

**Work-time reduction: does a shorter working week improve Work-life balance?**

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# **Work-time reduction: does a shorter working week improve Work-life balance?**

*By ALAALAM AISHA*

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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*Aisha Alaalam*

## Summary of thesis:

Achieving a work life balance is every working person's goal, so, is reducing the number of an employee's working hours in a week enough to achieve this goal? In this thesis research we attempt to answer this question by analyzing if a shorter working week was proposed as a new Bahraini law would have an impact on a working employee's social life. As perceived by medical region 1 laboratory employees in the ministry of health at the Kingdom of Bahrain. This study explores the relationship between reducing working hours and employee social life balance to achieve maximum employee satisfaction and have better solutions in a fast moving society, community wise and economically wise if possible. The employees' view is vital in order to reach an objective conclusion. For this reason qualitative research interviews were selected as the best possible media to reach the desired goal.

The qualitative analysis has shown that according to the interviews, a shorter working hour week would be one of the factors that can lead to a work-life balance but not the only one and a shorter week hours can lead to a better health and increase productivity and performance of an employee.

The thesis research plan will be divided into three sections. **In the first section**, I will tried to explain the concepts of quality of life (QOL), quality of working life (QWL) , work-life balance (WLB) and working-time reduction (WTR), then looked into the historical development of working hours, and also explored the global trends in actual working hours. Then I explained the current and different Bahraini working hour's laws as stated by the Bahraini Civil Service Bureau (CSB). After that, I also looked into literature reviews on factors effecting work-life balance and saw in depth literature considering work time reduction and its impact. and presented some research about case studies that were done by the governments of some countries concerning working time reduction, these countries were: France, United States of America , Austria and the Portugal .

**In section two**, I presented the empirical part of the thesis research explaining the research methodology used and why. Then I presented and explained the interview process on the sample case studied at the ministry of health region 1 laboratory department employees. At the end I concluded with the research results, findings and statistics.

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**In section three**, I presented the analysis and discussion of the findings, challenges faced, barriers / limitations and opportunities of such research in the future. And I close my research paper with a conclusion (recommendations) to the whole research paper.

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## INTRODUCTION

### I. Presentation of the subject:

In the past decade much research and debate have been focused on whether reducing working hour's increases productivity. Many people around the world have different views about the best number of hours worked daily. Some see reducing working hours from 8 to 6 hours as a way to increase labor productivity and improve working conditions. Also reducing working hours can open up more jobs which in return can reduce unemployment rates. Furthermore the establishment could operate on the level of full operation, and all this of course contributes in the long term to increase the profit of companies and establishments, and raise the level of economy in the same country. However, there is another opinion contrary to that view, so what is the best solution?

### II. Personal and professional interests in the subject:

The subject of working-time reduction (WTR) has been attracting considerable interest in past decades since the technological advancements have flourished in many aspects of our lives. Also it has gained attention in the debate on the social-ecological and economic transformation level in many societies. Some researches claim that WTR could possibly reduce unemployment rates and growth pressures<sup>1</sup>. Also it has been suggested that WTR might have an effect on improving an individual's health and well-being while reducing ones stress levels which leads to an

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<sup>1</sup> Antal, M. (2014). Green goals and full employment: are they compatible? *ecol.econ*, 107, 276- 286.

enhancement in quality of life.<sup>2</sup> Working-time reduction is also debated as a strategy to reduce environmental pressures.

On a personal level, as a working mother of two, this subject interests me and gives me an insight on how to achieve such a balance in my career as a regional manager and as an individual in my social life. On the professional front, and as a regional manager with the responsibility of 30 employees, my ambition is that this research paper will help me to shed some light on a neglected “forbidden to talk about” subject and enlighten the higher management of the value and effect of reducing wasted time at work and utilizing it in favor of the employees social life to achieve a multiple level affect in the society and economy. And, perhaps also effect policy makers in Bahrain to reach to an innovative model that will create a balanced work-life culture.

### **III. Problematic and Hypotheses:**

#### **Problematic:**

- Is reducing the number of an employee’s working hours in a week enough to achieve a work-life balance in the employee’s life?

#### **Sub research questions:**

1. Does reducing the number of an employee’s working hours in a week have an impact on his/her social life?
2. Does reducing number of an employee’s working hours in a week impact his/her health?

#### **The objective of the research:**

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<sup>2</sup> Buhl, J., Acosta, J., 2016b. Labour markets: time and income effects from reducing working hours in Germany. In: Santarius, T., Walnum, H.J., Aall, C. (Eds.), Rethinking Climate Coote, A., Franklin, J., Simms, A., 2010. 21 Hours. Why a Shorter Working Week Can Help Us All to Flourish in the 21st Century. New Economics Foundation, London.

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- To study the work-life balance of the employees in ministry of health laboratory section of region 1.
- To find out if reducing working time in a week can improve the work-life balance of employees.
- To identify any imbalances in the organization.
- To offer findings, suggestions and conclusion

#### **IV. Methodology:**

Working time reduction is becoming a topic that many are interested in all around the world. It's becoming a focal point of many research topics especially governments and countries like OECD. That's why in my research paper I have utilized a variety of resources to obtain the information and data needed to complete this research.

Firstly, I researched known journals and articles, using the search engine provided by university of Aix-Marseille online library and the university of Bahrain online library to get an updated perspective about the subject of working time reduction. Secondly, I utilized the local libraries in the Kingdom of Bahrain and the university of Bahrain library to research some of the books sources available which I found to be very useful in my research. Thirdly, utilizing the internet and the internet websites and links also has been part of my research to get up-to-date news and reports from different reliable sources.

Lastly, the most influential part of my methodology has been a semi-structured interview that I conducted with about 15 employees working at the laboratory departments at 6 different public health centers under the ministry of health in Bahrain. It must be noted that 15 employees represent about 10% of the total 162 employees working in all 28 health centers which are distributed in five medical regions in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The region that I conducted the research on was region 1 (the one I supervise and manage). Thus, it can be said that it's a good sample size, which comprised 3 different categories of employees which were: 7 senior laboratory technicians, 4 laboratory technicians and 4 medical assistants (phlebotomists). The

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results of the interviews will give an insight into how this sample of employees perceive work-life balance and would a reduction in their working hours make a difference in their work-like balance .

## V. Thesis research plan:

The thesis research plan will be divided into three sections. **In the first section**, I will try to explain the concepts of quality of life (QOL), quality of working life (QWL) , work-life balance (WLB) and working-time reduction (WTR), then I will look into the historical development of working hours, and also explore the global trends in actual working hours. I will then explain the current and different Bahraini working hour's laws as stated by the Bahraini Civil Service Bureau (CSB). After that, I will also look into literature reviews on factors effecting work-life balance and see in depth literature considering work time reduction and its impact. I will also present some research about case studies that were done by the governments of some countries concerning working time reduction, these countries are: France, United States of America and Austria. Also I will address in this chapter the current and different Bahraini working hour's laws as stated by the Bahraini Civil Service Bureau (CSB).

**In section two**, I will present the empirical part of the thesis research explaining the research methodology used and why. Then I will present and explain the interview process on the sample case studied at the ministry of health region 1 laboratory department employees. At the end I will conclude with the research results, findings and tables.

**In section three**, I will present the analysis and discussion of the findings , challenges faced, barriers / limitations and opportunities of such research in the future. And I will close my research paper with a conclusion (recommendations) to the whole research paper.

## Section One:

### 1.1 The Rise, Scope and the Potential of work time reduction and mapping its spread in the world:

Working time is the period of time that a person spends at paid labor. Unpaid labor such as personal housework or caring for children or pets is not considered part of the working week.

Lots of countries standardize the work week by law, such as specifying minimum daily rest periods, annual holidays, and a maximum number of working hours per week. Working time may differ from person to person, usually depending on one's location, lifestyle preference, culture, and the profitability of the individual's livelihood. For instance, a married individual with a house loan has to work more to cover his/her basic living cost than a single individual without a house loan commitment<sup>3</sup>.

Standard working hours (or normal working hours) refers to the legislation to limit the working hours per day, per week, per month or per year. If an employee needs to work overtime, the employer will need to pay overtime payments to employees as required in the law. In general, standard working hours of countries worldwide are around 40 to 44 hours per week (but not everywhere: from 35 hours per week in France to up to 112 hours per week in North Korean labor camps), and the additional overtime payments are around 25% to 50% above the normal hourly payments. Maximum working hours refers to the maximum working hours of an employee. The employee cannot work more than the level specified in the maximum working hour's law<sup>4</sup>.

Many studies show the number of working hours are one of the major factors that affect an employee's work-life balance. Work-time reduction refers to a reduction in paid working hours by an organization. Government and organizations see Reduction in working hours as a way to

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<sup>3</sup> Burchardt T (2008) Time and income poverty, CASE report 57 (London: LSE) Available at: <http://sticerd.ise.ac.uk/case/publications/reports.asp>

<sup>4</sup> Bosch G and Ichniowski S (2001) 'working-time reduction and employment: experiences in Europe and economic policy recommendations' Cambridge Journal of Economics 25: 209-243.

decrease the unemployment rate (like the French case), increase productivity, decrease wasted time at work, achieve a work-life balance for employees, and reduce environmental effects<sup>5</sup> .

The New Economics Foundation has recommended moving to a 21-hour standard work week to address problems with unemployment, high carbon emissions, low well-being, entrenched inequalities, overworking, family care, and the general lack of free time<sup>6</sup>

By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century there were two key standards which were available for limiting weekly working hours, the 48-hours limit of the industrial era and the more recent objective of the 40-hours week. The reduction of working hours shortened by almost half, mostly due to rising salaries brought about by improved economic growth, with a supportive role from trade unions, collective bargaining, and progressive legislation. In most of the industrialized world the workweek hours dropped steadily, to about 40 hours after World War II. The limitation of working hours is also proclaimed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Schor JB (2005) 'Sustainable consumption and worktime reduction' journal of Industrial Ecology 9(1-2): 37-50

<sup>6</sup> Coote, Anna; Franklin, Jane; Simms, Andrew (February 2010). *"21 hours: Why a shorter working week can help us all to flourish in the 21st century"* (PDF). London: New Economics Foundation. ISBN 9781904882701.

<sup>7</sup> Lee, S., McCann, D., & Messenger, J. (2007). 'Working time around the world: trends in working hours, laws and policies in a global comparative perspective'. Retrieved from <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com>

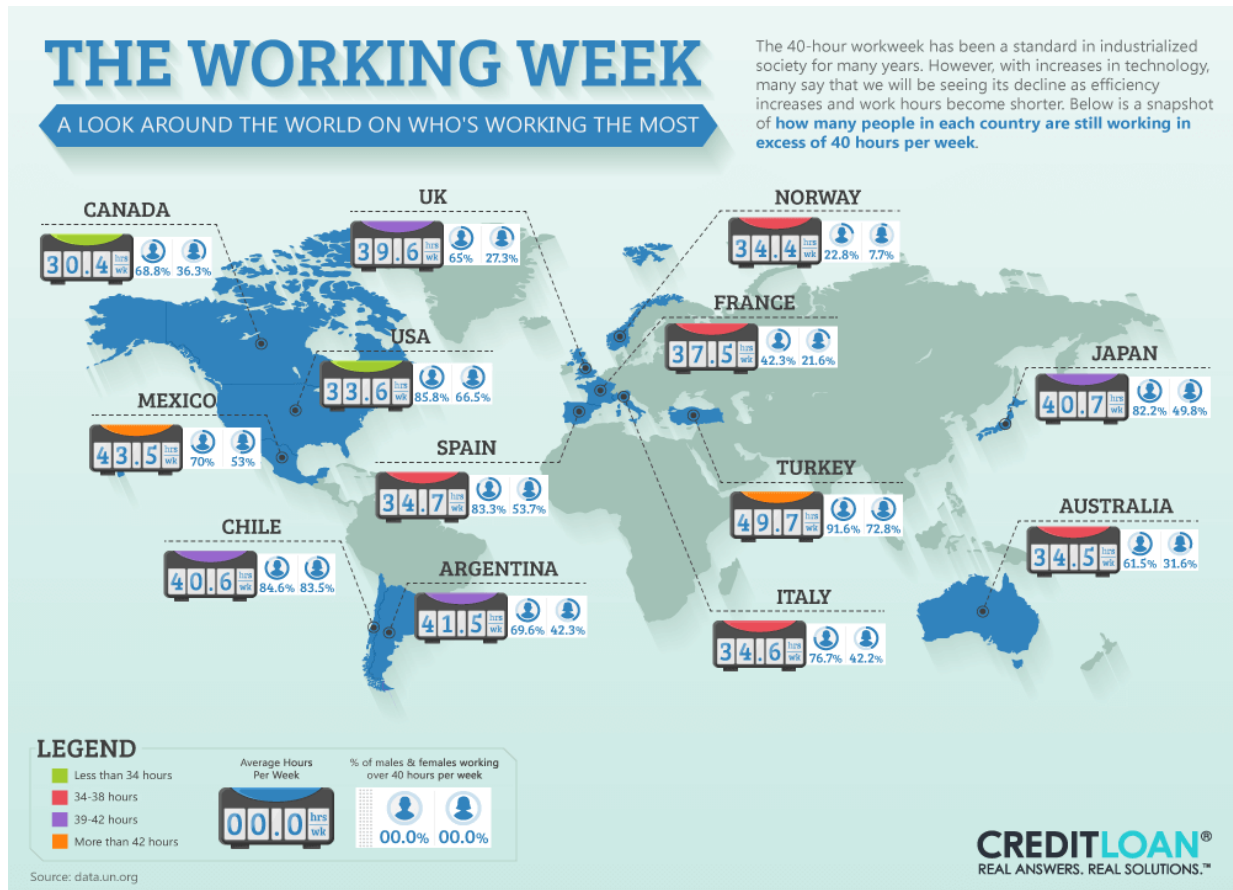


Figure 2 examples of average working time around the world

## 1.2 Work- life balance (WLB), Quality Of Life (QOL) and Quality of Working Life (QWL):

According to some authors like (Nipaert-Eng, 1996)<sup>8</sup> the concept of work-life relationship can be better described as a practice of creating and keeping “distinct territories of the self”. However, It appears that the term “quality of life” does not have a definitive definition, because the concept is subjective and different to each individual and discipline (Mayers, 1995)<sup>9</sup>. Fallowfield L

<sup>8</sup> Nipaert-Eng, C. E. (1996). *Home and Work: Negotiating Boundaries Through Everyday Life*. Chiago: The University of Chicago Press.

<sup>9</sup> Mayers, C. A. (1995, april 1). Defining and Assessing Quality of life. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 58(4), 146-150.

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(1990)<sup>10</sup> argued that 'Conceptually, quality of life is a somewhat vague term. We are all capable of expressing ideas and opinions as to what the phrase "quality of life" means for us as individuals. Trying to define it explicitly in a fashion that would permit objective measurement, is another matter'. Nevertheless, (MacGilp, 1991)<sup>11</sup> suggested that a classic definition can be found in the literature defining that "Quality of life involves satisfaction in a number of life areas" but (Mayers, 1995) in his article finds it to be ambiguous, meaningless and unsuitable to use as a foundation for an empirical work. On the other hand in his opinion, the most holistic and strongest definition was mentioned by Niemi et al (1988)<sup>12</sup> where they state that 'Although the concept has been only loosely defined there is agreement that quality of life refers to a person's subjective well-being and life satisfaction and that it includes mental and physical health, material well-being, interpersonal relationships within and without the family, work and other activities within the community, personal development and fulfilment, and active recreation.'

Several authors and researchers have suggested models that could describe the meaning of quality of working life, which include a range of factors.

Hackman and Oldham (1976) were among the first to describe QWL as a psychological growth needs. They identified needs like: Skill diversity, Task Identity, Task importance, Autonomy and Feedback, as examples of such needs. They advised that such needs have to be considered if an employee is to experience high quality of working life<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, Taylor (1979) identified the necessary components of quality of working life as basic extrinsic job factors of wages, hours and working conditions, and the intrinsic job perceptions of the nature of the work itself. He advocated that a number of other characteristics could be added, including: individual influence, employee involvement in the management, justice and equity, social support, use of one's present abilities, self-development, a meaningful future at work, social relevance of the work, effect on extra work activities. He also

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<sup>10</sup> Fallowfield L (1990) *The quality of life*. London: Human Horizons series, Souvenir Press.

<sup>11</sup> MacGilp D (1991) A quality of life study of discharged long-term psychiatric patients. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 16, 1206-15.

<sup>12</sup> Niemi M-L, Laaksonen R, Kotila M, Waltimo O (1988) Quality of life 4 years after stroke. *Stroke*, 19(9), 1101-1107

<sup>13</sup> Hackman J & Oldham G (1974) *The Job Diagnostic Survey*. New Haven: Yale University.



recommended that relevant quality of working life concepts may differ according to organization and employee group.<sup>14</sup>

Other researchers have also claimed that quality of work life can differ between groups of employees. Researcher like Ellis and Pompli (2002) recognized a number of factors leading to job dissatisfaction and quality of work life in nurses, that comprised: unfavorable working environments, resident aggression, workload, inability to deliver quality of care preferred, balance of work and family, shiftwork, lack of involvement in decision making, professional isolation, lack of recognition, poor relationships with supervisor/peers, role conflict, lack of opportunity to learn new skills<sup>15</sup>.

## 1.3 Working hours laws in Bahrain

### 1.3.1 Regular/shift working hours:

**According to the** Civil service Bureau in Bahraini law states that

**Law Decree No 48/2010 Promulgating Civil Service Law, Article (19)**

#### **Working hours**

(1) Normal working days, work during public holidays, timings and conditions of work of Employees, pursuant to public interest, shall be determined in accordance with a decision from the Bureau.

(2) However, special timings for certain category of Positions and Employees in certain Government Entities, having regard to their nature of work, may be determined by a decision from the Relevant Authority and approved by the Bureau.

#### **Civil service bureau instructions No (5) for year 2013**

Official working hours:

1. The official working hours of the regular working hours system shall be 36 hours per week

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<sup>14</sup> Taylor J C in Cooper, CL and Mumford, E (1979) The quality of working life in Western and Eastern Europe. ABP

<sup>15</sup> Ellis N & Pompli A 2002 Quality of working life for nurses. Commonwealth Dept of Health and Ageing. Canberra

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from 7 am to 2:15 pm from Sunday to Wednesday and from 7 am to 2 pm on Thursday. The official working hours of the extended working hours system are 40 hours per week from 7 am to 3 pm from Sunday to Thursday.

2. The official working hours shall be divided into three main sections as follows:

**a. Basic working hours:** This is the period of time in which the employee's presence is considered obligatory at the work site to perform his duties.

**B. Flexible working hours:** This is the flexible period that allows the employee who is subject to the flexible working system the opportunity to determine the appropriate time for him to come to work without prejudice to the interest of work according to certain regulations.

**C. Supplementary working hours:** This is the period that the employee subject to the flexible schedule must complete according to the scheduled daily working hours.

3. The flexible working schedule of the civil service shall be limited to a maximum of one hour. The basic, flexible and complementary working hours shall be according to one of the categories specified in the following tables in accordance with the hours of work approved for the employee

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### 1.3.2 Special working hours to the Kingdom of Bahrain:

According to the Bahraini civil service law, in the holy month of Ramadan, since Bahrain is an Islamic country, the working hours in a week is reduced to the 1/6 of the total working hours, that is to say that for regular working employees it reduces from 36hr/week to 30hrs/week and for shift pattern employees it reduces from 40hr/week to 33.5 hrs. /week. This applies to the public and private sectors<sup>17</sup>. Also, another special working hours timing concerning all Bahraini women that the Executive Regulations of the Civil Service Law give special advantages to Bahraini women working in terms of their own leave, in view of their health conditions, their responsibility in maternity and the care of their children and family. The regulation grants the employee who gives birth a full-time maternity allowance with all benefits for 60 days, which

<sup>16</sup> civil service bureau. (2015). Retrieved November 2017, from <https://www.csb.gov.bh/:https://www.csb.gov.bh/ar/civil-service-legislation/civil-service-law/law-48-2010.html>

<sup>17</sup> civil service bureau. (2015). Retrieved November 2017, from <https://www.csb.gov.bh/:https://www.csb.gov.bh/ar/news/1258.html>

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commences starting from the first day of the status recorded in the birth certificate. Upon returning to work after the maternity leave, the employee is entitled to two hours of care each day with pay for her baby up to the age of two years<sup>18</sup>. This special timing show that in the Kingdom of Bahrain a shorter working hours week policy or law can be applied and that we can adapt to a shorter week, since especially in Ramadhan and public and private disciplines have shorter working week hours even the educational sector which is an important aspect concerning Bahraini families.

#### 1.4 “Real world” Examples of countries applied WTR policies:

Many experimentations have been carried out by different governments and employers for different reasons where they introduced a change in working hour’s week by reducing them, examples of such governments are: 1) France, with an aim of reducing unemployment and gender inequality, and achieving a better work-life balance, the French government introduced a reduction in the yearly total working hours where policy stated that the total yearly working hours must not exceed 1600 hours. The research into the effect of such a law had mixed outcomes. It was found that 58% of employees that responded said that they noticed a positive impact in their lives, and it improved their work-life balance, especially for females with young children.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, the option of a yearly total hours, made work less predictable mainly for low-skilled workers<sup>20</sup>. 2) Another example of a government that introduced a shorter working week is the United States of America, where the main aim of this one year experiment

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<sup>18</sup> Civil Service Bureau. (2015). Retrieved November 2017, from <https://www.csb.gov.bh/ar/https://www.csb.gov.bh/ar/bulletins/%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%AB%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%AF%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84.html>

<sup>19</sup> Fagnani J and Letabiler M (2004) ‘work and family life balance: the impact of the 35-Hours laws in France’ *Work, Employment and Society*. 18(3): 551-572.

<sup>20</sup> Askenazy P (2004) ‘shorter work time, hours flexibility and labour force intensification’ *Eastern Economic Journal* 20(4): Fall 2004: 603-314

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was to save energy and cut carbon and costs. In this experiment, the government shifted the standard week from a five 8-hour days to four 10-hours day, Monday to Thursday, which meant that employees had 3 off work days.<sup>21</sup> This experiment showed that employee satisfaction rated increased while employee absenteeism decreased and also there was a positive impact on their productivity which resulted in saving the state of Utah £4.1 million dollars.it also helped in reducing the environment effect of carbon emissions and petrol consumption. At the end of the one year experiment, 82% of the employees wanted to continue with the new shorter week arrangement<sup>22</sup>. 3) A third example of WTR effect would be the Austrian government experiment, where the government introduced a novel working time policy called “ the Leisure Option”’. This gave the employees the option to choose between additional leisure time of five hours per month instead of wage increase or a 3% high pay increase. It was reported that 15-20% of the employees applied for the leisure option <sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, another case experiment is the government of the Portugal case, where in December 1, 1996 Portugal introduced a new law on working hours which gradually reduced the standard workweek from 44 hours to 40 hours. The new law decreased working hours, while hourly wages were increased, keeping monthly earnings approximately constant. It was reported that working hour’s reduction did not lead to an increased job loss of workers directly affected <sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.rules.utah.gov/execdoks/2008/ExecDoc140994.htm>

<sup>22</sup> <http://connecticutlawreview.org/document/RexFacerandLoriWadworth.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Schwendinger,M.,2015a. Arbeitszeiten in osterreich: Zwischen Wunschen und realitat. Materialien Zu Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft 148.

<sup>24</sup> Varej~ao, J. (2005). Work-sharing revisited - lessons from a natural experiment. Mimeo, Universidade do Porto.

## Section Two

### 2.1 Research methodology:

Qualitative approach suited my research since I was concerned with understanding as well as describing the phenomenon under investigation. Thus, a semi-structured interview that I conducted with about 15 employees working in the laboratory departments at 6 different public health centers under the ministry of health in Bahrain. It must be noted that 15 employees represent about 10% of the total 162 employees working in all 28 health centers which are distributed in five medical regions in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The region that I conducted the research on was region 1 (the one I supervise and manage). Thus, it can be said that it's a good sample size, which comprised 3 different categories of employees which were: 7 senior laboratory technicians, 4 laboratory technicians and 4 medical assistants (phlebotomists). The results of the interviews will give an insight into how this sample of employees perceive work-life balance and would a reduction in their working hours make a difference in their work-life balance and health .

### 2.2 The interview process

The role of the researcher in this interview process was not as an outside observer but an involved researcher.

The interviews were conducted either personally (face to face) or by phone by arranging an appointment with each interviewee in their work place.

### 2.4 Result findings:

According to table 1 which represents the attributes of the interviewees, who are 7 senior staff, 4 junior staff and 4 assistant staff. where their age ranged between 24 years to 42 years old and 13 out of 15 interviewees females whereas only 2 male. Also as can be seen from the table that 11

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out of 15 interviewees are married and 4 out of 15 interviewees are single. Furthermore, from table 1 it can be seen from the married employees interviewed, 9 out of 11 have their partners working and 2 out of 11 married employees' partners are unemployed or retired. 12 out of 15 interviewees have at least 1 child.

According to table 2, 10 out of 15 interviewees work on the 40hrs per week shift system of the Bahraini law and 3 of these employees are on the 'two hours of care' each day with pay system and therefore their working hours per week is reduced from 40hrs/week to 30hrs/week. On the other hand, as seen in the table, that 4 of the 15 interviewees are on the 36hrs/week regular system. And one of the interviewed employees is on the 'two hours of care' each day with pay system and therefore her working hours per week is reduced from 36hrs/week to 26hrs/week.

As can be seen from answering question 2, the majority of the interviewees saw that their time with their close families is adequate. On the other hand, answering question 3 the majority agrees that they don't have enough time for friends and other social contacts, giving the reason mainly to family and childcare responsibilities and house chores after work. Also 10 out of 15 interviewees responded that they have no time for their hobbies and interests.

As for question 5 in the interview almost half of the interviewees responded that the term 'work-life balance' means to them that it's separating between the two where work doesn't overcome life and vice versa. In question 6, 9 out of 15 interviewees said that time spent at work effected their responsibilities and they explained mainly because they felt tired and exhausted when they were back from work and they couldn't fulfil their responsibility towards their children and family the way they wanted. However, the respondents who answered that work time didn't affect their family responsibilities referred that it was because they had organized their time between work and their life. Also one male respondent gave the reason to be that his wife - who is a stay at home mother- managed everything concerning house responsibilities so he didn't have the problem of work overcoming his family life.

One of the main questions related to this research was question 7, where it is concerned with the relationship between the current time spent at work and their health, 13 out of 15 interviewees responded that yes it effected their health either mentally like causing stress or physically like back pains and headaches or both.

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In question 8, when asking the interviewees opinions of what would be the effect of a shorter working week hours in two aspects of their life , first work wise, 10 interviewee had a positive attitude about it and responded that it would increase their productivity, and performance and decrease their stress. While 2 had a negative response and 3 responded that it wouldn't make any difference work wise. In comparison, all interviewees had a positive response to the effect if they had shorter working week hour's 'life wise' where mainly they said it would make their social life and health better.

The answers for question 9 varied between the interviewees in their preference of their preferred working hour week, it varied from a preferred 10hr/week to 36hrs/week. And when asked in question 10 what would be their choice if they had to choose between leisure (less salary and fewer working hours) or high payment (more salary and more working hours) 10 out of 15 choose the leisure option and accepted less salary in exchange for fewer working hours, whereas 4 preferred the high payment option over the leisure option.

When asked about their point of view of the main difficulties and limitations of applying a shorter hour week law in Bahrain, the majority responded that applying such a law in the medical field would affect the service and there would be public and patient resistance to accept such a change. Also, the majority agreed for the last question (Q12) that the best form of working hours reduction would be in the form of a weekly flexible way rather than monthly of yearly basis.

### 2.3 Results tables:

Table 1: interviewee attributes result

<u>Code</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Marital status</u>	<u>Partner working?</u>	<u>No. of children</u>	<u>No. of years working in MOH</u>
<b>R1</b>	Senior staff	36	Female	Married	Yes	2	16
<b>R2</b>	Junior staff	27	Female	Married	Yes	1	7
<b>R3</b>	Assistant staff	24	Female	Single	—	—	2
<b>R4</b>	Assistant staff	27	Female	Single	—	—	3
<b>R5</b>	Senior staff	39	Female	Married	Yes	7	10
<b>R6</b>	Junior staff	30	Female	Married	yes	1	8
<b>R7</b>	Senior staff	31	Female	Single	—	—	10
<b>R8</b>	Junior staff	33	Female	Married	Yes	2	1
<b>R9</b>	Assistant staff	42	Female	Single	—	1	10
<b>R10</b>	Assistant staff	25	Female	Married	Yes	2	6
<b>R11</b>	Senior staff	39	Female	Married	No	7	10
<b>R12</b>	Junior staff	39	Male	Married	No	2	11
<b>R13</b>	Senior staff	39	Female	Married	Yes	4	18
<b>R14</b>	Senior staff	32	Male	Married	Yes	2	12

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<b>R15</b>	Senior staff	33	Female	Married	Yes	2	12
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Table 2: Employee interview results

<u>Code</u>	<u>Q1</u>	<u>Q2</u>	<u>Q3</u>		<u>Q4</u>	<u>Q5</u>	<u>Q6</u>		<u>Q7</u>
			<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>			<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	
<b>R1</b>	40hr/week	Adequate	No	Work, house, children commitments	No	Each has its own time, separate	yes	Feel exhausted	Yes, back pain, shoulders, mental stress
<b>R2</b>	40hr/week with maternity caring hrs. = 30hr/week	Adequate	adequate	Caring hrs. allow that, only one child, no school	No	Separate time for each, no over coming	Some times	Effect child care routine	No
<b>R3</b>	40hr/week	Adequate	No	Exhausted after work	Yes	Organizing time between both	No	I organize my time	Yes, mentally stressful
<b>R4</b>	40hr/week	Adequate	No	Feel tired and exhausted	Yes	Equal timing between both	No	I give each is right	Yes, mentally stressful, shoulder hands pain
<b>R5</b>	40hr/week with maternity caring hrs. = 30hr/week	Adequate without shift day	No	House and children responsibilities take all time	No	Balancing work and family life, separate time for each without over coming	Yes	Child care effected especially my infant	Yes, less sleep and more tiredness, stress of responsibilities to get done
<b>R6</b>	36hr/week	Too few	No	House and family responsibilities	No	To give each part its right and fulfil its responsibilities	Yes	Can't fulfil family demands and responsibilities, not enough time	Yes, physical body pain, abortion
<b>R7</b>	36hr/week	Adequate	Sometimes	Depend on work day	No	Spend less time at work, more time with family	Yes	Too much time wasted at work	Yes, I get neck and back pain

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						and hobbies			
<b>R8</b>	40hr/week	Adequate	Yes	Organize time	No	Separate time for each, no over coming	Yes	Child care effected especially my infant	Yes, back pain and shoulder pain
<b>R9</b>	36hr/week	Adequate	Yes	Because my son is adult	Yes	Separate time for each, no over coming	Some times	Depends on what happens at work	Yes, wrist pain and headache
<b>R10</b>	36hr/week with maternity caring hrs. = 26hr/week	Adequate	Yes	Because I have 2 hours caring	No	Separate time for each, no over coming and mixing	No	I have organized my time	Yes, backache, shoulder pain and stress
<b>R11</b>	40hr/week with maternity caring hrs. = 30hr/week	Adequate	No	Because of home and child responsibilities	Yes	Organizing work and life to create balance	No	Because I organize everything	No
<b>R12</b>	40hr/week	Adequate	Yes	I can organize and manage time	Sometimes	Managing the both together not separate from each other	No	Because my wife manages everything at home	Sometimes, headache and back pain with double shifts
<b>R13</b>	40hrs/week	Too few	No	Because of home and child responsibilities	No	Organizing work and life to create balance	Yes	Can't cook for family and not giving my kid their right	Yes , cause stress, exhausted
<b>R14</b>	40hr/week	Adequate	No	Work is taking most of the time, remaining time for family	No	Sufficient time for family and work	Yes	Can't fulfil the responsibilities because of work exhaustion	Yes, cause stress, exhaustion, increase weight
<b>R15</b>	36hr/week	Too few	No	Work is taking most of	No	Fulfil responsibi	Yes	Can't fulfil the way I	Yes, stress, exhaustion,

[Type here]

				my time		lities of both rightfully		want	increase weight, back pain, headache
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Table 3: Employee interview results continued

<u>Code</u>	<u>Q8</u>		<u>Q9</u>		<u>Q10</u>	<u>Q11</u>	<u>Q12</u>
	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>			
<b>R1</b>	Increase productivity, Increase performance, More energy	Time to exercise, better social life, time for hobbies	25hrs/week 8am- 1pm	More time to organize chores and responsibilities without stress	Leisure ( accept less salary)	Organizational: medical field difficult to reduce, pubic resistance	Daily but flexible
<b>R2</b>	No change	More time for family, social life, better child care	26hr/week without evening shift	More time for social life	Leisure ( accept less salary)	Patient resistance	Per week with fixed flexible hours
<b>R3</b>	No change	More time for family	20hrs/week (8am-12)	More time for morning exercise	Leisure ( accept less salary)	Org. MOH will be effected	Per week with fixed flexible hours
<b>R4</b>	Less stress, increase productivity in less time	More time with family	10hr/week (7am-9 am)	Enough to finish work and have more time for shopping	Leisure ( accept less salary)	Org, patient resistance	Per week with fixed flexible hours
<b>R5</b>	Better performance, less time waste, more productivity and less hours	More time with family, pending responsibilities get done, time for hobbies	25hrs/week 8am- 1pm	Less stress, rushing in the morning, more time to finish chores	High payment when responsibilities are less, to save money. Leisure with increasing responsibility (accept less salary)	National, service would be affected and patient resistance	week with fixed flexible hours (Standardize)
<b>R6</b>	Less stress, better service, better relationship at work	More time for myself and hobbies, more time to socialize, more time for family	25hrs/week But flexible like caring hours	Enough time to finish chores and responsibilities, less stressful	Leisure ( accept less salary)	Patient resistance but with time they will accept	Standardize scheduled fixed flexible hours per week
<b>R7</b>	My performance will not change, but I will be happier	More time for hobbies and social life, increase happiness	25hrs/week But flexible like caring hours	Depending on the need	None of them	Organization will be affected	Standardize scheduled fixed flexible hours per week
<b>R8</b>	Less stress and more productivity	More time for family and hobbies	36hr/week	Enough time to finish work	High payment	Patient resistance	Weekly flexible hours

[Type here]

<b>R9</b>	More stress at work to get things done	More time for home, family and hobbies	30hr/week (7am - 1pm)	Gives time for rest and lunch	Leisure (accept less salary)	It will affect the organization	Weekly flexible hours
<b>R10</b>	Less stressful, less wasted hours, increase quality of work	More time for family, less stress, more time to study	20hr/week (8am – 12pm)	More time to fulfil responsibilities	Leisure (Accept less salary)	Patient resistance	Weekly flexible hours
<b>R11</b>	I will be bored at home, time will be restricted at work	Have time to exercise and look after my mother	30hr/week (8am-2pm)	Enough time to organize myself and solve work related problems like shortage	High payment	Adaptation to the new timing will take time	Monthly scheduled Shorter hours
<b>R12</b>	Doesn't make a difference	More time for family	35hr/week (7am-2pm)	Enough to get work done	High payment	Will affect the service provided and the patients	Week or monthly fixed
<b>R13</b>	Increase performance, more active because less stress, and increase concentration	Better child care, better social life, increase health and less stress	30hr/week (7am-1pm)	Cut out wasted hours	Leisure (accept less salary)	Organization (MOH) will not like the idea, because they want us to work more hours for less cost	Fixed weekly
<b>R14</b>	Increase productivity, quality of work and work motivation	Better quality of family life, more time for friends and hobbies, less stress and better health	25hr/week (8am – 1pm)	Enough time to finish tasks	Leisure accept less salary	Public resistance and service might be affected	Weekly with flexible hours
<b>R15</b>	Reduce waste time, increase productivity, less stress	More family time, better social life and better health	25hr/week (8am – 1pm)	Enough time to get things done	Leisure accept less salary	Public acceptance	Weekly standardize flexible

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## Section Three

### 3.1 Analysis and Discussion:

The goal of this study was to investigate if a shorter working week was proposed as a new Bahraini law would have an impact on a working employee's social life. And to answer the question, is reducing the number of an employee's working hours in a week enough to achieve a work-life balance in the employee's life? Also to answer the sub questions, does reducing the number of an employee's working hours in a week have an impact on his/her social life? And, does reducing number of an employee's working hours in a week impact his/her health?

The findings of this study clearly show that the sample wasn't representative of the employees because 13 out of 15 interviewees were females whereas only 2 were male and that limitation refers to the type of the organization where ministry of health the laboratory section has a majority of female employees. on the other hand, the age group between 24 years to 42 years old were in the range of what most studies were which is called the active working age.

Also as can be seen from the table that 11 out of 15 interviewees are married and 4 out of 15 interviewees are single. Furthermore, from table 1 it can be seen from the married employees interviewed, 9 out 11 have their partners working and 2 out of 11 married employees' partners are unemployed or retired. 12 out of 15 interviewees have at least 1 child.

According to the results it can be seen that female employees with 2 hour care system, are more satisfied with their hours and they wish to remain this working hours even after they finish the applied law of two year special two hour child care reduction. 10 out of 15 interviewees work on the 40hrs per week shift system of the Bahraini law and 3 of these employees are on the "two hours of care" each day with pay system and therefore their working hours per week is reduced from 40hrs/week to 30hrs/week. On the other hand, as seen in the table, that 4 of the 15 interviewees are on the 36hrs/week regular system. And one of the interviewed employees is on the "two hours of care" each day with pay system and therefor her working hours per week is reduced from 36hrs/week to 26hrs/week.

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As can be seen from answering question 2, the majority of the interviewees saw that their time with their close families is adequate. On the other hand, answering question 3 the majority agrees that they don't have enough time for friends and other social contacts, giving the reason mainly to family and childcare responsibilities and house chores after work. In this research it was clearly seen that 10 out of 15 interviewees responded that they have no time for their hobbies and interests in my opinion that is because most responded that by the time they get to home from work there is only time to finish house chores and family responsibilities and by the end of the day they are tired and don't have time for them self especially the female parents. A study by Glass and Estes (1997) showed that conflict between paid work and family responsibilities lead to decreased employee productivity and also resulted in bad family functioning<sup>25</sup>. In question 6, 9 out of 15 interviewees said that time spent at work effected their responsibilities and they explained mainly because they felt tired and exhausted when they were back form work and they couldn't fulfil their responsibility towards their children and family the way they wanted. However, the respondents who answered that work time didn't affect their family responsibilities referred that it was because they had organized their time between work and their life. Also one male respondent gave the reason to be that his wife - who is a stay at home mother- managed everything concerning house responsibilities so he didn't have the problem of work overcoming his family life. This shows that there's a gap in the research that needs to be explored which is to compare between both couples working and if only one partner working. It seems with only one partner working, work-life responsibilities are more manageable. Never the less, it would be interesting to explore that aspect too.

As for question 5 in the interview almost half of the interview responded that the term "work-life balance" means to them that it's separating between the two where work doesn't overcome life and vice versa which agrees with some of the literature review. I my opinion, work life balance is not by separating both aspects but by managing and organizing time to fulfill the both responsibilities rightfully, two of the interviewed employed also responded to this question that as long as they organized them self's they didn't have an issue with balancing their work-life responsibilities. Especially that one of them has 7 children but she still manages to balance both aspects of her life.

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<sup>25</sup> Glass, J.L. and Estes, S.B (1997) ' the Family Responsive Workplace', Annual Review Social, Vol.23, pp.289-313



One of the main questions related to this research was question 7, where it is concerned with the relationship between the current time spent at work and their health, 13 out of 15 interviewees responded that yes it effected their health either mentally like causing stress or physically like back pains and headaches or both. His is confirmed in a research paper by Frone (2000) where he discovered that work-home conflict equally affected the health of men and women<sup>26</sup>.

Interviewees had a positive attitude about the assumption of when the effect of a shorter working week hours in two aspects of their life it and most of them responded that it would increase their productivity, and performance and decrease their stress. Also, all interviewees had a positive response to the effect if they had shorter working week hour's 'life wise' where mainly they said it would make their social life and health better. This finding agrees with MacEwen et.al (1994) findings where he confirmed that longer working hours reduces family satisfaction and reducing working hours and lead to better health and productivity of an employee<sup>27</sup>

The interviewee's answers varied in their preference of their preferred working hour week, it varied from a preferred 10hr/week to 36hrs/week. This shows that there is a lot of wasted time at work that needs to be cut down to allow better productivity and effective outcome of their work. Question 10 was added according to the Austrian experiment of giving the choice between leisure or high payment, 10 out of 15 choose the leisure option and accepted less salary in exchange for fewer working hours, whereas 4 preferred the high payment option over the leisure option. This confirms the experiment mentioned in the literature review and as we can see that young employees now have a different perception than old employee 30 years ago where they preferred working more hours and neglected leisure time. Young employee accept a cut in their salary in opposite of having more "life" time and free time for them self and socialize more.

When asked about their point of view of the main difficulties and limitations of applying a shorter hour week law in Bahrain, the majority responded that applying such a law in the medical field would affect the service and there would be public and patient resistance to accept such a change. But this could be overcome with time when the public will start to see the better performance from the employees and also with time the resistance will decrease , in addition the

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<sup>26</sup> Frone, M.R. (2000) @ Work-family conflict and employee psychiatric disorders: The National Comorbidity Survey', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol.85, No.6, pp.888-895.

<sup>27</sup> MacEwen, K.E. and Barling, J. (1994) 'Daily consequences of work interference with family and family interference with work, , *Work and Stress*, Vol.8, pp.244-254.

shortage in staff and be compensated with other staff with can help in the employment just like the French case.

Lastly, the majority agreed in the last question (Q12) that the best form of working hours reduction would be in the form of a weekly flexible way rather than monthly or yearly basis. I agree with the majority but only to add that the flexibility should also be regulated by policies and laws.

In my opinion, Bahrain has already special working times that comes in a reduced form, like Ramadan timings and maternity special timings, so that means that we can adopt easily to a shorter working week hours and gain the positive aspects of this phenomenon on the other side we can work to create more creative innovative solutions to any negative points that might arise and by that create a innovative ‘fit only for Bahrain’ model of an effective system that cares about the work-life balance on the Bahraini employee and flourish economically, environmentally and socially.

### **3.2 Challenges, Barriers and limitations:**

There was an unavailability of some employees at the right time of data collection because of their annual leave or maternity leaves, so it takes a long time to set appointments and fulfil researcher's job commitments as a manager. Time constraints made it impossible to gather more information. Also the researcher's medical condition made it difficult to conduct more interviews to gather more data. The study was conducted during the working hours so the employees were concentrating on their own work, so their opinion may be biased.

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## 6. Conclusions:

Productivity can increase with a reduced number of working hours in a week. Working-time reduction has a positive impact on employee health and satisfaction. And therefore can lead to better work-life balance in an employee's life.

The reliability of the findings depend mainly of the sample size therefore, It is recommended that further studies in this topic especially in Bahrain could focus on a larger sample of public sector workers in Bahrain, to get a clearer picture that can be utilized for policy decision making at a national level. Future researches may perhaps also focus on various public sector disciplines to understand if there are different factors effecting work-life balance in each disciplines and addressing those issues might lead to social and economical benefits for all.

Also health awareness programs are recommended for the organization and a preferred exercise program at work might make a difference in their work satisfaction even without a reduction in work hours. An annual feedback system regarding work may be introduced in the organization that can study all aspects of work time at the organization, like cutting wasted time and peak working times to ensure best and effective utilization of work time at the establishment.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix: 1

#### **Cover letter of interview presentation**

Dear sir/madam

My name is Aisha Alaalam. I am a Master degree student in public management and executive Master of Public Management (MPM) program of the BIPA (Bahrain Institute of Public Administration). The topic of my thesis is **“Work-time reduction: does a shorter working week improve Work-life balance?”**. The organization under study will be region 1 medical laboratory employees in the ministry of health.

This work, which is supervised by Professor Kim Griffin, deals with the relationship between reducing working hours and employee social life balance to achieve maximum employee satisfaction and have better solutions in a fast moving society, community wise and economically wise if possible. The employees’ view is vital in order to reach an objective conclusion. Moreover, this study attempts to give answers to two basic questions: **1)** is reducing the number of an employee’s working hours in a week enough to achieve a work-life balance in an employee’s life? **2)** Does reducing the number of working hours in a week increase an employee’s productivity and performance?

The reason I’m sending this email to you is to ask for your confirmation in order to conduct in your organization the empirical part of my research which consists of interviewing in person or by phone, number of region 1 laboratory employees. The total number of interviews will be 30.

Attached you may find a sample of the questionnaire which is consists of 10 semi structure questions, all related to working hours and work-life balance variables that would effect this. Please bear in mind that the interview aims only to support the scientific research on the issue stated above and is not intended for any other purpose other than that. In addition, I would like to ensure you that all interviewed employees’ will remain anonymous in the research paper.

Looking forward for your reply.

Kind regards,

Aisha Alaalam

[Type here]

## Interview guide

### “Reducing Working hours and work-life balance”

#### 1. Attributes of the interviewee:

<b>Interview number:</b>	
<b>Date of the interview :</b>	
<b>Age:</b>	
<b>Gender:</b>	<input type="radio"/> Male <input type="radio"/> Female
<b>Marital statuses</b>	<input type="radio"/> Married <input type="radio"/> Single
<b>Husband/wife working?</b>	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
<b>Number of children</b>	
<b>Position of the employee in the organization?</b>	<input type="radio"/> Senior staff <input type="radio"/> Junior staff <input type="radio"/> Assistant staff
<b>How long have you been working for the ministry of health?</b>	
<b>Public or private sector:</b>	public
<b>Sector:</b>	Health

[Type here]



**The nature of work hours:**

**Q1-** How many hours do you work in a week?

**Q2-** In your opinion how much time do you spend with your family?

**Q3-** A. Do you have enough time for friends and other social contacts?

B. What is the reason?

**Q4-** Do you have time for your own hobbies and interests?

**The effect of the currently working week hours in the work-life balance:**

**Q5 -** What does work-life balance mean to you?

**Q6-** A. Does time spent at work effect on your family responsibilities?

B. Can you explain how?

**Q7-** Does time spent at work effect on your health?

[Type here]

**The implications if there was a shorter working week hours:**

**Q8-** In your opinion what would be the effect if you had a shorter working week hours?

A. Work wise:

B. Life wise:

**Q9-** A. What would be your ideal (preferred) working hour's week?

B. Why?

**Q10-** If given the choice, Would you choose leisure ( less salary and more "life" time) **OR** high payment ( more salary and less "life" time)?

**Q11-** From your point of view, what are the main difficulties and limitations of applying a shorter working hour's week? (Personal, organizational, national)

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**Q12** - From your point of view, what form could the reduction of working time in Bahrain take (if Bahrain decided to reduce working time) ?

**Thank you for your time...**

[Type here]

## Appendix 2:

### List of participants in the interview process

<b>Interviewee number</b>	<b>Job position</b>	<b>Interview date</b>
R1	Senior staff	15/11/2017
R2	Junior staff	16/11/2017
R3	Assistant staff	16/11/2017
R4	Assistant staff	16/11/2017
R5	Senior staff	20/11/2017
R6	Junior staff	20/11/2017
R7	Senior staff	21/11/2017
R8	Junior staff	21/11/2017
R9	Assistant staff	22/11/2017
R10	Assistant staff	22/11/2017
R11	Senior staff	29/11/2017
R12	Junior staff	29/11/2017
R13	Senior staff	29/11/2017
R14	Senior staff	12/12/2017
R15	Senior staff	12/12/2017

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UNIVERSITY OF AIX MARSALLE  
Faculty of PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

Author: Aisha Alaalam

Master's thesis: **Work-time reduction: does a shorter working week improve Work-life balance?**

Degree: Master of Public Management

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## ABSTRACT

**Achieving a work life balance is every working person's goal, so, is reducing the number of an employee's working hours in a week enough to achieve this goal? In this thesis research we attempt to answer this question by analyzing if a shorter working week was proposed as a new Bahraini law would have an impact on a working employee's social life. As perceived by medical region 1 laboratory employees in the ministry of health at the Kingdom of Bahrain. This study explores the relationship between reducing working hours and employee social life balance to achieve maximum employee satisfaction and have better solutions in a fast moving society, community wise and economically wise if possible. The employees' view is vital in order to reach an objective conclusion. For this reason qualitative research interviews were selected as the best possible media to reach the desired goal.**

**In conclusion, the qualitative analysis has shown that according to the interviews, a shorter working hour week would be one of the factors that can lead to a work-life balance but not the only one and a shorter week hours can lead to a better health and increase productivity and performance of an employee.**

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**KEYWORDS:** working week hours, performance, structure, motivation, public sector, family and work balance.

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