



Determinants of Part-Time Employment in Rural Areas and Small Towns in Ontario, Canada

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Abstract: This paper investigates the socio-demographic factors that determine stability in part-time employment, distinguishing between full-year part-time and part-year part-time work across varying geographic contexts in the province of Ontario. Logistic and logit regression models have been employed to analyze the microdata obtained from the Canadian Income Survey, 2020, for Rural Ontario, towns with population under 30,000, towns with population between 30,000 and 99,999 residents, as well as the overall province. The key explanatory variables include age, sex, educational attainment, and immigration status. The results indicate sharp disparities in the likelihood of sustaining part-time work throughout the year. Gender emerges as a strong predictor, with women significantly more likely to be engaged in full-year part-time employment. Age as a determinant suggests that mid -and late-career adults are less likely to sustain part-time work throughout the year than younger workers, which reflects transitions to full-time work in one's prime years and a partial withdrawal from the work force at older ages. Education has a non-significant role in smaller communities. However, in larger communities, it is associated with lower odds of full-year part-time work. Immigration status has minimal influence in most settings, which highlights limited differentiation between immigrants and non-immigrants in part-time work stability. The study contributes to understanding the labour market segmentation in the province of Ontario, and the results point toward the need for policies that address gendered employment patterns and support workers in different stages of their lives, especially in rural and small towns.

Keywords: Part-time employment, labour market segmentation, gender disparities, rural labour markets, small towns, Ontario, logistic regression, employment stability, Canadian Income Survey

INTRODUCTION

Part-time employment has become a strong defining feature of the contemporary labour markets, which reflects a shift in demographic dynamics and individual work preferences, among other things. In Canada, in January 2026, 3.9 million persons worked part-time; Among all part-time workers, 2.4 million were women and 1.5 million were men. Part-time work was earlier associated with temporary or supplementary income, but now it encompasses a wide range of occupational roles, ranging from low-wage service jobs to professional corporate jobs that offer flexible schedules. In Canada, particularly in Ontario, regional labour markets vary substantially. Rural communities and smaller towns face distinct economic constraints compared to urban centers. By disintegrating part-time employment into full-year part-time and part-year part-time categories, this paper aims to

highlight the socio-demographic factors that shape the stability and nature of part-time work in different geographic contexts. Moreover, part-time employment outcomes are influenced by a combination of personal characteristics and local labour market conditions. Factors such as age, gender, educational attainment, and immigration status can interact with geography to produce different outcomes.

This paper aims to answer the following questions:

1. Which socio-demographic factors influence the likelihood of sustaining part-time work throughout the year, in comparison to part-year employment in Ontario?
2. To what extent do these factors vary across different geographic contexts- rural communities, small towns, and larger urban areas?
3. How do age, gender, educational attainment, and immigration status interact with the labour market to influence the probability of being employed in part-time work throughout the year?
4. Are there consistent patterns across geographies, or do certain factors matter more in specific community sizes?

By answering these questions, this paper seeks to deepen the understanding of how personal and regional characteristics intersect to shape part-time employment stability. It also reflects where policy interventions might be targeted to support opportunity in rural and small-town labour markets.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Sex remains to be one of the most consistent predictors of part-time employment patterns in Canada. Despite major shifts in labour force participation in the last few decades, women continue to be more likely to engage in part-time work than men. Statistics Canada reports that as of 2023, 15.6% worked part-time compared to only 5.9% of men. The long-standing disparity reflects both structural and cultural expectations, women continue to assume greater caregiving responsibilities and face organisational norms that often assume their primary role lies in family work than paid work.

Moreover, women aged 25 to 44 are four times more likely than men to cite childcare or familial responsibilities as the main reason for working part-time, 38.5% vs 9.4% (Battams and Mathieu, 2024). In the meantime, men tend to report involuntary reasons such as not being able to find full-time work. In addition to this, the Labour Force Survey data from February 2025 states that 15.7% of women reported working part-time compares to just 6.1% of men, among core-aged (25-54 years) workers, with nearly one quarter (24.3%) of women in this age group identifying childcare as the central factor (Statistics Canada, 2025).

The trade-off for women engaged in part-time work is significant because part-time schedules are often associated with reduced earnings, fewer benefits, and limited career progression opportunities (Battams and Mathieu, 2024). Furthermore, core-aged women continue to face a gender pay gap: they earned an average of \$36.04 per hour, relative to \$41.02 for men (Statistics Canada, 2025). These financial penalties compound over a lifetime and affect retirement security, access to benefits, and overall economic stability.

Altogether, this evidence highlights that sex is a powerful determinant of part-time employment in Canada. Women's continued overrepresentation in part-time roles, especially those motivated by caregiving needs, explains how labour market structures and social expectations intersect.

Age is another crucial determinant in influencing part-time employment stability in Canada, with distinct patterns across different stages of the life course. Youth, core-aged adults, and older workers engage in part-time work for different reasons, which reflects both personal circumstances and structural labour market conditions. Youth workers (15-24 years) are the most likely to work part-time. Historical trends show that nearly half of young workers are employed part-time: in 2023, 49.4% of youth employees worked part-time, which was a significant increase from 21.1% in 1976 (Battams and Mathieu, 2024). Individuals in this group often combine employment with education or take on entry-level jobs that make part-time work a transitional stage than a long-term arrangement (Statistics Canada, 2025).

By contrast, core-aged adults (25-54 years) are far less likely to work part-time. 15.7% of women and just 6.1% of men in this age group worked part-time (Statistics Canada, 2025). At this stage of life, individuals face family and financial obligations, which lead most individuals to pursue full-time positions. However, the gender divide continues to exist within this group as well, as caregiving responsibilities continue to push many women towards part-time employment.

Among older adults (65 years and above), part-time work has become a common occurrence. In 2023, 41.3% of employed adults aged 65+ worked part-time, which was an increase from 31.4% in 1976 (Battams and Mathieu, 2024). Part-time employment represents a pathway to gradual retirement or a way to supplement pension income, for older workers. Taken together, these patterns underscore that age strongly shapes the nature and meaning of part-time work.

Education also stands out as a key anchor in securing stable, full-year employment in Ontario. Individuals without a certificate, diploma, or degree face significantly weaker labour market outcomes, with a participation rate of only 32.8% and an employment rate of 26.6%. This contrasts sharply with those who hold postsecondary credentials, whose participation rate is much higher at 73.2%, and those holding a bachelor's degree or higher, with a 77.2% participation rate and employment rate of 71.1% (Statistics Canada, 2023). Moreover, unemployment rates decline steadily with education, individuals without formal credentials experience unemployment rates of 19% compared to 7.9% among those with a bachelor's degree and 5.5% among those with a doctorate (Statistics Canada, 2023).

These figures highlight that education strongly enhances labour force outcomes, not only opening access to jobs but also stabilizing participation rates. Furthermore, the stepwise decline in unemployment across education levels implies that credentials act as a buffer against unstable employment. This has relevance for part-time work, as individuals with lower education are more likely to be clustered in unstable part-time roles, while those with university education may enter part-time work by choice.

Between 2001 and 2021, nearly one-third (31%) of all job growth in Canada was in part-time work, with immigrant workers and temporary foreign workers accounting for most of these positions, 54% and 29% respectively. Canadian born workers contributed relatively little to the growth in part-time employment (Picot and Hou, 2024). This finding suggests

that immigrants are disproportionately represented in part-time roles at the national/provincial levels, particularly in lower-skilled occupations, where part-time jobs have expanded even as full-time positions declined. Even though immigrants are helping to drive the growth of professional employment in Canada, they are more likely to remain concentrated in part-time and lower skilled roles jobs than Canadian-born workers (Picot and Hou, 2024).

These regional labour market differences mean that the effects of sex, age, education, and immigration on part-time employment may not be uniform across the province of Ontario. While much of the existing literature has examined these socio-demographic factors in broad national or provincial contexts, this study aims to systematically disaggregate outcomes based on community size. The dynamics of part-time work in rural areas and small towns have still not been explored in depth, even though these regions face unique constraints such as seasonal industries and limited returns to education. By focusing specifically on Rural Ontario, towns under 30,000, and towns between 30,000 and 99,999 residents, this paper contributes to a more in-depth understanding of how demographic characteristics intersect with geography to shape employment stability.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The study uses microdata from the Canadian Income Survey (CIS), 2020, which provides detailed information on the socio-demographic and labour market characteristics of individuals aged 15 years and above. The CIS is a nationally representative survey which is conducted annually by Statistics Canada. It is designed to capture income distribution and labour market activity. The diverse coverage of employment characteristics by the CIS makes it suitable for analyzing patterns of part-time work. This analysis only focuses on individuals residing in Ontario.

The sample has been disaggregated into four distinct geographic categories: Rural Ontario, towns with populations under 30,000 towns with populations between 30,000 and 99,999 residents, and the overall province. This breakdown enables us to compare the small and rural communities with larger population centres in the province. Observations with missing or invalid values were excluded from the analysis.

The dependent variable measures the stability of part-time employment and distinguishes between full-year part-time employment, referring to individuals who worked part-time for the entire year and part-year part-time employment, referring to individuals whose part-time work was limited to only part of the year.

The independent variables are socio-demographic in nature and include age group, sex, educational attainment, and immigration status. Age group is categorized into 12 brackets: 16-17 years, 18-24 years, 25-29 years, 30-34 years, 35-39 years, 40-44 years, 45-49 years, 50-54 years, 55-59 years, 60-64 years, 65-69 years, and 70 years and above. For the purposes of the regression, "16-17 years" is treated as the reference category. Sex is coded as 1 for male and 2 for female, with male as the reference. group. Education is coded on a four-point scale: 1 for less than high school, 2 for high school graduate or some postsecondary, 3 for non-university postsecondary diploma or certificate, and 4 for university degree. Individuals with less than high school education forms the reference

group. Immigration status has been coded 1 for immigrants and 2 for non-immigrants, with immigrants as the reference group.

The study employs both logit and logistic regression models to estimate the relationship between individual characteristics and the probability of being employed in full-year part-time work. The logit model provides coefficient estimates that identify the direction and statistical significance of relationships, and the logistic regression (odds ratio) gives us an intuitive interpretation of effect sizes.

The model can be expressed as:

$$\text{Logit}(P_i) = B_0 + B_1\text{Age}_i + B_2\text{Sex}_i + B_3\text{Education}_i + B_4\text{Immigrant}_i + \epsilon_i$$

Herein, P_i represents the probability of an individual being employed in full-year part-time work. Separate regressions are run for each geographic category which allows for a comparative analysis amongst them.

Our model's explanatory power is modest, which is very typical for cross-sectional labour market data, it still identifies the consistent demographic patterns that highlight the dynamics of part-time employment stability in Ontario.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the regressions which examine the socio-demographic determinants of sustaining full-year versus part-year part-time employment across the province of Ontario. Across all the models, sex has emerged as the strongest determinant of sustaining full-year part-time employment. Women are significantly more likely to remain in part-time work throughout the year, relative to their male counterparts, with odd ratios ranging from just above 2 in larger towns, and 3 in rural areas. This suggests that gender differences in part-time employment are a consistent pattern in Ontario's labour markets.

Age also plays an important role; wherein mid-career adults (30-54 years) are significantly less likely than young adults to sustain part-time work throughout the whole year. This reflects transition into full-time employment during prime working years as well as gradual withdrawal from the labour force as one grows older.

Table I: Determinants of Part-Time Employment in Rural Ontario

Logistic regression					Number of obs = 443	
					LR chi2(4) = 29.08	
					Prob > chi2 = 0.0000	
Log likelihood = -261.82035					Pseudo R2 = 0.0526	
WorkType	Odds ratio	Std. err.	z	P> z	[95% conf. interval]	
Age	1.029231	.0355827	0.83	0.405	.9618005	1.101389
Sex	3.1983	.7212899	5.16	0.000	2.055672	4.976049
Education	.8628862	.1020609	-1.25	0.212	.6843443	1.088009
Immigrant	1.255746	.5906698	0.48	0.628	.4994814	3.157072
_cons	.0528519	.0582991	-2.67	0.008	.0060832	.4591888

On the contrary, education and immigration status play weaker roles. In rural and small-town contexts, both variables are largely insignificant. However, in larger towns and at the provincial level, higher educational attainment is associated with lower odds of full-year part-time employment. Immigration status has a minimal influence, with significance on the provincial level but negligible effects elsewhere.

In Rural Ontario, the regression results show a highly gendered pattern of part-time employment. Women are more than three times as likely as men to sustain full-year part-time work. This makes gender the dominant determinant in this setting. The strength of this effect highlights structural and social dynamics as women in rural settings are often employed in occupations such as retail and education which provide steadier part-time opportunities, while men are employed in seasonal sectors such as construction and agriculture.

Age also exerts some influence but shows inconsistent patterns. Mid-career adults are significantly less likely to be employed in full-year part-time employment compared to younger workers. This highlights that younger workers may view part-time work as an entry-point into the labour market, while mid-career adults transition to full-time positions or exit the labour market when full-time opportunities are scarce.

Educational attainment does not have a statistically significant effect in rural Ontario which indicates that holding a diploma or degree does not necessarily change the odds of being in year-round part-time work. Employment opportunities in these settings are shaped more by the types of jobs available than the qualification of workers competing for them. Moreover, the immigrant population in rural areas is significantly small, and job options are often constrained to a limited number of sectors. Therefore, differences between immigrants and non-immigrants may be negligible.

Table II: Determinants of Part-time Employment in Towns with a Population Under 30,000

Logistic regression					Number of obs = 343	
					LR chi2(4) = 15.08	
					Prob > chi2 = 0.0045	
Log likelihood = -202.91095					Pseudo R2 = 0.0358	
WorkType	Odds ratio	Std. err.	z	P> z	[95% conf. interval]	
Age	1.006661	.0393485	0.17	0.865	.9324191	1.086814
Sex	2.52245	.6293463	3.71	0.000	1.546855	4.11335
Education	.9309335	.1281118	-0.52	0.603	.7108522	1.219152
Immigrant	.7083244	.4029934	-0.61	0.544	.2322471	2.1603
_cons	.2288116	.3158879	-1.07	0.285	.0152878	3.424617

In towns with a population less than 30,000, the results again highlight the central role of sex in shaping part-time employment stability. Women are more than twice likely as men to be involved in full-year part-time work (OR= 2.52, $p < 0.01$). This aligns with the pattern observed in rural Ontario, highlighting the persistence of gendered employment structures in smaller labour markets.

Age does not exert a statistically significant effect in such towns. It is possible that mid-career workers are less likely to remain in part-time employment throughout the year,

relative to younger workers. This reflects that part-time jobs act as transitional employment for younger adults, while adults in their 30s to 50s are more likely to shift into full-time positions or partially withdraw from the labour force.

Education and immigration status show no significant correlation with holding full-year part-time employment in towns of this size. Workers who hold a high school diploma, a non-university postsecondary certificate or a university degree have the same odds of remaining in part-time employment year-round, relative to those who have not completed high school. Immigration status is also not statistically significant, with immigrants showing odds like those of non-immigrants, reflecting small immigrant populations in these communities. It also points toward the structural dominance of local employment conditions that affect all workers similarly, regardless of immigration status.

Table III: Determinants of Part-time Employment in Towns with a population between 30,000 and 99,999

Logistic regression					Number of obs = 519	
					LR chi2(4) = 29.25	
					Prob > chi2 = 0.0000	
Log likelihood = -313.6079					Pseudo R2 = 0.0446	
WorkType	Odds ratio	Std. err.	z	P> z	[95% conf. interval]	
Age	1.049851	.0312796	1.63	0.103	.9903	1.112984
Sex	2.165804	.4223883	3.96	0.000	1.47779	3.174137
Education	.6335909	.0783124	-3.69	0.000	.4972785	.8072687
Immigrant	1.807793	1.013626	1.06	0.291	.6023954	5.4252
_cons	.0963836	.1146218	-1.97	0.049	.0093699	.9914557

Sex is still a strong determinant of full-year part-time employment. Women are more than twice as likely as men to sustain part-time throughout the year (OR=2.17, $p<0.01$). This finding is consistent with the broader Ontario-wide trend.

Education shows a significant and negative relationship with sustaining part-time work. The odds ratio of 0.63 indicates that higher educational attainment is associated with lower odds of remaining in part-time employment throughout the full year. In mid-sized towns, this could reflect a stronger demand for full-time skilled positions, and the high opportunity cost for educated workers who are more likely to exit part-time roles for more stable positions.

Age does not emerge as a statistically significant predictor (OR = 1.05, $p= 0.103$). However, the positive direction of the coefficient highlights that older workers may be more likely to sustain part-time employment, but the effect is too weak to draw firm conclusions. Immigrant status is not significant, indicating that immigrants and non-immigrants have broadly similar odds of maintaining full-year part-time work in mid-sized towns.

Overall, sex and education are the primary determinants of sustained part-time employment in towns, with a population between 30,000 and 99,999 residents.

Table IV: Determinants of Part-Time Employment in Ontario

Logistic regression		Number of obs = 6,172				
		LR chi2(4) = 289.16				
		Prob > chi2 = 0.0000				
Log likelihood = -3745.9779		Pseudo R2 = 0.0372				
WorkType	Odds ratio	Std. err.	z	P> z	[95% conf. interval]	
Age	.9814186	.008679	-2.12	0.034	.9645546	.9985774
Sex	2.300688	.1311584	14.62	0.000	2.057464	2.572666
Education	.788975	.0236814	-7.90	0.000	.7438992	.8367822
Immigrant	1.15995	.0822224	2.09	0.036	1.009491	1.332835
_cons	.23278	.0463304	-7.32	0.000	.1575906	.3438437

For the province of Ontario as a whole, age is a critical determinant. Individuals in almost every age bracket are significantly less likely to sustain part-time work throughout the year, in comparison to the youngest group (18-24 years). The coefficients are negative across all categories and the steepest declines are observed among workers in their 30s and 40s. This trend aligns with expectations as younger individuals often rely on part-time employment while in school or early stages of their career, while mid-career professionals transition to full-time job opportunities. Moreover, older workers also show reduced odds of sustaining part-time work.

Sex also comes out as a powerful predictor of part-time employment stability. Women are more than twice as likely as men (OR= 2.30, $p<0.001$) to be engaged in full-year part-time work. This reinforces the evidence of gender segmentation in the labour market. Caregiving responsibilities and household roles often contribute to women's higher propensity for part-time employment.

Education plays a significant role too, though the effect is subtle. Having a university degree or some postsecondary training is associated with lower odds of full-year part-time employment. This indicates that individuals with higher educational credentials are more likely to transition to full-time roles, while those with lower education may remain in part-time roles, either owing to necessity or due to constraints in the labour market.

Lastly, immigration status plays a weaker role. Immigrants show slightly higher odds of sustaining part-time compared to non-immigrants (OR=1.16, $p<0.05$), the effect size is modest relative to gender or education. Therefore, immigration background matters but does not strongly differentiate part-time employment stability once other factors are considered.

CONCLUSION

The study examined the socio-demographic determinants of sustaining part-time employment in Ontario, differentiating between full-year and part-year part-time work. First, the results indicate that sex is the most consistent and powerful determinant of part-time employment stability. Women are significantly more likely to be engaged in full-year part-time work, relative to men, across all geographies. This finding indicates a gendered division of labour, wherein women are constrained into part-time positions, often owing to caregiving responsibilities and occupational segmentation.

Age effects are also evident but vary across geographies. In general, mid, and late career adults are less likely to sustain part-time employment in comparison to younger workers. This reflects transition into full-time employment during prime working years and gradual withdrawal from the work force at older ages. However, the magnitude of these effects differs across geographies. In smaller towns and rural areas, age plays a weaker role, but in larger communities and the overall province, it is a strong determinant of part-time job stability.

Education shows mixed results. In smaller communities, educational attainment is non-significant in predicting the stability of part-time employment. On the contrary, higher levels of education are associated with lower odds of full-year part-time employment in larger towns and the provincial level, which suggests that education provides access to more secure and full-time opportunities in urban labour markets.

Furthermore, immigration status exerts minimal influence in most models, which indicates limited differentiation between immigrants and non-immigrants in terms of part-time work stability. This might reflect the integration of immigrants into the labour markets and the uniformity of part-time job availability across groups. The only exception appears in the overall provincial data, where immigrants show slightly higher odds of sustaining part-time work, though the effect is modest.

Altogether, these findings reveal consistent and context specific patterns. An individual's sex consistently matters across all geographies, age and education vary in strength depending on the community size. Immigration status does not have any consequences at smaller scales but is modestly relevant at the provincial level. The results highlight that labour market patterns are dependent on where people live, as what is true for Ontario as a whole may not hold in rural areas or small towns.

The evidence points to the need for policies that address gendered employment patterns, expand opportunities for educated workers in small communities, and ensure that part-time work provides stability and fairness for those who rely on it as a primary form of employment, as it is often concentrated in sectors with limited benefits.

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