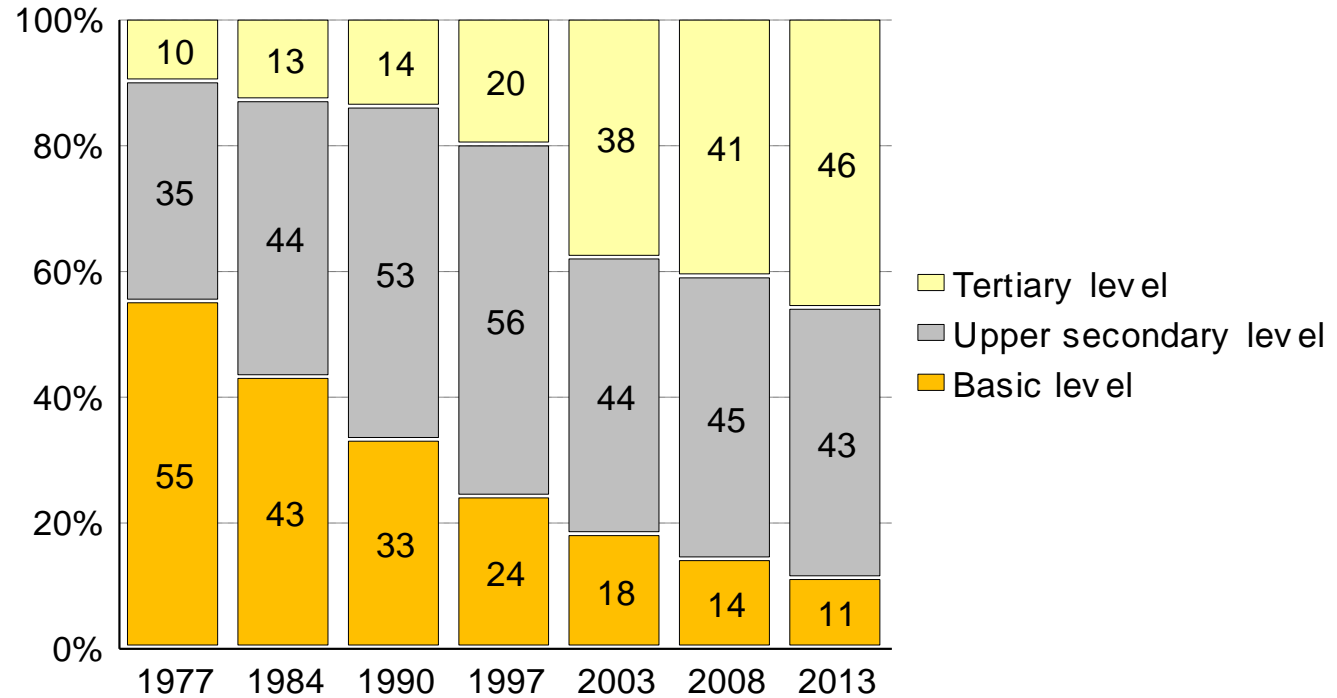
- Finland in recession, but employment in 2010-2013 almost unchanged
- employees in old age continue to work, employment rates rise
- unemployment in increase, mostly hidden unemployment and those over 55 years who earlier had got unemployment pension
- level of education high: only 11 per cent with basic education
- women have the majority among employees (54 000 persons)
- a lot of uncertainty coming from abroad: financial crises in the USA, financially problematic countries in the EU, reductions in exports
- the experiences of uncertainty at the highest
- positive changes in working conditions also visible: satisfaction with one's current job in general and with different aspects of work, experiences of time pressure and mental strain have eased
- publicity is astonishing negative, media is full of threats: the polarisation of the labour force, computers and robots will replace half of the jobs, all have to change fields and retrain
- non of these have any factual basis in statistics or research, but threats are imported from other countries, where polarisation can be real

Conflicting trends in the use of labour

- **Security:**
 - security of contracts and employment, long careers
- **Commitment:**
 - stability, lifelong career planning
- **Skills deepening:**
 - knowledge development, lifelong learning
- **Cooperation:**
 - good teamwork, joint participation and learning
- **Flexibility:**
 - negative flexibility, work/family difficulties, precarity
- **Mobility:**
 - easing dismissals, lay-offs
- **Productivity:**
 - overplaying efficiency, short-term profits, low-paid jobs
- **Individualisation:**
 - constant measuring, individual pay, less working together

Wage and salary earners by level of education

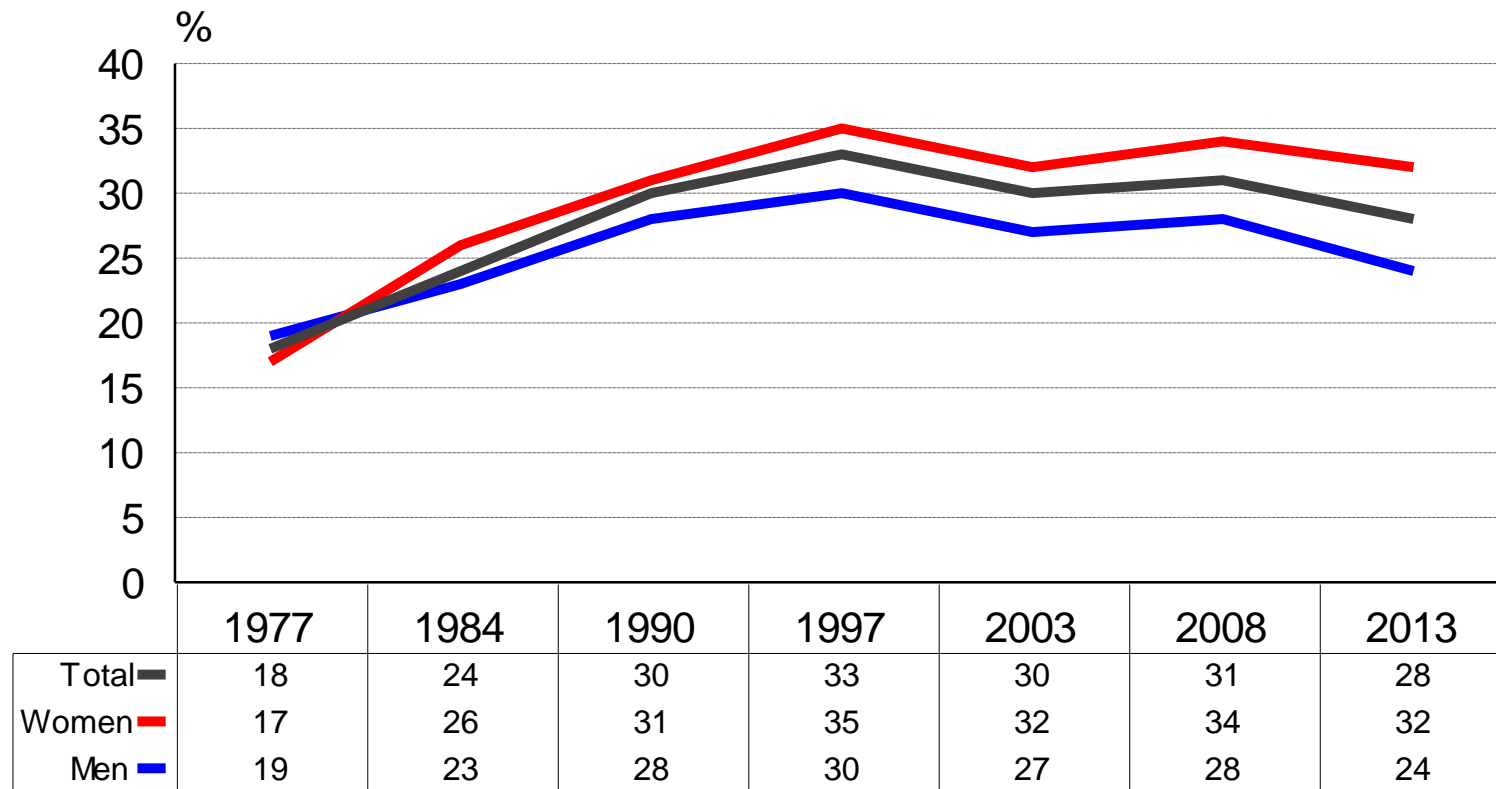
Quality of Work Life Surveys 1977, 1984, 1990, 1997, 2003, 2008 and 2013



Vuodesta 2003 uuden koulutusluokituksen mukaan

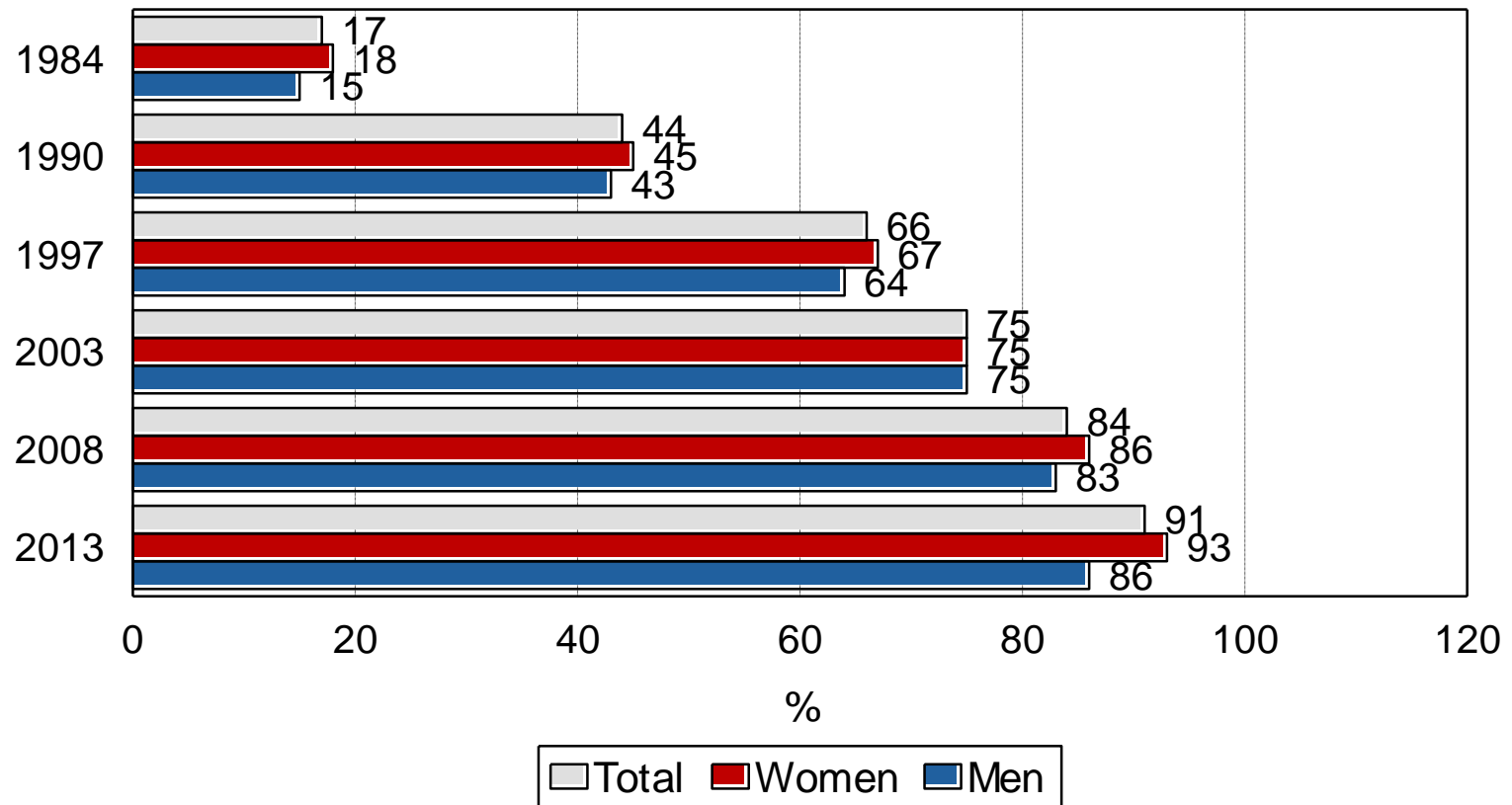
Adverse effects of time pressure

“Very much” or “quite a lot” adverse effects. Quality of Work Life Surveys 1977 - 2013

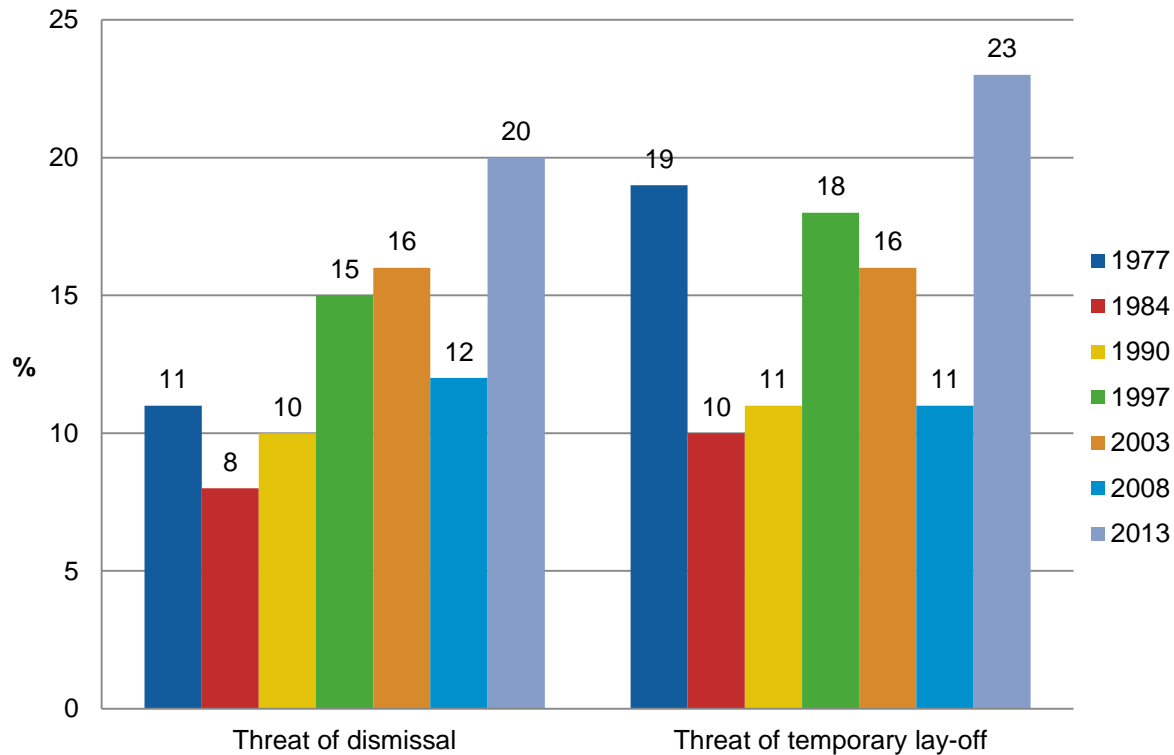


Proportion of employees using information technology

Quality of Work Life Surveys 1984 - 2013



Those who experienced threat of dismissal or temporary lay-off Share of wage and salary earners. Quality of Work Life Surveys 1977-2013



Extremely satisfied with the current job and its various aspects
Quality of Work Life Surveys 2008 and 2013

