

European Population Conference 2012

Extended abstract

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Family-building transitions, female permanence in paid employment and the pursuit of full-time careers: bringing the gender division of labour into focus

The last decades of the 20th Century and the beginning of the present one have witnessed an ever-more generalized incorporation of women to the labour market. Such a transformation has gone hand in hand with an unprecedented expansion of their educational attainment and human capital development. This notwithstanding, family-building events – union formation and especially childbirth – continue to prove particularly challenging for female labour force attachment in most post-industrial societies; often giving rise to reductions in working time or even complete withdrawal from paid employment.

In recent years, sociologic, economic and demographic research has identified contextual and individual-level variables that affect women's labour supply decisions after the two aforementioned life course transitions. Theoretically, neoclassical time-allocation frameworks have modelled family and work-related decisions as interdependent (Mincer 1963; Becker 1965; 1981; 1993; Willis 1973; Blau et al. 1998). Empirically, the impact of union formation or the birth of a child on female employment attachment has been put in relation with factors as varied as women's own preferences (Hakim 1996; 2000); access to affordable childcare, (Blau & Robins 1989; Blau et al. 1998; Kimmel 1998; Apps & Rees 2004) parental leave, high quality part-time jobs and flexible work arrangements; as well as with micro-level socioeconomic variables that affect the opportunity costs of time spent on and off the labour market (Drobnič et al 1999; Blau et al. 2008; Del Boca et al. 2009).

The aim of this paper is to expand existing research by incorporating the intra-household division of labour to the analysis. More specifically, it seeks to determine whether men's domestic effort exerts any significant influence on women's propensity to exit the workforce or shift from full-time to part-time employment after the transition

to a union or to motherhood. Bringing attention to developments in the domestic sphere appears crucial given their relevance in terms of gender equality and for easing work-family reconciliation dilemmas. In addition, relating male behaviour to women's employment trajectories throughout the life course also seems important in the light of what has been called "a genuine revolution of women's roles" (Goldin 2006; Esping-Andersen 2009). Against the backdrop of the magnitude of the latter, fundamental questions arise on the position of men themselves in such a scenario and their potential contribution to its shaping. After all, even if not to a proportional extent, male unpaid work has also started to increase as women consolidate their massive incorporation to paid employment. This is especially true regarding childcare (Esping-Andersen 2009), wherefore examining its relation to female work attachment after family-building seems pertinent.

The dynamic nature of behaviour, with regard to both paid and unpaid work, after the transition to union formation and motherhood, respectively, makes it necessary to resort to longitudinal data. This is also motivated by the close interrelationships among the phenomena under study, which would make it impossible to assess the direction of causality by means of cross-sectional evidence. Consequently, the paper draws on longitudinal data from the German Socio-economic Panel (1984-2009), which also offers rich retrospective biographical information on relevant variables.

Non-parametric and parametric event history analysis techniques are applied to subsamples of women having got married or given birth between 1984 and 2009. To begin with, the potential influence of male housework and childcare effort upon women's survival in employment after marriage and childbirth, respectively, is assessed by means of descriptive statistics (life tables, survival curves) and regression analysis (transition rate exponential models with episode-splitting). The same procedure is subsequently followed using transitions out of full-time employment as dependent variable. Only married couples are considered when focus is laid on behaviour after the transition into a union, as the dataset does not provide explicit information on the start and end dates of cohabitation spells. In the case of the transition to childbirth, in contrast, both cohabiting and married couples are analyzed; since what is important is that a transition to parenthood has taken place within a union regardless of exactly when such a union started.

The findings obtained reveal that there indeed appears to be a relation between women's employment transitions after marriage and childbirth, respectively, and their

male partners' housework and childcare effort. Such a link is found to be particularly evident in the case of women's permanence in full-time work after their entry into a marital union, and might even diminish the strong dependence of such a decision on economic considerations. Female labour supply behaviour after childbirth, in contrast, seems to follow a partially different logic of its own, probably linked to the strong German culture of motherhood. This said, a positive effect of men's contribution to unpaid work, especially in terms of childcare, can not be discarded in this case either.

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