

# Combating the Motherhood Penalty

Recommendations for SharePower

Date: 7th July 2023  
Names: Elise Alsteens, Inès Le Courtois, Max Einvall, Elena Gaggini,  
Marthe Haafkes, Elise Murer, Sara Neuber, and Sophia Wilkins  
Student IDs: 6274684, 6248512, 6281447, 6289305, 6280582, 6287495, 6267815,  
6289624  
Title: text  
Tutor: Jinyi Wei  
Tutorial Group: 08  
Course Coordinators: Wilfred van Dellen, Inge Römgens, and Zeta Eirtree  
Course: PRO3008 ThinkTank  
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*Elise Alsteens*

*Inès Le Courtois*

*Max Einvall*

*Elena Gaggini*

*Marthe Haafkes*

*Elise Murer*

*Sara Neuber*

*Sophia Wilkins*

## Executive Summary (*English*)

Four weeks ago, SharePower consulted our Think Tank from University College Maastricht to address the gap between the demand for labor supply in Limburg and the lack of women represented in the workforce. As a group of 8 students with diverse academic backgrounds, we began our collaborative journey to find a viable solution to bridge this gap. After identifying the Dutch part-time culture as a main root cause of the mismatch described by SharePower, the team posed the following research question as a guideline for the remainder of the project: What factors drive part-time employment and hinder the return to full-time paid work for mothers without caring responsibilities?

After conducting an extensive literature review encompassing various fields of study, our team determined that the motherhood penalty serves as the fundamental basis of the problem at hand. We chose five theories which uncover the causes of the motherhood penalty and together with two socio-psychological theories provide a holistic view of the factors contributing to the motherhood penalty. These theories lay the groundwork for the Think Tank to develop well-rounded and effective recommendations aimed at solving SharePower's problem.

As a Think Tank we came up with four recommendations addressing different aspects. The first recommendation focuses on providing action-oriented unconscious bias training to employers, aiming to address and reduce their biases against women in the workplace. The second and third recommendation center around informative and educational workshops for parents and future parents. While the former intends to supply women with a variety of skills to enhance their value on the job market, the latter is concerned with educating parents about the structure and implications of the Dutch Childcare system. Lastly, the fourth recommendation encompasses a proposal for SharePower app with the objective of providing a community-based space for mothers to exchange experiences, stay updated with workshops, and empower each other. A summary of these recommendations can be found under Summary of Recommendations. Finally, our Think Tank put forth suggestions for future research initiatives that SharePower can undertake to acquire additional insights on strategies to promote higher rates of mothers re-entering full-time employment in Limburg.

## Executive Summary (*Nederlands*)

Vier weken geleden raadpleegde SharePower onze Think Tank van University College Maastricht om de kloof tussen de vraag naar arbeidskrachten in Limburg en het gebrek aan

vrouwen op de arbeidsmarkt aan te pakken. Als groep van 8 studenten met verschillende academische achtergronden begonnen we onze gezamenlijke reis om een haalbare oplossing te vinden om deze kloof te overbruggen. Na het identificeren van de Nederlandse deeltijdcultuur als een belangrijke oorzaak van de mismatch beschreven door SharePower, stelde het team de volgende onderzoeksvraag als richtlijn voor de rest van het project: Welke factoren stimuleren deeltijdwerk en belemmeren de terugkeer naar fulltime betaald werk voor moeders zonder zorgtaken?

Na het uitvoeren van een uitgebreid literatuuronderzoek dat verschillende onderzoeksrichtingen omvatte, stelde ons team vast dat de moederstraf de fundamentele basis vormt van het probleem in kwestie. We kozen vijf theorieën die de oorzaken van de moederschuld blootleggen en samen met twee sociaal-psychologische theorieën een holistisch beeld geven van de factoren die bijdragen aan de moederschuld. Deze theorieën leggen de basis voor de Think Tank om afgeronde en effectieve aanbevelingen te ontwikkelen om het probleem van SharePower op te lossen.

Als Think Tank kwamen we met vier aanbevelingen die verschillende aspecten aanpakken. De eerste aanbeveling richt zich op het aanbieden van actiegerichte trainingen aan werkgevers over onbewuste vooroordelen, met als doel hun vooroordelen tegen vrouwen op de werkvloer te verminderen. De tweede en derde aanbeveling focussen op informatieve en educatieve workshops voor ouders en toekomstige ouders. Terwijl de eerste bedoeld is om vrouwen verschillende vaardigheden aan te leren om hun waarde op de arbeidsmarkt te vergroten, richt de tweede zich op het informeren van ouders over de structuur en implicaties van het Nederlandse systeem van kinderopvang. Tot slot, de vierde aanbeveling omvat een voorstel voor een SharePower app met als doel het bieden van een community-based ruimte voor moeders om ervaringen uit te wisselen, op de hoogte te blijven van workshops en elkaar te ondersteunen. Een samenvatting van deze aanbevelingen is te vinden onder Samenvatting van de aanbevelingen. Tot slot geeft onze Think Tank suggesties voor toekomstige onderzoeksinitiatieven die SharePower kan gebruiken om inzicht te krijgen in strategieën om tot een hogere graad van herintreding van moeders in fulltime banen in Limburg te komen.

## Summary of Recommendations



### Unconscious Bias Training

This intervention is meant for employers and aims to reduce workplace discrimination against mothers by tackling stereotyping. SharePower should host action-oriented unconscious bias trainings which provide strategies for how to mitigate bias.



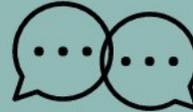
### Skill-Building Workshops

SharePower is recommended to host workshops for mothers to increase their human capital and value on the labor market. There should be workshops that are business specific as well as generic, teaching analytical, as well as linguistic and digital design skills.



### Education on Childcare System

SharePower should host workshops for future or expecting mothers and fathers on the structure of the Dutch childcare system, what policies are in place and how their salary and refunding works relate to these. This intervention will help future parents navigate the system and get access to childcare more easily.



### App for Online Peer Support

SharePower should launch an app where mothers can exchange advice on issues regarding participation in the workforce and parenting. This would counteract the negative effects of the isolation and pressure of motherhood. The app can also be to market their workshops.



# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Problem Analysis.....</b>	<b>3</b>
SharePower’s View of the Problem.....	3
Our View of the Problem.....	5
<b>Theoretical Framework.....</b>	<b>7</b>
(i) Human Capital Theory.....	7
(ii) Effort Hypothesis.....	8
(iii) Job Characteristics.....	8
(iv) Employer Discrimination.....	9
(v) Selection.....	9
Social Role Theory.....	10
Role Congruity Theory.....	10
<b>Research Approach.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Recommendations.....</b>	<b>13</b>
I. For Employers.....	13
Action-Oriented Unconscious Bias Training.....	13
II. For Parents and Future Parents.....	18
Short Term: Skill-Building Workshops for Mothers.....	18
Long Term: Education on Childcare System for Future Parents.....	22
App for Online Peer Support.....	25
<b>Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>47</b>
Appendix A. Guidelines for Action-Oriented Unconscious Bias Training.....	47
Appendix B. Guidelines for Skill-Building Workshops.....	55
Appendix C. Suggested Interview Questions.....	59

## Introduction

SharePower is a non-profit organization established in 1975 and based in Roermond. The company aims to achieve equal opportunities for everyone in Limburg, particularly women. To accomplish this, they engage in diverse initiatives such as information sharing, training, events, and partnerships to combat disparities in parenthood, work, taboos, prejudices, technology, finances, politics, and research. SharePower empowers women by offering political training and raising awareness through workshops and information materials to fight existing inequalities. They, for instance, train women interested in entering politics and raising awareness about social inequality through workshops and information materials to empower women to fight the existing disparities.

During an introductory meeting with the Think Tank team, SharePower shared that they have observed a discrepancy between labor supply and demand, with many women in Limburg facing difficulties in securing employment and employers encountering challenges in hiring women. Moreover, according to SharePower, many women in Limburg have problems re-entering the labor market after leaving it temporarily to care for children. SharePower deems it necessary to understand the reasons for the mismatch and find potential solutions for what employers and women looking for jobs can do to bridge this gap.

In light of this information, SharePower's assignment to the Think Tank team at University College Maastricht was to analyze this mismatch and provide recommendations to best support both women and companies. During the problem analysis, the team conducted extensive research and discovered a more specific issue within the broader gap: working mothers delaying their return to full-time employment after working part-time. In the Netherlands, part-time work is prevalent and has a gendered nature, with 63% of women engaging in part-time employment (Eurostat, 2023). The *Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek* (Statistics Netherlands) (2022) reported that 70% of women in 2021 worked part-time compared to 28% of men. The part-time culture spreads to every field within society and has implications that are only reserved for women, especially when the situation does not change after the children are independent and thus do not require as much care, leading them to never return to full-time employment. Furthermore, although the Dutch labor market displays shortages of employees in multiple sectors, a gap between men and women persists. Although the government provides subsidies to cover childcare costs, these contributions do not effectively incentivize women to actively participate in the workforce. Consequently, traditional gender roles are perpetuated, and women encounter challenges when trying to

enter the labor market. Therefore, the analysis should not solely focus on re-entering the workforce, as the underlying issue lies in the preceding step. Women's decisions regarding labor market participation are heavily influenced by their caregiving responsibilities for children, often leading to leaving the workforce or opting for part-time work (Pacelli et al., 2013). Mothers are more inclined towards part-time employment than mothers who do not have children and are also less likely to return to full-time positions once they have started to work part-time (Booth & van Ours, 2012). This problem of imbalance between the genders and mothers and non-mothers is exacerbated by the fact that employers often expect mothers to work part-time, which reinforced bias against them (Henle et al., 2015). It also widens the labor supply gap between mothers and the demand for full-time employment as employers are more hesitant to hire mothers (van Osch & Schaveling, 2017).

This issue involves multiple parties and stakeholders, ranging from mothers and employers to decision-makers and both national and local governments. Each of these entities exerts distinct influences on the matter, resulting in a multifaceted relevance that spans from broader societal implications to individual circumstances. The significance of this case extends to the societal level, particularly in relation to the *motherhood penalty*, which is a concept describing the discrimination women face in the labor market after becoming mothers (Correll et al., 2007). Understanding this phenomenon provides insight into the broader societal issues surrounding gender disparities. Also, disentangling the complexities of the issue would contribute to a better understanding of women's experiences within the workplace, facilitating the identification of compromises that support their transition back to full-time positions and the closing of the gender gap. Finally, the disentanglement of the issue, as described earlier, would contribute to a better understanding of women's experiences within the work environment. This understanding can lead to the identification of compromises that assist women in transitioning back to full-time positions, ultimately working towards closing the gender gap. By addressing the underlying factors and challenges faced by women, it becomes possible to create an environment that supports their advancement and equal opportunities in the workforce.

By analyzing the problem, the team carries out focused research for SharePower and offers tailored solutions to address the underlying causes of concerns related to women's labor market participation in Limburg. This report aims to offer precise recommendations that can assist SharePower in resolving the problem while also applying to other companies. The research is driven by the following question: What factors drive part-time employment and hinder the return to full-time paid work for mothers without caring responsibilities?

The evidence necessary to answer this question is organized as follows. The report will commence by providing an analysis of both SharePower's perspective on the problem and the issue identified by the Think Tank team. The second section of the report presents the theoretical framework and its related theories, such as the concept of the motherhood penalty. The third section provides details on the research approach, explaining why the methodology of a descriptive literature review was chosen. The data and evidence gathered and analyzed through the literature review are then condensed into four recommendations. Due to factors such as time constraints, a section is reserved for limitations and suggestions for future research. Lastly, a final recapitulation will be proposed in the conclusion.

## Problem Analysis

### SharePower’s View of the Problem

SharePower initially presented the Think Tank team with a broad issue concerning the disparity between the number of available vacancies and the underrepresentation of women in the workforce, particularly in relation to organizations' struggles to fill these positions. Additionally, they expressed concerns about women in the Limburg region temporarily leaving the labor market, often due to childcare responsibilities, and facing difficulties when trying to re-enter it. As a Think Tank, our first assignment was to analyze this problem utilizing the Toulmin Model (see Figure 1), which facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the client's reasoning process. This analytical tool allowed us to identify any errors, inconsistencies, or gaps in the logical coherence of their reasoning that needed to be addressed.

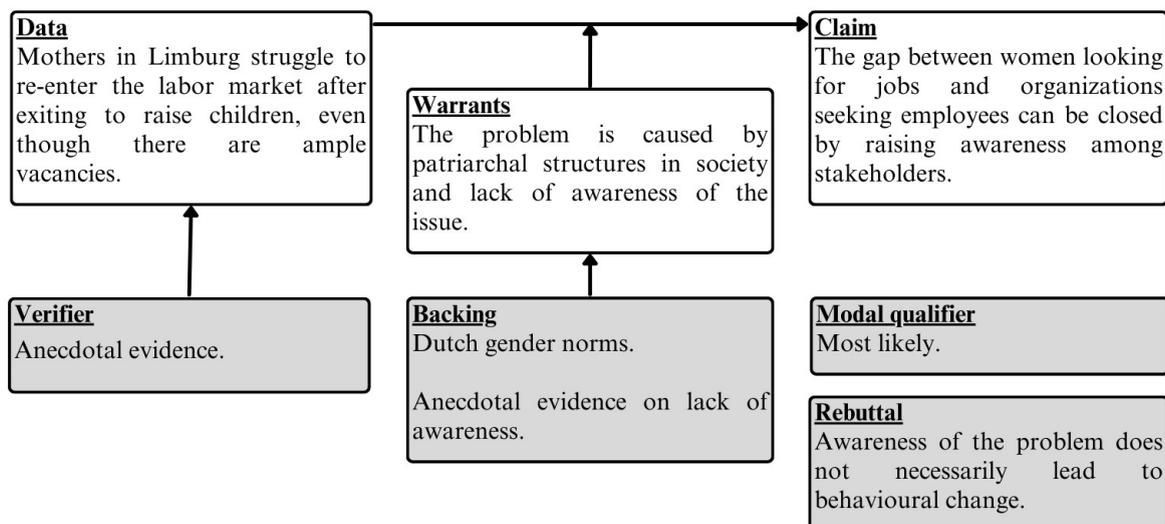


Figure 1: SharePower's line of reasoning.

During our analysis using the Toulmin Model, we observed that the problem (see *data* in Figure 1) presented by SharePower mainly relied on anecdotal evidence. Our discussions with the client revealed that their assertions were predominantly based on informal sources and conversations with women. While acknowledging the importance of considering their experiences, it is important to note that relying solely on anecdotal evidence can lead to fallacious reasoning when analyzing a problem. It is therefore necessary to complement such evidence with academic and statistical data to determine the extent to which the company's concerns reflect a substantial and prioritized issue.

Given the nature of the organization and its structure, the initial claim stated that the gap between women seeking jobs and organizations looking for employees could be reduced by raising awareness among both stakeholders. However, our Think Tank identified a fundamental issue with this claim. It assumes either that the women in question lack awareness of where to find job opportunities or that the organizations are unaware of the reasons why these women cannot work for them. While a lack of awareness may contribute to the gap, it is important to consider that there might be other underlying systemic issues that are causing this problem, such as patriarchy. The logical warrant in the Toulmin model which connects the data and claim would therefore involve not only the lack of awareness but also the pervasive influence of the patriarchy. By recognizing the broader influence of patriarchal structures, we can better understand the complexities and dynamics involved in addressing this issue. Nevertheless, our team encountered the recurring problem that this warrant is based on general Dutch norms and, more importantly, anecdotal evidence.

The next step in the problem analysis was to find the evidence necessary to construct a logically coherent Toulmin Model without any gaps or missing information. Primarily, we found that raising awareness can be counterproductive, if not paired with concrete strategies on how to take action based upon increased awareness (Atewologun et al., 2018). This indicates that the process through which the stakeholders are informed on the issue needs to be changed. This is further explored in the section titled "Action-Oriented Unconscious Bias Training."

To summarize, our Think Tank determined that the problem outlined by SharePower relied primarily on anecdotal evidence, which is insufficient for a robust definition. Consequently, our subsequent course of action was to engage in academic research to either

validate the client's initial problem as relevant or redefine it based on the findings from credible academic sources.

## Our View of the Problem

Upon evaluating the Toulmin model from the client's perspective, our team discovered that the problem of mothers struggling to re-enter the labor market has a deeper root cause. Through extensive research, it became evident that the issue primarily revolved around mothers in the Netherlands with children aged 12 years or older, who exhibit a greater inclination towards part-time employment and a lower likelihood of returning to full-time positions. Furthermore, employers expect mothers to conform to this pattern, leading to prejudice and discrimination. This reinforces traditional family dynamics and widens the gap between the labor supply of mothers and the demand for full-time work. To visually represent this refined understanding, Figure 2 presents a Toulmin model that supports the problem statement and the subsequent claims that follow.

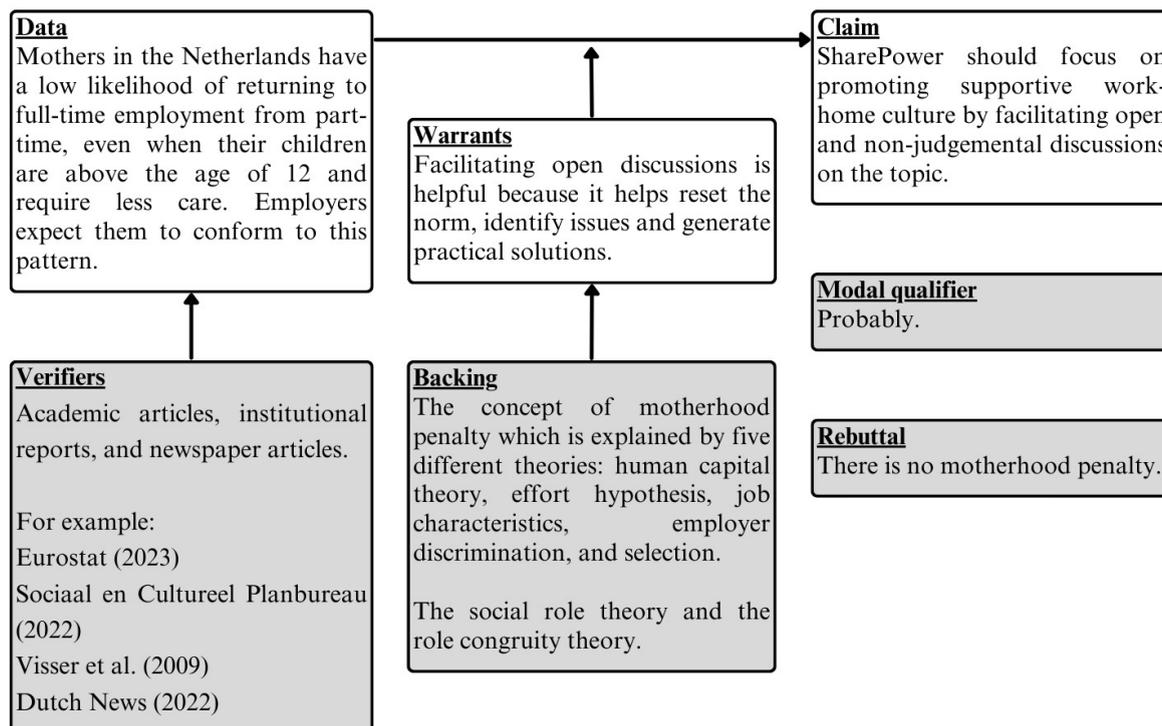


Figure 2: Our View of the Toulmin Model.

To back up the problem statement, various studies have been found that confirm the problem at hand. Research indicates that women's decisions regarding labor market participation are influenced by their caregiving responsibilities for children, often leading them to leave the

workforce or choose part-time employment (Pacelli et al., 2013). Even after their children have grown up and no longer require significant care, it is common for women in the Netherlands to maintain or reduce their working hours. Recent studies further reveal that employers rarely actively encourage mothers to seek full-time employment, assuming that they have chosen part-time work for a valid reason (Portegijs, 2022). Regarding employment discrimination, it has been demonstrated that being a female primary caregiver significantly impacts how a company perceives an individual's performance and characteristics. These perceptions, in turn, influence the hiring processes and salary decisions, leading to disparities between caregivers and non-caregivers (Henle et al., 2015). Both of these aspects have been shown to reinforce traditional patriarchal family dynamics in the Netherlands, where men are predominantly regarded as breadwinners, while women assume the role of caregivers and often become financially dependent on their male partners (van Veelen, 2020). Furthermore, a study by Vohlídalová (2017) found that in dual-career academic couples, the woman's career is often considered secondary to those of men.

Based on the information provided above, we recommend SharePower focus on addressing the motherhood penalty, particularly by focusing on more open discussions with both men and women to reset the norms, identify issues, and develop practical solutions to these issues. This recommendation is based on the confirmed existence of the motherhood penalty in the Netherlands, as supported by previous studies (Rabatè & Rellstab, 2021).

Hiring discrimination caused by the motherhood penalty leads to mothers in Limburg to rely on part-time employment and remain in such positions once their children are old enough to care for themselves. Moreover, the motherhood penalty is associated with the motherhood pay gap, which refers to the wage inequality between mothers and non-mothers as well as mothers and fathers and can be attributed to the concept of human capital (Grimshaw & Rubery, 2015). According to Xu and Fletcher (2017), each worker possesses a set of skills that can be enhanced or accumulated through education and training. However, motherhood is often associated with a decrease in human capital due to maternal leave, labor market exits, or reduced working hours (Grimshaw & Rubery, 2015; Budig & Hodges, 2010). This reduction in commitment to work may also account for the loss since mothers are less likely to seek out higher-paying positions with greater responsibility (Grimshaw & Rubery, 2015).

# Theoretical Framework

In this report, the following main theories were used as a framework to guide and analyze the research findings of this Think Tank Project:

1. Motherhood Penalty
2. Social Role and Congruity Theory

The motherhood penalty refers to a social phenomenon that significantly impacts the professional advancement of mothers aiming to resume full-time employment (Grimshaw & Rubery, 2018). It highlights the discriminatory challenges mothers face in the workplace, including the issue of lower wages and being less likely to get hired (Gash, 2009; Wang & Ackerman, 2020). According to Grimshaw and Rubery (2018), studies suggest that even when mothers have older children who require less immediate care, they continue to experience disadvantages and discrimination regarding wages and career advancement, as compared to women without children. A review by Margret Gough and Mary Noonan (2013) identified the five main theoretical explanations for the motherhood penalty, namely (i) the human capital theory, (ii) the effort hypothesis, (iii) the theory of job characteristics, (iv) employer discrimination, and (v) the theory of selection. Taken together, these theories provide vital insights into how the motherhood penalty is being perpetuated in society and its consequences on women's work possibilities and choices.

## (i) Human Capital Theory

From a human capital theory perspective, the concept of the motherhood penalty suggests that women who are mothers tend to allocate less time to their work, potentially resulting in the assumption that they acquire fewer skills during this period (Gough & Noonan, 2013). This poses a problem as, according to the human capital theory, an individual can only acquire higher wages if they have enough work experience, training, and skills. Consequently, due to the assumption held by employers that mothers possess smaller skill sets and exhibit less commitment to work compared to women without children, it is more probable for mothers to encounter reduced wages and restricted career prospects (Budig & England, 2001). To analyze the motherhood penalty, numerous studies on the subject incorporate the human capital theory and account for various factors, including education, job experience, tenure,

time spent out of the labor market, and current employment status (part-time versus full-time). These studies provide insights into the complex nature of the issue. For instance, the maternity extended leave policy perpetuates the penalty by discouraging maternal employment after childbirth. As a result, this makes it more challenging for mothers to secure full-time positions or advance in their careers, further pushing them forward to part-time employment (Gough & Noonan, 2013).

### (ii) Effort Hypothesis

According to Gough and Noonan (2013), the effort hypothesis addresses a similar concern as a human capital theory but offers a different perspective on the motherhood penalty. Instead of attributing it to mothers' lack of skill or commitment, the effort hypothesis suggests that the penalty arises from the assumption that mothers exert less effort due to the lack of time. Indeed, as mothers take on household responsibilities and care for their children, they often find less time and energy to work, which can lead to employers' hesitation to hire mothers. This leads to biased evaluations, reduced career advancement opportunities, and lower mothers' wages. It can thus be hypothesized that employers hold certain assumptions about mothers, such as the fact that they prioritize their family responsibilities over their work obligations, leading to the perception that mothers have reduced effort in their workplace compared to women who do not have children. This is further perpetuated through social role expectations, which portray women in a nurturing and caregiving lens. Thus, the effort hypothesis explains the motherhood penalty phenomenon by addressing the lack of endeavor and time that mothers give rather than looking into their job qualifications (Gough & Noonan, 2013).

### (iii) Job Characteristics

Another approach to understanding the motherhood penalty is to examine the types of jobs that mothers typically seek. The theory of job characteristics suggests that caregivers often opt for part-time employment and accept lower wages as it offers more flexibility in terms of working hours. This choice allows them to prioritize their family responsibilities and grants them the opportunity to focus on their family responsibilities. The perpetuation of the motherhood penalty cannot be attributed solely to employer biases, as it is also influenced by mothers' acceptance of the need for part-time employment to achieve a satisfactory work-life balance. However, this contributes to the mechanisms explained by the human capital theory

and effort hypothesis, such as lack of skills and commitment. Indeed, by relying on part-time jobs for lack of time, mothers unintentionally perpetuate the biased perception within the labor market that they are incapable or uninterested in committing to full-time employment. This creates a loop in which the motherhood penalty is reinforced, as mothers must turn to part-time employment while struggling with the wage gap (Gough & Noonan, 2013).

#### (iv) Employer Discrimination

The motherhood penalty can also be analyzed by looking into employer discrimination. One can distinguish two different types of discrimination: statistical and taste. Statistical discrimination is based on numerical evidence, while taste-based discrimination is driven by subjective perceptions and biases. The former is characterized by employers' assumption that mothers are, on average, less productive than women without children. In comparison, the latter can be defined by coworkers' and employees' preference to work with women who are not mothers. A study by Corell and colleagues (2007) investigated the grounds for hiring discrimination by having employers choose between fictional job applicants who only differed in terms of their parental status. They found that hiring managers tend to dismiss and lower the starting salaries of mothers compared to women who had no children. These results support the hypothesis that employer discrimination during the hiring process also contributes to the development of the motherhood penalty.

#### (v) Selection

The selection theory is the final theory that seeks to explain the motherhood penalty, proposing that factors internal to mothers themselves contribute to this phenomenon. Unlike the theories mentioned above, which focus on external influences like discrimination and bias, the selection theory suggests that intrinsic and individual characteristics of mothers play a role. It recognizes that some women may have been more career-oriented before becoming mothers or exhibit higher levels of commitment, making them more motivated to resume full-time employment after having children (Gough & Noonan, 2013). This perspective on the motherhood penalty highlights that analyzing the phenomenon requires taking into account factors that go beyond societal or workplace discrimination and bias. By acknowledging the role of personal values and personalities, a more comprehensive understanding of the motherhood penalty can be achieved.

## Social Role Theory

The second theoretical framework, which adopts a socio-psychological perspective, encompasses two theories. The first theory is known as the *Social Role Theory* and asserts that norms and societal pressure impose roles on people based on their gender. These roles dictate that individuals should conform to the stereotypical characteristics associated with their gender category. Consequently, people internalize these expectations and adopt gender-specific behaviors and features. For instance, within the family context, men are expected to assume the role of breadwinners and providers, while women are assumed to be the primary caregiver and stay home to care for the children (Ridgeway, 2001; Burgess, 2013). The theory also implies that the roles and categories allocated by society shape individuals' behavior and self-perception (Ridgeway, 2001). In the context of the motherhood penalty phenomenon, the social role theory explains how balancing the demands of parenting and a profession can produce conflicts and obstacles for women. Indeed, gender categories and stereotypes frequently contribute to the expectation that women, particularly mothers, should prioritize family responsibilities over full-time employment. It can therefore be hypothesized that mothers turn toward part-time work over full-time because they feel pressured to comply with these societal expectations. Furthermore, because of their status as *mothers*, such women may face biases and discrimination in the workplace based on gender-specific assumptions regarding their commitment and competence (Burgess, 2013).

## Role Congruity Theory

The second socio-psychological theory is called the *Role Congruity Theory*. Building upon Social Role Theory, this theory centers on individuals' perceptions and evaluations of gender roles and expectations. It specifically examines how the mismatch or incongruity between the prescribed gender roles and workplace positions affects people's judgments and attitudes. By considering the impact of role incongruity, the Role Congruity Theory provides insights into the dynamics of gender-based biases and stereotypes in relation to occupational settings. The theory suggests that negative assumptions arise when women occupy roles in the workplace which are socially associated with men. This misalignment in gender roles leads to societal stereotypes that generate biases impacting women's positions in the workplace. The theory also claims that the larger the incongruity between women's roles and the conventional worker roles, the stronger the negative expectations regarding women's work performance

(Burgess, 2013). The Role Congruity Theory argues that women (especially mothers) who do not exhibit stereotypically feminine characteristics (such as being nurturing, emotional, and supportive) face more prejudice, bias, and reduced evaluations (Diekmann & Goodfriend, 2006). This poses a problem when women try to take on leadership positions or fill roles that men traditionally dominate. This explains why women are less frequently chosen for leadership jobs and higher positions (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

## Research Approach

This section of the report outlines the methodology our Think Tank applied to answer the research question and achieve the objectives of the study. Upon identifying the client's problem, we decided on two data collection methods to provide actionable recommendations for SharePower: Qualitative interviews with the two key stakeholders involved, and a descriptive literature review. The two stakeholders based on our research question were mothers with children above the age of 12 and directors of HR at various Dutch companies. However, as the number of respondents was not sufficiently high to draw comprehensive conclusions from and the timeline of the project was constrained, we decided to exclude the interviews from our data collection and focus on the descriptive literature review approach.

Descriptive literature reviews involve collecting and analyzing existing literature on a specific topic or concept without the aim to further build upon it (Xiao & Watson, 2019). By carefully selecting relevant empirical research findings on a specific phenomenon, such reviews enable the synthesis of evidence required to support an overall argument. Primary or original data is left out. Instead, the focus lies on various published works, scholarly journal articles, books, reports, and trustworthy websites. In the context of our project, a literature review holds particular value, especially considering its wide applicability in interdisciplinary research (Synder, 2019). Given that the problem involves multiple disciplines and intersects with various fields of study, this type of data collection allows us to explore and integrate knowledge from different domains effectively. It, therefore, enhances the depth and breadth of our analysis, facilitating the development of well-rounded recommendations for the client.

To conduct the literature review, we chose a systematic literature search as a guideline to find answers to our research question. In this type of literature search, the goal is to identify and filter all pertinent empirical studies that can contribute to the aim of the research. By comparing and drawing conclusions from the findings across these studies, a comprehensive understanding can be derived (Snyder, 2019). The systematic search was conducted on

several academic databases, using the option of advanced search to reduce the chance of bias and missing important findings. The databases used were JSTOR, PsycNet, WorldCat, Emerald Insights, EBSCO, Scopus, and PubMed. The diversity of databases used can be attributed to the interdisciplinary nature of the project and the varied academic backgrounds of the members of the Think Tank, who focused on different aspects when answering the research question. Consequently, the main search terms used vary depending on the focus, but those which all had in common were: Mothers, Working Mothers, Part-time Employment, Labor Participation, Employers, Employees, Reinforcement, Discrimination, Bias, the Netherlands, Limburg, Motherhood Penalty, Division of Labor, and Caring Responsibilities.

To ensure that the recommendations presented by the Think Tank can effectively address the problem and be implemented by SharePower, their potential is assessed based on the *SAFE* criteria: social acceptability, feasibility, and effectiveness. This evaluation framework enables a thorough examination of the recommendations' societal acceptance, practicality, and impact (Kraft & Furlong, 2021). The following section offers a brief explanation of each of the criteria.

1. **Social Acceptability:** This criterion focuses on how the initiative is likely to be received in terms of acceptance and support within the broader society or affected community. It considers the social, cultural, and ethical implications of the proposed solution. Evaluating social acceptability involves assessing whether the recommendation aligns with societal values, norms, and expectations. It also considers the potential impacts on various stakeholders and whether the proposed solution is perceived as fair, just, and equitable.
2. **Feasibility:** Feasibility examines whether the recommendation is viable and implementable in practical terms. It encompasses various dimensions, including political feasibility, administrative feasibility, and technological feasibility. Political feasibility assesses the likelihood of the recommendation being politically acceptable and gaining support from key policymakers, and stakeholders. Administrative feasibility examines whether the recommendation can be effectively implemented within existing administrative structures and capacities. Technological feasibility considers whether the necessary technologies and infrastructure are available or can be developed to support the implementation of the recommendation.

3. Effectiveness: This criterion evaluates the likelihood of achieving the goals and objectives set by the client. Effectiveness refers to how well the recommendation is expected to address the problem and produce the desired outcomes.

## Recommendations

### I. For Employers

#### Action-Oriented Unconscious Bias Training

SharePower suggests that increasing awareness among employers may offer a potential solution to the issue of mothers delaying their return to full-time employment. This section examines the effectiveness of unconscious bias training (UBT) in organizations and companies as a means to promote equality and reduce discrimination against marginalized groups (Pendry et al., 2007). UBT aims to raise awareness of unconscious biases, also known as implicit biases, which are unconscious perspectives, opinions, and stereotype associations about others that influence our actions and decisions without conscious recognition (Atewologun et al., 2018). These implicit biases are shaped by various factors such as our upbringing, cultural environment, context, and personal experiences (Kramer et al., 2021; Atewologun et al., 2018). By addressing and mitigating these unconscious biases, employers can minimize the influence of implicit biases associated with mothers. This can mitigate the negative effects of the motherhood penalty and foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for mothers' return to full-time employment.

UBT can be delivered online or through face-to-face workshops, and they usually involve an Implicit Association Test which demonstrates that everyone is susceptible to unconscious bias to some extent. The workshops also offer information on unconscious bias theory, information on its impact, and some also present techniques to mitigate biases (Atewologun et al., 2018). A report by Atewologun and colleagues (2018) found that UBT effectively raises awareness of implicit bias and reduces its occurrence, especially when using Implicit Association Tests and educating participants on unconscious bias theory. However, there are some downsides and risks which need to be considered before deciding to use diversity training.

Several studies have found that there is a risk for backlash following UBT aimed at raising awareness about stereotyping. Duguid and Thomas-Hunt (2015), for instance, demonstrated that raising awareness can normalize and encourage stereotyping, which

increases discrimination. Professionals exposed to frequent stereotyping messages were found to be less likely to work with individuals who defy stereotypes and tend to exhibit more stereotype-consistent behavior in competitive tasks. However, individuals exposed to counter-stereotyping effort messages display less inclination toward such behaviors (Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015; see also Atewologun et al., 2018). Another study (Uhlmann & Cohen, 2007) found that decision-makers in hiring processes who were primed with a sense of personal objectivity, which could be attained through education on biases, exhibited a higher likelihood of discriminating based on gender. This demonstrates that simply possessing egalitarian attitudes does not guarantee the prevention of inequitable behaviors.

Devine and colleagues' *habit-breaking analysis of prejudice reduction* (Devine et al., 2012) offers a theoretical explanation for why merely knowing about one's biases is not enough to eliminate them. The theory asserts that prejudices and discriminatory behavior resemble deeply ingrained habits, in the sense that they require substantial effort and time to overcome. Individuals must therefore, in addition to being aware of their biases, actively work to 'break the habit.' To prevent UBT from backfiring, it, therefore, needs to be action-oriented and offer strategies for mitigating bias. Guidelines on how to do this are provided by the *prejudice habit-breaking intervention* developed by Devine and her colleagues (2012). The training is based on the habit-breaking analysis of prejudice reduction and it has been proven effective in reducing bias and increasing concerns about discrimination and personal awareness of bias, especially for participants who were concerned about discrimination and used bias-reducing strategies.

### Explanation of Recommendation

Our first recommendation to SharePower is therefore to host UBT based on the prejudice habit-breaking intervention. By using Devine's framework as a guide, the drawbacks of UBT presented above can be avoided. The adverse consequences of raising awareness found in Uhlmann and Cohen's study (2007) can be reduced by designing action-oriented interventions. It is therefore crucial to equip participants with strategies to mitigate their bias. To avoid the issues raised by Duguid and Thomas-Hunt (2015), SharePower should expose participants to examples which counteract stereotypes of mothers (and fathers) and encourage participants to seek such examples themselves both during and after the workshop.

Much like the prejudice habit-breaking intervention, SharePower's UBT should start by introducing the concept of implicit bias to the audience, along with information on its negative impact on working mothers. Following the educational segment, participants should

take the *Gender – Career Implicit Association Test*, which often reveals unconscious associations between family and women and between career and men (Project Implicit, 2011). After taking the test, participants will receive feedback regarding their own biases. Participants should also be informed about various strategies for mitigating bias, such as challenging stereotypical beliefs, contemplating counter-stereotypical examples, seeking individualized information about others, adopting alternative perspectives, and increasing opportunities for intergroup contact. At each stage, participants should be encouraged to generate examples of how they can apply these strategies in their own lives. SharePower should emphasize that the strategies reinforce each other and that the more they are practiced, the more effective they become. According to Sabin and colleagues (2020), it is also important to involve trainees during the program's design phase and allow them to identify challenges, provide feedback, and refine the intervention for future cohorts. SharePower should therefore discuss the content of the workshop with the relevant company or organization before and after the event. This is important as it ensures that the content is tailored to the audience and is improved based on their feedback. Even though the prejudice habit-breaking intervention was initially developed to combat race bias (Devine et al., 2012), its underlying principles and action-oriented strategies make it an effective tool for reducing the marginalization of mothers as well. Although race bias and the marginalization of mothers are distinct forms of discrimination, they share certain fundamental characteristics that make the intervention applicable to both. For instance, both race bias and marginalization of mothers stem from stereotypes and require proactive measures to be mitigated.

Guidelines for action-oriented unconscious bias training can be found in appendix A.

### SAFE Evaluation of the UBT Recommendation

#### **Social Acceptability**

The prejudice habit-breaking intervention is likely to enjoy high social acceptability due to the positive perception of UBT by companies and organizations. UBT has garnered significant attention from Western governments and companies that are keen on promoting diversity and inclusivity while addressing biases that perpetuate discrimination against marginalized groups. Williamson and Foley (2018) highlight the increasing interest in UBT as a tool for fostering a more inclusive work environment. Many companies are actively seeking to improve their practices in terms of equality and diversity, recognizing the importance of

creating a fair and unbiased workplace. They understand that embracing diversity not only aligns with ethical considerations but also has tangible benefits such as enhanced creativity, innovation, and productivity. Therefore, there is a strong demand from companies to engage in interventions like the prejudice habit-breaking intervention, which helps challenge biases and promote a more inclusive and equitable culture. The social acceptability of such interventions is therefore high, and organizations are motivated to actively participate in initiatives that advance their equality and diversity goals.

Although social acceptability is high, there is a risk that individuals belonging to dominant groups will become defensive when the status quo is challenged (Sabin et al., 2020). However, a discursive review by Möller and colleagues (2023) claims that defensiveness can be mitigated by recognizing the meaning and value of uncomfortable and difficult feelings such as anger and resistance. According to the authors, many UBT instructors discount complex emotions by either framing bias as natural or by dismissing such feelings as defensive. Additionally, 'bad' feelings are often framed as hindrances to change which participants are encouraged to quickly move through. This approach minimizes the opportunities for participants to fully explore and consider the material and affective implications of structural, institutional, and systemic sexism.

To overcome these limitations, it is crucial for SharePower to foster a safe and inclusive environment during the workshop. This entails creating a space where open and non-judgmental discussions can occur, allowing participants to freely express their feelings and share their experiences without the fear of being criticized or judged. Researchers Hannah and Carpenter-Song (2013) mention several ways in which UBT instructors can do so. One of those strategies that SharePower should use is to divide the participants into smaller groups for discussions. This is beneficial as the emotional risk of expressing yourself is bigger in larger groups. SharePower should also make sure to encourage participants to focus on the work of introspection and the sharing of personal experiences. This could for instance be done by leaving time for silence and giving participants ample time to reflect. By fostering a supportive and non-judgmental space, the intervention can create a transformative learning environment that promotes deeper self-reflection and a greater commitment to long-term change.

### **Feasibility**

This intervention should be technically feasible for SharePower as they have previous experience in hosting workshops. Although this workshop may differ from the ones they have

hosted before, the detailed guidelines in Appendix A in combination with their expertise provide a solid starting point for a successful workshop. However, the intervention may present administrative challenges, particularly in identifying and persuading respected managers to participate in the co-design process and publicly endorse the initiative. Their involvement is crucial as it garners support from participants, making them more receptive to the intervention and less inclined to question its relevance, as highlighted by Hunter (2021). SharePower is however likely to be able to overcome this challenge as they have an extensive social network and good connections with companies that they have consulted and collaborated with. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the workshop will be feasible for SharePower to host.

### **Effectiveness**

The prejudice habit-breaking intervention directly addresses the issue of employer discrimination against mothers, particularly in relation to their delayed return to full-time employment after having children. This problem is influenced by stereotypes and gender discrimination present in the workplace, which contribute to the behavior of mothers reducing their working hours more than fathers. The intervention provides a logical solution as it recognizes that mothers often have less financial incentive to continue working full-time due to the gender pay gap (Leibowitz et al., 1992). This pay gap makes it economically advantageous for mothers to prioritize childcare at home and opt for part-time work while their male partners work full-time (Vierling-Claassen, 2013). One of the key factors perpetuating this gap is the presence of stereotypes about women and mothers, which are more negatively connotated than stereotypes about men and fathers (Wang & Ackerman, 2020). To effectively address this issue, the workshop intervention focuses on tackling the root cause, which is stereotyping. By challenging and providing remedies for these stereotypes, the intervention is likely to be effective in combating discriminatory obstacles and biases in the workplace and taking steps towards minimizing the gender pay gap.

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Rate</b>
Social Acceptability	+ –
Feasibility	+
Effectiveness	+

Table 1: Evaluation of action-oriented unconscious bias training.

## II. For Parents and Future Parents

The following section presents recommendations targeting parents and future parents. The first two involve organizing educational and informative workshops through which short- and long-term outcomes can be achieved. The final recommendation centers around the development of an app based upon a peer support network, fostering community engagement and facilitating the exchange of knowledge.

### Short Term: Skill-Building Workshops for Mothers

Using the theory of human capital as a starting point, one possible solution is to address the challenges of depreciation and insufficient human capital. The concepts of human capital and the motherhood penalty are interconnected, providing insights into the difficulties encountered by mothers in the labor market, which can be viewed as a consequence of limited human capital. Recognizing this relationship allows for the development of strategies aimed at mitigating the effects of the motherhood penalty and promoting the growth of human capital among mothers in the workforce. Research conducted by Grimshaw and Rubery (2015) indicates that higher levels of education and training lead to increased expected salaries. Promoting education and training opportunities for mothers can therefore be a valuable approach to counteracting the motherhood penalty and fostering the enhancement of their human capital, ultimately leading to improved career prospects and economic empowerment. The authors highlight that the wage penalties associated with part-time work have intensified for mothers over time. Additionally, they emphasize that when comparing women who experienced career interruptions with those who did not, the pay gap between these two groups can largely be attributed to differences in human capital (Grimshaw & Rubery, 2015). The findings indicate that career interruptions and part-time work arising from childcare responsibilities negatively affect women's work experience and skill development and the motherhood pay gap.

#### Explanation of Recommendation

To address human capital depreciation in the short term, SharePower should implement skill-building workshops designed to enhance the skills and qualifications of individuals, including mothers, in the workforce. SharePower should also collaborate with businesses to organize and facilitate skill-building workshops that can be offered to their employees. When

mothers take a career break, they often miss out on opportunities to acquire new qualifications and gain valuable experience. As a result, their skills and qualifications can become outdated compared to individuals who did not take a break. This disparity in skill development can pose challenges for mothers when reentering the workforce, as they may face a gap between their skills and the current demands of their chosen field. By enabling mothers to take a career break while also staying up to date with the latest skills and qualifications, SharePower can help them bridge the gap and increase their chances of being hired when they re-enter the workforce or seek to find a full-time job. By implementing this recommendation, SharePower can empower mothers who are transitioning back to full-time employment by equipping them with the necessary skills and qualifications. This initiative would significantly enhance their chances of being hired and successfully reintegrating into the workforce.

A study by Birt (2023) highlights that technological fields have gained substantial relevance in today's rapidly evolving job market and that having specific skills in these areas can therefore greatly enhance one's chances of securing a job offer. To remain competitive in this dynamic job market, it is essential for individuals seeking employment opportunities to stay updated with the latest technological skills and advancements. According to the author, specific skills are essential for success in the modern labor market. Some of these skills are job-specific, while others are more versatile and applicable to various professions. Based on this insight, a recommendation for SharePower is to offer workshops that focus on teaching two general skills: analytical and linguistic skills. Analytical skills are highly valued by employers as they allow the individual to efficiently analyze and solve problems as well as make decisions, which helps the organization achieve its goals while improving the employee's performance. The ability to speak a second language is also a highly sought-after skill as companies increasingly create localized content for global markets, which creates an increasing demand for individuals who can serve as translators. Being proficient in a second language enables individuals to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps, facilitating effective communication and engagement with diverse audiences (Birt, 2023). Research by Last (2022) has also shown that speaking more than one language can significantly expand the number of job opportunities available to individuals.

To ensure high-quality workshops, SharePower should collaborate with specialists from businesses and organizations. This partnership will align the workshops with specific skill requirements and industry demands. By facilitating these collaborations, SharePower can encourage company participation, which will benefit mothers by providing them with the

Guidelines for skill-building workshops can be found in appendix B.

specific skills needed for different types of jobs. SharePower could for instance work with a marketing team and focus on digital design skills. Demonstrating technological proficiency through these skills is beneficial for employers, as it showcases valuable abilities in today's digital-driven environment (Goins, 2023).

### SAFE Evaluation of Skill-Building Workshops for Mothers

#### **Social Acceptability**

The skill-building workshops for mothers are likely to be well received as people in general, as well as mothers wanting to advance in their careers, tend to want to improve and expand their skill sets. They are also likely to be socially accepted by mothers as the initiative offers them an opportunity to expand their knowledge and gain confidence in the labor market.

#### **Feasibility**

The Feasibility of conducting a skills-building workshop for a target group is highly dependent on the availability of resources and support. It is important to assess the needs of the target group and to have access to the necessary materials and personnel to ensure the success of the workshop. Surveys should therefore be conducted to identify the specific skills gaps and needs of the target group. SharePower should also collaborate with local educational institutions and vocational training centers to develop and deliver relevant and accessible training programs.

The feasibility of the workshops also depends on what skill is being taught. Analytical skills are especially well-researched and have clear instructions, making those workshops feasible. While implementing language skills workshops may present feasibility challenges for SharePower, particularly in terms of resource availability for hiring language teachers, there is a potential solution. The feasibility of language workshops can be enhanced by seeking volunteers who are willing to contribute their language-teaching expertise. This would alleviate the resource burden and make the workshops more attainable. However, it is important to recognize that learning a language in a short period without consistent practice can be challenging. Even if the skills course is well-designed and efficient, it may not yield the desired results without ongoing practice and reinforcement. Indeed, the feasibility of skills workshops in collaboration with companies can be considered more viable, as the specific skills can be taught by specialists within those fields. This collaboration enhances the feasibility of the workshops by leveraging the expertise and resources available within the partnering organizations. Overall, while both types of skills workshops may have their

respective strengths and weaknesses in terms of feasibility, they remain a strong recommendation. With proper planning and execution, skills workshops can be a viable option to support mothers in their career development.

**Effectiveness**

Skill-building workshops have the potential to help mothers build their human capital by acquiring new skills and knowledge, which would reduce the motherhood penalty, as explained by the theory of human capital. These initiatives are specifically designed to help mothers develop new skills and knowledge that can help them in their job search and career advancement. Such programs not only enhance existing skills but also enable the acquisition of new ones. By actively participating in skill-building workshops or training programs, mothers can gain valuable insights into their own capabilities and align them with the demands of the job market. This fosters personal and professional growth, ultimately increasing their effectiveness in pursuing and securing meaningful employment opportunities.

The effectiveness of the initiative varies depending on the skill being taught as well as the collaboration with the companies or organizations. Analytical skills, for instance, can contribute to the development of a versatile skill set with broader applications. However, measuring the level of proficiency in this skill can be challenging as it is more abstract in nature. On the other hand, language skills can be measured more concretely and are highly valuable additions to a resume. However, it is difficult to learn a language and the training has to be executed well to be effective. In terms of working with specific companies, the effectiveness would depend on the alignment of goals between SharePower and the companies involved. If their objectives align, collaborating with these companies can offer mothers the opportunity to acquire specific skills that are directly relevant to their future careers. Overall, the effectiveness of the initiative relies on the careful design and execution of the skill-building workshops, the measurement and applicability of the skills being taught, and the alignment of objectives between SharePower and the collaborating companies. Through a thoughtful and strategic approach, SharePower can maximize the effectiveness of the initiative, ensuring that mothers gain valuable skills that are relevant to their professional growth and advancement.

Criteria	Rate
Social Acceptability	+

Feasibility	+ –
Effectiveness	+ –

Table 2: Evaluation of Skill-Building Workshops for Mothers.

### Long Term: Education on Childcare System for Future Parents

The availability of childcare in the Netherlands is an important consideration, as it directly relates to why numerous mothers opt for part-time employment in order to take care of their children. It is worth noting that countries differ significantly in how their work-family policies contribute to reinforcing gendered divisions of unpaid and paid labor (Fahlén, 2016). Understanding the functioning of the Dutch childcare system, therefore, becomes a crucial aspect in addressing the problem effectively.

According to Fahlén (2016), only 6% of children in the Netherlands under the age of three are enrolled in childcare for over 30 hours per week. Additionally, the cost of childcare for two-year-olds, measured as a percentage of the average wage, stands at 55.8%, which is high compared to other European countries. It is worth noting that the Netherlands offers limited paid paternity leave and predominantly provides intermediate to expensive childcare options, alongside unpaid or short Full-Time Equivalents (also called FTEs) for paid parental leave. This is due to the Dutch childcare system operating under the *Partnership Model*, wherein the state plays a central role in funding services without directly providing them. Instead, it relies on collaboration with employers, the community, and families to finance and deliver childcare services. Under the partnership model, the state assumes that parents, especially mothers, can provide care for their children, prioritizing support for this care rather than encouraging women's full-time employment after parenthood (Fahlén, 2016). As a result, a significant concern arises: the Netherlands lacks a childcare system that enables both parents to work full-time while ensuring adequate care for their child.

Research examining the Dutch policies concerning part-time labor usually emphasizes wage moderation through tax reductions, encouraging higher labor market participation, and facilitating working time reduction by allowing greater differentiation among workers or firms, along with increased decentralization in decision-making (Visser et al., 2004). Unfortunately, such policies overlook the fact that one of the main reasons women choose part-time employment is the lack of accessible childcare (Booth & van Ours, 2012). In contrast to the Netherlands, Norway has more accessible childcare services, which has been shown to reduce the rate of part-time employment (Kitterod et al., 2013). In contrast to the

Partnership Model in the Netherlands, Norway adopts the *Universal Model of Childcare*, wherein the state plays a central role in provision. Under this framework, universal coverage of childcare is a national policy, with municipalities typically responsible for service provision (Fahlén, 2016).

Taking all this information into consideration, two key aspects emerge. Firstly, the Netherlands' childcare model is economically dependent on contributions from families, communities, and employers for funding, which ultimately reinforces traditional family norms. Secondly, as highlighted by Visser and colleagues (2004) the Netherlands actively promotes and embraces part-time employment through its policies. The normalization of part-time work is facilitated through the process of negotiated flexibility in working time arrangements, which gained momentum with the *New Course* central agreement of 1993. The *New Course* model, through its decentralization of decision-making and introduction of greater differentiation among workers or firms, implemented wage moderation, tax reduction, increased labor market participation, and reduced working time. However, it is important to note that despite these policy changes, the lack of childcare facilities and the underlying system still play a significant role. The demand for childcare has been steadily increasing and is expected to continue rising (Visser et al., 2004). To address the main problem and give suitable recommendations, it is crucial to understand the factors leading to women opting for part-time positions after childcare.

Part-time employment is common in the Netherlands partly because it is more practical than full-time employment when childcare services are not available. Since traditional perceptions of housewifery have shifted, working part-time has also become a more socially acceptable option than withdrawing from the labor market (Visser et al., 2004). However, the policy measures implemented to achieve a more balanced workforce have not been effective, resulting in women still being predominantly responsible for caregiving at home. Furthermore, concerning our main problem, these policies did not encourage companies to support women once their childcare responsibilities ended.

### Explanation of Recommendation

To address the challenges highlighted above, our long-term recommendation for SharePower is to conduct workshops for expecting and future parents, providing a comprehensive understanding of the Dutch childcare system. The workshops should cover policies, requirements, and the functioning of salary and refunding processes within the system. It is important to shed light on how the system works as the complexities of the Dutch childcare

system are often perceived as confusing and therefore intimidating (Maarse, 2021). By providing concrete guidance on navigating the system and optimizing its benefits, SharePower can facilitate a more equitable distribution of childcare responsibilities and work-life balance. Moreover, these workshops can empower parents to negotiate contracts that allow them to fulfill both their childcare duties and professional obligations. For instance, outlining the Labour Time Act of 1996, which obliges employers to allow employees to be able to manage care and work (Kremer, 2007). Another important point is the ‘Stimulative Measures on Childcare of 1996, which outlines that the state should contribute only when both employer and employee pay for childcare (Kremer, 2007). This means that employers should buy *Bedrijf Plaatsen* (company places), for their employees to have a place in childcare institutions (Kremer, 2007).

Additionally, such meetings can foster the development of community-based childcare solutions, promoting a supportive network for families. The workshop should also address the division of unpaid labor within couples, as studies indicate that this would enable greater female participation in the paid workforce (Smith & Johnson, 2020). This includes not only childcare responsibilities but also other aspects of unpaid housework. The workshops can also function as a way to bring together a community of expecting parents in similar circumstances, which can pave the way for community-based childcare solutions. This can be encouraged by establishing local babysitting networks, cooperative childcare groups, or supporting neighborhood initiatives.

### SAFE Evaluation of Education of Childcare System for Future Parents

#### **Social Acceptability**

Given that many families face this common challenge, the opportunity to gather in a group and collectively find a solution is likely to be well-received. However, one potential concern is that this initiative could perpetuate the existing issue of women's participation overshadowing men's, thereby reinforcing gender roles. To decrease the likelihood of imbalances, the marketing strategy should either be targeted to couples or appeal particularly to men to encourage their participation.

#### **Feasibility**

Given SharePower's commitment to addressing gender inequalities and their expertise in disseminating knowledge within society, the feasibility of this recommendation is high. Conducting workshops aligns with their organizational objectives and they possess the

necessary resources and knowledge to successfully execute such initiatives. This recommendation is thus politically, administratively, and technologically feasible.

### Effectiveness

The effectiveness of this recommendation can only be assessed over the long term. This represents a potential weakness, as it relies on time to determine if the workshop can effectively reduce women's reliance on part-time work, encourage them to pursue their professional ambitions and contribute to men taking more childcare and household responsibilities. It is crucial to emphasize that the workshop aims to empower women to recognize and seize opportunities beyond part-time employment, enabling them to pursue their full career potential.

Criteria	Rate
Social Acceptability	+
Feasibility	+
Effectiveness	+ –

Table 3: Evaluation of education on the Dutch childcare system for future parents.

### App for Online Peer Support

This section explores some social and psychological factors that contribute to the motherhood penalty, such as mothers' mental health, gender roles, and the unequal distribution of unpaid work, all of which shape mothers' career trajectories. By examining these factors and their implications, we can gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by mothers in transitioning back to full-time employment.

As previously mentioned in this report, the Social Role Theory shows that the motherhood penalty is reinforced by societal norms and expectations that assign women the primary caregiver role, creating pressure for them to prioritize the well-being of their families and children (Burgess, 2013). Despite having older children who require less hands-on care, mothers may still face pressure to conform to these gender roles, leading them to opt for part-time employment to balance societal expectations and career aspirations (Grimshaw & Rubery, 2018). Additionally, the unequal distribution of unpaid care work, predominantly performed by women, significantly impacts mothers' employment choices and opportunities

(Alonso et al., 2019). An OECD research report titled “Unpaid care work: The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labor outcomes” highlights how the domestic demands of unpaid care work limit women's availability for full-time paid employment (Ferrant et al., 2014). The impact of unpaid hours extends beyond caregiving responsibilities and includes the broader spectrum of household chores and domestic tasks. Indeed, even when their children are older and require less direct care, these mothers may still be involved in various caregiving responsibilities, such as managing household tasks or providing emotional support to their partner and children (Ferrant et al., 2014). The burden of unpaid care work affects their ability to commit to full-time employment and can result in reduced working hours or switching to part-time jobs (Alonso et al., 2019). It can therefore be hypothesized that this unequal distribution of unpaid care work creates a barrier for mothers to fully engage in their careers and transition back to full-time work (Samtleben & Müller, 2022).

Several factors contribute to mothers' preference for part-time work even after their youngest child turns 12, particularly in terms of mental health. One significant factor is the burden of a heavy workload. Even though women tend to work fewer hours when they get pregnant (van der Klaauw et al., 2009), it does not correlate to the unpaid hours they work as they take on many responsibilities in different settings such as in households, work-places and communities (Gjerdingen et al., 2001, p.3). According to Gjerdingen and colleagues (2001), women do more than double the amount of unpaid work that men do (2001, p.5). Thus, although most women have around 20-35 paid hours a week, they still suffer from a heavy workload (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2023).

Another factor contributing to mothers working part-time is the feeling of guilt, which is influenced by traditional family structures, gender roles, and societal expectations placed upon them (Gjerdingen et al., 2001, p.11). Additionally, the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) has conducted surveys that show that housekeeping, having time for themselves, friends, partners, and hobbies all influence mothers' decision to continue working part-time (van der Klaauw et al., 2009). Unpaid work can have significant consequences on women's well-being, leading to physical and emotional suffering, feelings of sadness, and increased anxiety. The cognitive and emotional commitment required, coupled with a lack of respite for leisure, communication with partners or friends, and self-care, can contribute to these negative effects (Seedat & Rondon, 2021). Moreover, according to Seedat and Rondon, women may experience higher stress, burden and role strain levels than men, especially when being subject to external stress. This suggests that women's subjective experience of stress is

influenced by their actual stressors and their interpretation and perception of those stressors concerning their roles and societal expectations.

Another important aspect to consider is socialization, as parents play a crucial role in shaping individuals' development, beliefs, values, and norms that influence their children's attitudes and behaviors (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). This primary socialization process has a significant impact on how individuals perceive work and gender roles. For instance, research on Dutch mothers demonstrates a strong correlation between their attitudes towards gender roles and work, and the division of labor they experienced within their own families during childhood (Ruitenber, 2014). Those with more traditional views often recall their mothers assuming primary responsibility for household tasks and engaging in part-time employment to support their fathers' careers.

In addition to parental influence, secondary socialization, which occurs beyond the family unit, also plays a role in shaping individuals' attitudes (Ruitenber, 2014). Peers, friends, acquaintances, and the community they reside in contribute to this process. Studies indicate that mothers' work and gender attitudes are influenced by their social environment (Cavapozzi et al., 2021; Maurin & Moschion, 2009; Mota et al. 2016). In social contexts where women hold more progressive views on gender equality, mothers are more likely to contribute a larger share of total market hours worked by themselves and their partners. Conversely, in more traditional social contexts, societal expectations can discourage women's workforce participation.

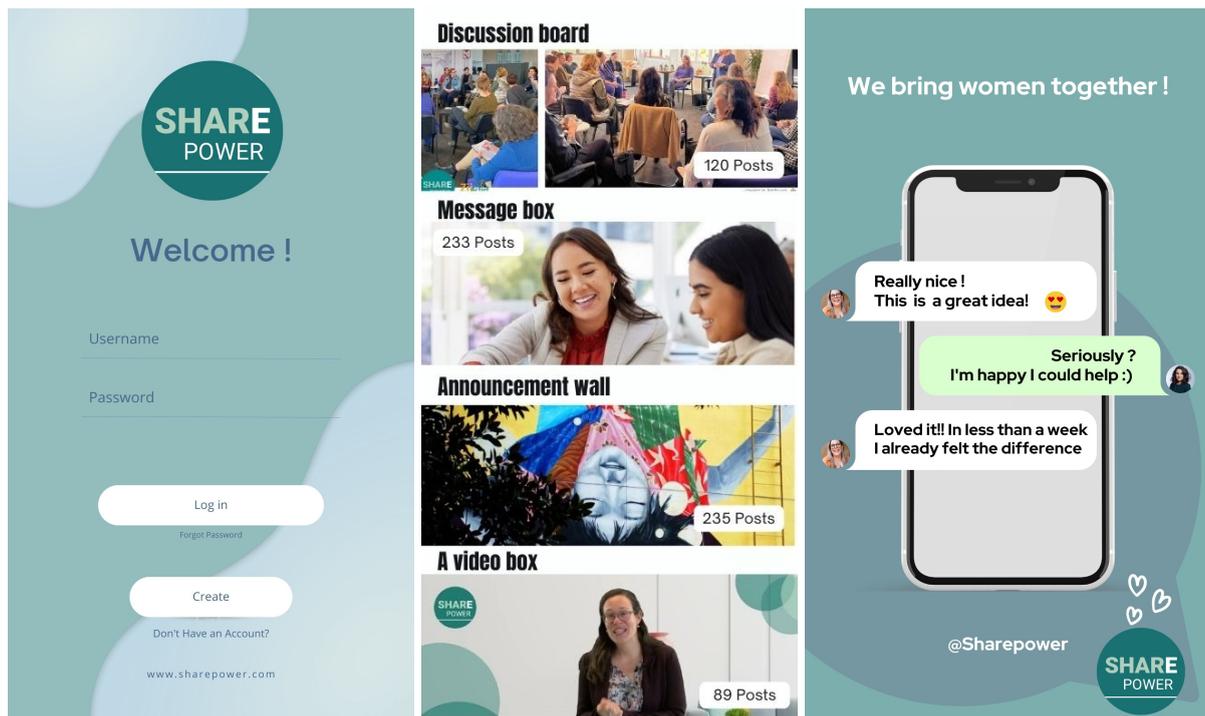
#### Explanation of Recommendation

Based on the information provided above, we recommend implementing a SharePower app, focusing on an online peer support network specifically designed for mothers. The app serves as an overarching recommendation, as it effectively integrates the other proposed recommendations, while at the same time enhancing open and non-judgemental discussions between various stakeholders. It will have four main functions:

1. A discussion board where mothers can exchange and share questions, opinions, and comments in response to each other's posts.
2. A private message system that allows mothers to text or call each other.
3. An announcement wall where various workshops and important events offered by SharePower are advertised.

4. A video section where SharePower makes their YouTube videos available and can insert new ones.

Figures 3, 4, and 5 below illustrate what the app could look like. Figure 3 is an example of a potential Login page where users can type their username and password to gain access to the app. Figure 4 illustrates the app's functions, as listed above. If the user was to, for instance, click on the message box shown in Figure 4, they would be taken to the page shown in Figure 5. In this picture, a hypothetical conversation between female users is shown.



Figures 3, 4 and 5: Prototype of the app.

The concept underlying the SharePower app combines various practices already implemented by the organization into a single, accessible network that operates continuously. In contrast to Zoom meetings or the establishment of an online forum, the app provides a space to interact with others while at the same time staying up to date with workshops, events, and videos offered by SharePower. Below you may find an explanation of how the app would function.

The discussion board will function similarly to other social media platforms, such as Twitter or Facebook, in the sense that mothers (and other users) can post questions, opinions, and work-related challenges. Other mothers can respond to these directly in a comment section, either giving advice or expressing support. If some women feel more comfortable talking to each other privately, they can do so using the message box. Bringing mothers closer

to one another, such interactions can help them to feel supported and understood. The announcement wall provides information about SharePower's upcoming events and workshops. Users have the option to enable push notifications, ensuring that they stay updated on important dates and receive reminders to sign up for workshops or events. Furthermore, women can be inspired by the weekly role model poster which can also be found on the announcement wall. These posts encompass the stories, tips, and experiences of fellow mothers, inspiring other women on how to achieve a healthy work-life balance. Lastly, the app has a video section in which SharePower's informative and educational videos are uploaded. This makes the videos more accessible, as women can immediately find them all in one space. Additionally, they can activate push notifications to be informed about new content.

### SAFE Evaluation of App for Online Peer Support

#### **Social Acceptability**

We believe this recommendation's social acceptability is high for several reasons. Firstly, a digital space accommodates the busy schedules of mothers, providing flexibility in terms of when and how they engage with the support network. Naturally, in-person workshops and events will retain relevance as they offer the value of personal interaction. However, the app allows mothers to gain access to the information, help and support they require at their own preferred time and convenience. Secondly, the app is designed to be inclusive and accessible to all, regardless of socioeconomic status or language. It provides free content without prerequisites and allows users to indicate language preferences and update their information as needed. This brings us to the final point: the app's ability to provide personalized information for each account. By entering personal details, such as their family situation, educational degree, or current job status, mothers will receive support tailored to their needs. This ensures that SharePower delivers targeted assistance to address individual circumstances.

#### **Feasibility**

The creation of an app is technically and administratively feasible, in addition to being cost-efficient. We recommend engaging students specializing in IT or Applied Computer Sciences at Maastricht University to develop the app as part of an extended project. This way, SharePower can minimize costs and ensure the development of a high-quality product that aligns with its objectives. The students would receive templates and content guidelines from both us and SharePower. Furthermore, their focus would be directed towards designing the

app in a simple and comprehensive manner for mothers to use. Similarly, SharePower members will also be able to create and add more content without further difficulties. SharePower's only responsibility would be to promote the app to acquire the initial user base required to sustain its operation. This can be done through their social media platforms, such as Instagram, or during their in-person workshops.

### **Effectiveness**

Research has highlighted the impact of peer support networks in countering the negative effects of the isolation and pressure of motherhood (Drentea & Moren-Cross, 2005). Indeed, studies by McLeish & Redshaw (2017) have demonstrated that mothers who engage in peer support networks experience enhanced emotional well-being and resilience, enabling them to navigate the hurdles associated with the motherhood penalty. These networks provide a safe and understanding space where mothers can share their experiences, challenges, and triumphs with like-minded individuals who can offer empathy, advice, and encouragement (McLeish & Redshaw, 2017). By connecting with peers who have faced similar obstacles, mothers gain a sense of validation and reassurance, reducing feelings of isolation and self-doubt.

In addition to addressing mental health concerns, online peer support networks also facilitate socialization for mothers. Being a mother with older children can sometimes lead to feelings of social isolation as the demands of parenting can limit opportunities for social interactions. These networks provide a platform for mothers to connect, build friendships, and engage in meaningful conversations. By fostering social connections, these networks help combat feelings of loneliness and provide a sense of belonging to a supportive community. Furthermore, different women with different backgrounds and beliefs can come together and share their experiences (Drentea & Moren-Cross, 2005b). By fostering a diverse and inclusive social environment, the potential amplifying effect of a single dominant attitude can be mitigated. Instead, it would create a space where mothers can interact with individuals who have made similar or contrasting decisions regarding their employment choices. Additionally, providing opportunities for open conversation and sharing of experiences can further contribute to breaking down stereotypes and reducing societal pressures, ultimately empowering mothers to choose the path that aligns with their aspirations and goals.

The proposed recommendation can empower mothers in multiple ways. Firstly, it creates a collective platform where they can unite to raise awareness about their challenges. This collective action creates opportunities for advocating policy changes that promote gender equality and work-life balance while fostering collaboration on initiatives that support career

development. By joining forces, women can unite in their voices and demand change that challenges the systemic biases that perpetuate the motherhood penalty. Their efforts to increase awareness about their unique challenges contribute to a broader societal dialogue surrounding the necessity for a more equitable distribution of unpaid work. Ultimately, this empowerment enables mothers to confront and overcome systemic barriers that hinder their progress (Drentea & Moren-Cross, 2005).

In conclusion, by implementing an app with an online peer support network, SharePower would actively work to counter the effects of the motherhood penalty on women in Limburg. This network provides a valuable resource for mothers with older children, offering emotional support, practical guidance, and a sense of belonging. By connecting mothers and amplifying their collective voices, SharePower would foster an inclusive environment where mothers can challenge societal norms and overcome the barriers imposed by the motherhood penalty.

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Rate</b>
Social Acceptability	(+)
Feasibility	(+/-)
Effectiveness	(+)

Table 4: Evaluation of app for online peer support.

## Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Despite the robust findings presented in this report, the interpretation of these results is subject to certain limitations, one of which being that there is a lack of data specific to Limburg, the Netherlands. Comparable data from other countries, such as the US, was therefore used in this study. While the information remains relevant and provides valuable insights into the problem, the lack of comprehensive data from the Netherlands hinders a thorough understanding and analysis of the local context. The absence of comprehensive data introduces bias by misrepresenting the unique circumstances of Limburg and negatively affects the attainment of comprehensive insights, accurate conclusions, and targeted actions.

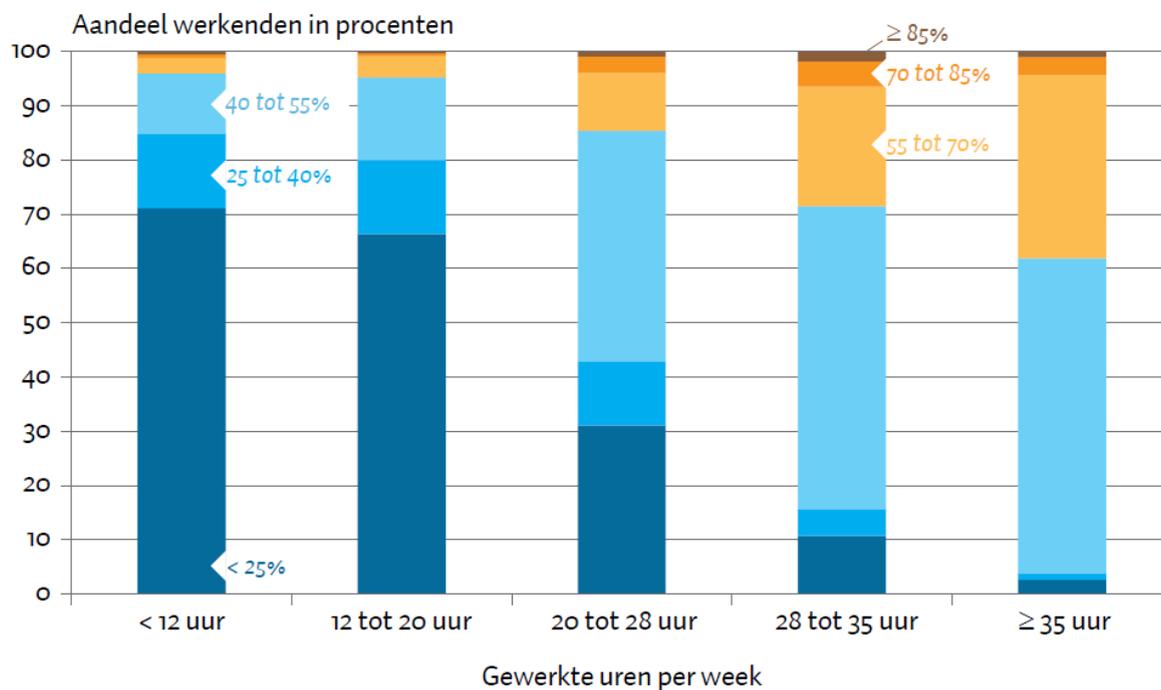
To overcome the limitation of specific data in Limburg and achieve a more comprehensive understanding, SharePower should conduct interviews with part-time working mothers whose youngest child is older than 12 years, as well as individuals working in the Human Resources (HR) department. This would ensure SharePower is able to fill in the data gap, gain a conceptual understanding and explore diverse viewpoints in a structured way. They can target specific areas or topics where the data is lacking, can ask specific questions to gather the information they are interested in or look into the stakeholders about whom they would like to know more. This would allow them to gain a deeper understanding and thereby allows for a more comprehensive analysis. To strive for impartiality, the interviewer should choose interviewees at random and ask all questions neutrally, and avoid any leading questions.

Suggestions for interview questions can be found in appendix C.

The scope of the project led to a second limitation of this report, which is the primary focus of research being employer bias, policy-making, and the psychology of mothers. As a result, several other areas that could benefit from an in-depth investigation were excluded. For example, there is a need for extensive research on how misconceptions regarding marginal tax rates affect individuals' choices between part-time and full-time employment. After conducting a brief analysis, our team discovered that the theoretical framework of the Laffer curve offers insights into the correlation between tax rates and labor supply. This framework illustrates how excessively high marginal tax rates can potentially diminish individuals' participation in the labor force (degl'Innocenti et al., 2022). In the Netherlands, most people assume that the marginal tax rate is significantly high (Financieele Dagblad, 2022). Looking at the Laffer curve, the rate being high should lead to people either keeping or decreasing their working hours. To tackle the issue of wanting more people to work, the Dutch government announced that it intends to help to increase the number of hours worked by lowering the marginal tax rate (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2023). Jongen and Schulenberg's research (2023) examined the relationship between the marginal tax rate and the number of hours that people work in the Netherlands. They concluded that working additional hours in the Netherlands generally carries a lower marginal tax rate for part-time workers compared to full-timers (see Figure 6). The data indicates that 30% of those who previously worked between 20 and 28 hours had a marginal tax rate of 25%, compared to 70% of those who had worked less than 12 hours. This finding supports the claim that it is financially advantageous for part-time workers in the former category to work more.

## Marginale druk van een dagdeel meer werk per week

FIGUUR 1



Noot: Deze figuur is berekend op basis van de volledige populatie werknemers.

Figure 6: Marginal tax rate in the Netherlands (Financieele Dagblad, 2022).

Despite studies such as Jongen and Schulenberg's (2023) which indicate that part-time workers experience financial advantages by working additional hours, many people choose to remain in part-time employment due to the common perception of the marginal tax rate being excessively high (Gielen & Beens, 2023). To counteract that tendency, SharePower could raise awareness about the actual marginal tax rates, which would lead to people making more informed decisions about their working hours (Goderis & Vlekke, 2023; Rosenblum, 2023). SharePower can investigate the applicability of the high tax rate misconception to Limburg and its relevance for working mothers. They can help improve mothers' understanding of the marginal tax rate through informative materials like posters or flyers. Future research by SharePower can explore multiple aspects, including examining assumptions of high marginal tax rates in the Netherlands and identifying effective strategies to enhance public awareness on the topic.

Future research can also explore ways to promote structural changes in employers and among men, alongside investigating family-friendly initiatives and policies. These initiatives may include flexible work arrangements, parental leave, childcare support, and the provision

of lactation rooms (Ali, 2022). SharePower can emphasize to employers the benefits of supporting employees' family needs, leading to a healthier and more productive workforce (Scribner et al., 2020; Kantan, 2014). These initiatives improve career prospects, enabling workers to transition to higher-prestige occupations with greater earning potential (Golden, 2001). Such policies help mitigate negative outcomes like limited career opportunities or reduced commitment (Skinner & Chapman, 2013).

One important aspect to consider is the encouragement of men to work part-time. SharePower should actively promote and encourage men to embrace part-time work options, allowing them to actively participate in family responsibilities. This can for instance be done through educating them on the matter during the workshops for expecting parents. By challenging traditional gender norms and fostering a more equal distribution of work and caregiving duties, it contributes to a more inclusive and flexible work culture. This approach aligns with the principles of workplace flexibility, encompassing factors such as flexible work arrangements, time off options, career exit, maintenance, and reentry pathways (Crowley, 2010). Allowing employees to have control over their work schedules, breaks, and compensation enables them to effectively manage personal obligations while remaining in full-time employment (International Labour Organization, 2023).

When considering the feasibility of flexible work arrangements, it is important to recognize that men and women have different prerequisites for balancing professional and personal obligations (Acker, 2006). Both men and women contribute to and perpetuate gender norms in the organization of work and personal life (Connell, 2012). Therefore, it is essential to emphasize the inclusion of men when discussing workplace flexibility. If women are the only ones perceived as requiring flexible schedules, little will change for them in the long run, as they will still be seen as problematic, while men are not (Hagqvist et al., 2023). Moreover, schedule flexibility can have different implications for men and women. Women often seek flexibility to better integrate work and personal life, whereas men may use it to increase their work engagement (Hofäcker & König, 2013). Without the option for flexibility, gender cultural norms can be reinforced (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020). However, fathers would benefit from flexible work arrangements that enable their involvement in parenting activities (Hagqvist et al., 2023). Thus, it is crucial to promote men's active participation in household responsibilities to ensure they are also eligible for flexible schedule options.

## Conclusion

This report has set out to provide practical and efficient suggestions for SharePower to take action to solve the problem of mothers in Limburg delaying their return to full-time employment after their child is above the age of 12. The research was guided by the question of what factors drive part-time employment and hinder the return to full-time paid work for mothers without caring responsibilities. Using data gathered through a literature review, we found that the factors hindering the return of full-time paid work for mothers without caring responsibilities are the undervaluation of women's participation in the labor market, which is closely connected to traditional gender roles associating women with household work. Our findings also show that other important factors are lack or depreciation of human capital, employer discrimination, lack of knowledge about the functioning of the childcare system, and isolation caused by motherhood.

Based on these findings, the report has presented four recommendations for SharePower to help solve the problem at hand. The first recommendation is for SharePower to host action-oriented unconscious bias training designed for employers. The aim of this intervention is to address the issues highlighted by the theory of employer discrimination, with a particular focus on reducing workplace discrimination against mothers by tackling prevalent stereotypes. These workshops will equip employers with information and practical strategies to effectively mitigate biases that influence their decision-making processes and workplace environments. By hosting this action-oriented unconscious bias training, SharePower will contribute to a more inclusive and fair workplace culture. Employers will be empowered with the knowledge and skills necessary to recognize and mitigate biases, leading to a reduction in the motherhood penalty.

Our second recommendation is for SharePower to host skill-building workshops for mothers, teaching both transferable and business-specific skills. These workshops will cover specialized knowledge for various industries, as well as transferable in-demand skills such as analytical, linguistic, and digital design. The aim is to increase participants' human capital which in turn will create new career opportunities for the participants. To maximize effectiveness, SharePower should collaborate with experts from businesses and educational institutions to ensure workshop content meets current labor market demands. This collaboration will also provide networking and potential employment opportunities for mothers. By offering diverse workshops, collaborating with stakeholders, and teaching

in-demand skills, SharePower can enhance employability and empower mothers for economic and social progress.

The third recommendation is for SharePower to host workshops to educate expecting mothers and fathers about the structure of the Dutch childcare system. These workshops will offer participants valuable information regarding the policies governing childcare, and the relationship between salary and refunding, among other things. This knowledge will empower attendees to navigate the childcare system effectively and improve their access to childcare services. This intervention directly addresses the issue raised by the social role theory, which relates to the breaking of traditional gender roles in parental care. By equipping expecting parents with knowledge and understanding of the childcare system, SharePower enables them to make informed decisions and actively participate in childcare responsibilities, promoting a more balanced and equitable distribution of parental care.

Our final recommendation for SharePower is to launch an app where mothers can easily connect and exchange advice on issues regarding participation in the workforce and parenting. The app would serve as a platform for mothers to engage with each other, fostering a sense of community and shared experiences. Moreover, it would introduce users to individuals who serve as role models, showcasing the possibility of achieving a harmonious balance between motherhood and a thriving career. By countering the negative effects of isolation and the pressures associated with motherhood, this app would contribute to the overall well-being and empowerment of mothers. The app can also be used by SharePower to market their workshops, including the skill-building training for mothers and the workshops about the childcare system.

In addition to these four recommendations, this report proposes three suggestions for future research. The first one is for SharePower to conduct interviews with HR professionals, as well as mothers with children above the age of 12. The second suggestion is for SharePower to explore the influence of the marginal tax rate and dive deeper into related areas. Finally, SharePower should promote family-friendly policies among employers and men, such as flexible work hours.

The findings presented in this report are of importance because they uncover the factors driving part-time employment and hindering the return to full-time paid work for mothers without caring responsibilities. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for addressing the motherhood penalty and promoting gender equality in the workforce. By implementing the recommendations provided in this report, SharePower can work towards ensuring equal opportunities for career advancement, reducing the gender pay gap as well as



the motherhood penalty, and ultimately creating a more inclusive and equitable work environment for working mothers.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A. Guidelines for Action-Oriented Unconscious Bias Training

### **Before the Workshop**

1. Conduct surveys, interviews or focus groups to engage the participants in the design phase of the intervention.
  - a. Identify their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors connected to implicit bias. What are their motivations for reducing bias? What do they hope to achieve? What are the potential obstacles that are part of the journey?
2. Get in contact with a senior leader or manager that can co-design the workshop.

### **Structure of the Workshop**

#### **1. Introduction**

- a. Welcome!
- b. Today we are going to take a new step in our personal growth journeys by learning about implicit biases, how they manifest themselves, and what we can do to mitigate them.
- c. Important to recognize that to be biased is to be human, but that we have the power to change our way of thinking and that we can and should take proactive steps to challenge our views of other people (Emerson, 2017; Atewologun, 2018).
- d. This is an invitation to challenge ourselves and explore our own biases, and an opportunity to reflect and actively work on disrupting our biases.
- e. This may feel uncomfortable. That is okay because it is part of the journey.
- f. Agenda and plan for the workshop.

#### **2. What is unconscious/implicit bias?**

- a. Implicit biases are subtle and unconscious perspectives, opinions, and stereotype associations regarding other people. They are triggered automatically and often function without our conscious knowledge,

influencing our actions and choices in everyday life. Our unconscious biases are shaped by factors such as our upbringing, cultural environment, context, and personal experiences (Kramer et al., 2021; Atewologun et al., 2018).

### **3. Why does it matter?**

- a. It leads to mothers being perceived as less competent and managers recommending them a lower salary than non-mothers with identical credentials (Correll et al., 2007)

### **4. ‘But this doesn’t concern me. Why should I care?’**

- a. Unconscious bias training should matter to you because it addresses the inherent tendencies of the human brain to take cognitive shortcuts, leading to biases. While some of these shortcuts are helpful, others create blind spots that we may not have intended. Our brains prioritize efficiency, but this efficiency also carries certain risks (Banaji, 2018). By engaging in unconscious bias training, you can mitigate these risks and foster a more inclusive and fair environment.
- b. Reasons to reduce personal biases (Loyola Marymount University, n.d.)
  - i. Reduce prejudices against people or groups you didn’t even know you had
  - ii. Implicit biases often diverge or differentiate from what one states, thinks, or feels they believe
  - iii. biases almost always work to the detriment of the lower-status group
  - iv. Implicit biases are powerful determinants of behavior
  - v. Reduce discrimination due to implicit biases
  - vi. Implicit biases are malleable and behaviors can be changed

### **5. Games, exercises, and discussions**

- a. The Father-Son Activity (highlights differences between individual participants’ biases) (Pendry et al., 2007).
  - i. In this activity, participants are asked to solve the following problem:  
“A father and son were involved in a car accident in which the father

was killed and the son was seriously injured. The father was pronounced dead at the scene of the accident and his body was taken to a local morgue. The son was taken by ambulance to a nearby hospital and was immediately wheeled into an emergency operating room. A surgeon was called. Upon arrival and seeing the patient, the attending surgeon exclaimed “Oh my God, it’s my son!’ Can you explain this?”

- ii. Approximately 40% of participants encountering this challenge fail to consider the most logical solution, which is that the surgeon is the boy's mother. Instead, they create intricate narratives such as the boy being adopted and the surgeon being his biological father, or the father in the car being a priest. This highlights the strong influence of automatic and stereotypical associations, as these individuals' problem-solving abilities and accurate judgments are hindered by the overpowering connection between surgeons and men.
  - iii. This exercise could be used as a transition into a discussion on the automatic nature of stereotypes and the differentiation between explicit and implicit biases. From there, the conversation can delve into exploring methods for managing or overcoming automatic biases. Furthermore, since some participants will correctly solve the problem using the most plausible explanation, this exercise emphasizes the variations in stereotyping among individuals and initiates a discussion on the factors influencing why stereotypes differ from person to person.
- b. The Tag Game (focuses on group dynamics and diversity experience in the workplace) (Fowler, 2006).
- i. During this activity, individuals stick badges with diverse shapes, colors, and sizes somewhere between their waist and neck. They are then directed to create groups without using verbal communication and without specific guidelines on how to form the groups. Afterwards, the participants are instructed to disband and reassemble into new groups. This process is repeated at least four times. Generally, participants tend to form groups based on similarities in shapes, colors, or sizes. It is infrequent for them to consider factors beyond the badges, and even rarer for them to purposely create diverse groups that encompass a wide range of shapes, colors, and sizes.

- ii. This activity, which encourages cooperation rather than conflict, can serve as a transition into a discussion on social categorization processes, the subconscious tendency to distinguish between "us" and "them," and the inclination towards in-group bias, also referred to as affinity bias. Additionally, it serves as an effective tool to introduce the idea of diversity and the potential advantages of having diverse workgroups.
- iii. Following the activity, group discussions can dive into the experiences of diversity (or the absence thereof) in the workplace and encourage participants to propose methods for enhancing the acknowledgment, support, and appreciation of diverse perspectives and experiences.

## **6. Gender – Career Implicit Association Test** (see Project Implicit, 2011 for access)

- a. What is it? (Kramer et al., 2021)
  - i. The Gender-Career Implicit Association Test (IAT) is a psychological tool that quantifies the direction and strength of implicit biases. This test in particular aims to measure the participants' implicit gender-career bias, which refers to unconscious stereotype associations linking gender and career ambition. Participants are asked to categorize stimuli (e.g., words or images) related to gender and careers, measuring response speed and accuracy. The test reveals if participants have stronger associations between, for example, males and careers or females and family.
- b. How does it work?
  - i. You will be asked to categorize words into groups as fast as you can. You will also be asked some questions regarding your beliefs, attitudes, and opinions, as well as standard demographic questions. The completion of this study is expected to take approximately 10 minutes. You will receive your IAT result along with an explanation of its significance after the workshop.
    1. Note: the reason why you should postpone revealing their test scores until the end is because it can lower potential defensiveness (Stone et al., 2020).

- c. Let everyone take the test (on desktop computers or touch-screen devices such as iPads and Android tablets).

**7. What do we do now when we know that we are biased? What can you as an individual do? (Forscher et al., 2017)**

**a. Challenge stereotypical beliefs**

- i. Explanation: Challenging stereotypical beliefs involves questioning and examining preconceived notions, biases, and generalizations about particular groups of people. It requires actively seeking to understand and challenge these beliefs to promote more inclusive and fair perspectives.
- ii. Ask participants to generate examples of how they could use the strategy in their own life.
- iii. Suggestions on what this could look like:
  1. When encountering stereotypes, actively challenge them. Speak up against discriminatory comments or actions, both in personal and public settings. Encourage critical thinking and questioning of stereotypes.

**b. Contemplate counter-stereotypical examples**

- i. Explanation: Contemplating counter-stereotypical examples involves actively considering and reflecting upon instances that challenge or defy stereotypes. It requires seeking out and acknowledging examples that contradict prevailing stereotypes, in order to broaden one's understanding and challenge ingrained biases.
- ii. Ask participants to generate examples of how they could use the strategy in their own life.
- iii. Example of what this could look like:
  1. Consume media that portray diverse characters and stories. Expand your media intake to include different cultures, races, genders, and identities, allowing for a broader understanding of humanity.

**c. Seek individualized information about others**

- i. Explanation: Seeking individualized information about others involves going beyond generalizations and stereotypes to gain a deeper understanding of people as unique individuals. This requires actively seeking personalized knowledge and information about someone's background, experiences, interests, and perspectives.
- ii. Ask participants to generate examples of how they could use the strategy in their own life.
- iii. Example of what this could look like:
  1. Instead of making assumptions or relying on superficial small talk, ask open-ended questions that encourage the person to share more about themselves. This can include questions about their background, hobbies, experiences, goals, or opinions. Actively listen to their responses and show genuine interest.

**d. Adopt alternative perspectives**

- i. Explanation: In implicit bias training, it is insufficient to solely present instances of discrimination and prejudice, although it is a beginning step. A more profound understanding and empathy for stereotyped groups can be fostered when learners mentally imagine themselves in the position of others. Perspective-taking serves as an avenue to accomplish this. Perspective-taking can help cultivate an inclusive culture where people engage in respectful dialogue and effective communication with individuals from diverse groups. Actively listen to and genuinely consider the viewpoints of others who hold different perspectives.
- ii. Do a perspective-taking exercise
  1. The instructor creates scenarios where learners assume the identity of a stereotyped individual. This can take the form of role-playing that replicates interpersonal conflicts.
- iii. Ask participants to generate examples of how they could use the strategy in their own life.
- iv. Example of what this could look like:
  1. When someone shares an unfamiliar experience or presents observations that differ from your own, you can encourage dialogue by asking questions and actively listening to their

experiences. If you have a different interpretation of an event, it is beneficial to share your viewpoint as an alternative perspective rather than challenging the other person's perspective.

**e. Interact with individuals in different social groups than you**

- i. Explanation: Positive interactions with members of other groups reduce the probability of applying biases. It is important to participate in activities that involve individuals from diverse backgrounds. Make an effort to engage with members of groups that you do not typically interact with on a regular basis.
- ii. Ask participants to generate examples of how they could use the strategy in their own life.
- iii. Suggestions on what this could look like:
  1. Make an effort to meet and befriend people who are different from you.

**8. Conclusion**

- a. Summary of the main points of the workshop.
- b. Emphasize that the strategies reinforce each other and that the more they are practiced, the more effective they become.
- c. Thank the participants for their time and effort.
- d. Ask for feedback on the session.

**After the Workshop**

1. Share the IAT results with the participants and provide an explanation of what they mean.
2. Contact the company or organization where the workshop was held to collect feedback on the intervention through surveys. Here are some suggestions for questions (Hunter, 2021):
  - a. How did you feel about the training?
  - b. What key takeaways stayed with you?
  - c. Has the workshop impacted your thoughts, feelings, and/or behavior toward others? If so, how?



3. Use this data to identify the intervention's strengths and weaknesses and implement necessary adjustments to enhance learner satisfaction and promote behavior change.

## Appendix B. Guidelines for Skill-Building Workshops

### Before the workshops:

- In order to be effective and keep focus, the skills classes should either be fast-paced, so 6-8 hours once a week for 2 months or slower pace, between 2-3 hours and spread out over a couple of days (Orlova, 2022).
- Before the workshops take place, SharePower should create a form where mothers have to answer the following questions before signing up for the workshop on the app:
  - What is your name, age, how many children do you have and how old are they?
    - \_\_\_\_\_
  - What job are you trying to apply for?
    - \_\_\_\_\_
  - Between these two skills, which one would you want to improve the most/ which would be the most relevant for your everyday life? (Can choose multiple)
    - Analysis: improving the ability to understand and analyze a problem or situation and make decisions, which would assist the company in achieving its goals as well as improving the employee's performance (Birt, 2023).
    - Language skills: The ability to speak more than one language can increase the number of job opportunities (Last, 2022).
      - Which language would you want to learn?
        - \_\_\_\_\_
  - Would you rather have the workshop/skills course fast- or slow-paced?
    - Fast: (6-8 hours long), once a week for 2 months
    - Slow: (2-3 hours long), twice a week for 2 months
  - Would you have time to work on the skills in between the workshops or not?
    - Yes
    - No
- By asking these questions, SharePower can understand the needs of the women taking part in the skills training and make sure the workshop is tailored to their specific demands.

- Based on these demands, SharePower should invite knowledgeable presenters and to minimize costs, those can be volunteers or old clients. Further, by inviting old clients, it can improve the online peer network of these women, in relation to the other recommendations made.
- The last action to take before the workshop would be to organize brief pre-workshop readings and provide handouts of presentations at the beginning of the workshop to enhance learning (McIntyre et al., 2008)

### Workshop 1: Analysis skills

- Welcome!
  - Introduce the different guest speakers
  - Encourage everyone to participate to gain the most knowledge possible
- Following sessions:
  - Mathematical skills
    - Solving equations step-by-step to reach an answer sharpens the participant's mathematical skills and is a great way to redefine their analytical skills (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023).
    - Bring in mathematical specialists/teachers/volunteers who practice various forms of math problems with the participants
  - Debates
    - By working in group settings, participants can discuss ideas and understanding how others process information and interpret issues will allow them to develop their own analytical skills (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023).
    - Make them debate on different topics of their choices
  - After the session
    - Participants should keep a journal where they write every day. Writing and reflecting on your day can improve your analytical skills (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023).
    - Give them brain games to take part in: challenging and getting the brain thinking (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023).
      - Sudoku
      - Crosswords

- Last session:
  - Guest speakers come back, have a discussion with the group
    - What did they learn?
    - Is it going to be useful in their future careers?
    - What would they improve about the workshop?
    - Give them certificates

### Workshop 2: Language skills

Before the workshop:

- Need to establish a prerequisite of A1 for the language they would like to learn
- Welcome!
  - Introduce the different guest speakers
  - Encourage everyone to participate to gain the most knowledge possible
- Following sessions:
  - The best way to learn a language is to practice it as much as possible (Budden, 2022)
    - Bring in volunteers that know the language and can have conversations with the participants about current events
- After the workshop
  - Watching movies or reading books in the foreign language can help improve (Budden, 2022)
    - Provide media in the foreign language the participants are learning to listen/watch on their own time
- Last session:
  - Guest speakers come back, have a discussion with the group
    - What did they learn?
    - Is it going to be useful in their future careers?
    - What would they improve about the workshop
    - Let the participant pass a test that proves their level of the language
    - Give them certificates

### Specific skills-training workshop. Example: Digital Design

Before workshop:

- Through contacts and correspondence, find clients who are willing to send specialists to conduct a workshop on Digital Design
- Once this is found, work closely to figure out how to structure it in terms of:
  - How long it should take
  - If they have time for homework
  - Where it can be conducted
  - How many people can participate
  - The price of the workshop, can it be done for free through volunteering as they will gain employees

During the workshop:

- Welcome!
  - Introduce the company that is going to conduct the workshop
  - Encourage everyone to participate to gain the most knowledge possible
- Session 1:
  - The guest speaker introduces what digital design is, how they use it on a day-to-day basis in their jobs, its relevance, and leaves time for a Q&A
  - Handouts are given out to do more research on it at home
- Following sessions:
  - Specialists can focus on what they need to talk about
    - Establish before the workshop what the structure could look like
- Last session:
  - Give out certificates
  - Ask the company to talk about job opportunities

## Appendix C. Suggested Interview Questions

### Questions for part-time working mothers with the youngest child at least 12 years:

1. How many children do you have? How old are they?
2. In which sector are you working?
  - a. For how long have you been working in this sector?
  - b. Have you ever worked in another sector? For how long?
3. Did you ever have a career break while having children?
4. How do you balance working and home life?
  - a. (What struggles do you experience? Can you elaborate?)
  - b. Did you notice any differences after having children within the working context?
5. Why did you choose to work part-time?
6. Are you satisfied with your working hours (amount of work)? Why/why not?
  - a. Would you want to change it in any way?
7. What is your opinion of part-time work?
8. Can you describe a usual/typical working day from the moment you awake till you go to sleep?
9. How do you perceive companies' attitudes towards mothers in terms of their employment choices?
10. (How would you like to be supported?)

### Questions for HR employees:

1. Do you currently experience a lack of employees?
  - a. How are you handling this situation?
2. Do you have part-time workers?
  - a. If yes, do you notice a gender disparity?
  - b. Is there a big difference between the number of part-time and full-time employees?
3. If a part-time employee would like to work more, how do they go about that? Who do they talk to? Do they need to get hired for another position?
4. Do you feel like there is an improvement that can be made in the transition to working more hours?

5. When trying to make the gap of a lack of employees smaller, are you considering gender in your decision of offering more working hours? Why?
  - a. Are your employees mainly men or women?
6. What do you usually do when an employee is pregnant?