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Family-Care-Employment Trajectories across Early- and Mid- Adulthood

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine how family, care and employment interact in men's and women's lives across early- to mid-adulthood (ages 26 to 46) using the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70). We use latent class analysis to identify family-care-employment configurations at different ages and subsequently assess which typical trajectories of configurations can be inferred across mid- and early adulthood. The conceptualization of care includes childrearing as well as informal care and household tasks, thereby providing a broader perspective than previous research. Moreover, by assessing how occupational interests measured in adolescence and early adulthood relate to family-care-employment configurations and trajectories, we attempt to shed light on the role of self-selection vis-à-vis the role of socio-economic resources.

Topic and Theoretical focus

The aim of this study is to examine family and employment trajectories across adulthood (ages 26 to 46) using the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70). We use latent class analysis to identify the family and employment configurations at different ages across adulthood (Barban & Billari, 2012; Ross, Schoon, Martin, & Sacker, 2009) and subsequently assess which trajectories across configurations can be inferred (Zhou & Kan, 2019).

We motivate our approach by the necessity to simultaneously consider how multiple dimensions in the life course interact and how patterns unfold over time in order to understand how gendered patterns of work and care are (re)produced (Aisenbrey & Fasang, 2017). A large body of research has focused on the phase of early family-formation as the focal point in which gender differences in work and care emerge (see for example Begall & Grunow, 2015; Schober, 2013). However, by focusing on unidirectional relations between work and care at one stage in the life-course, the fact that an individual's work-care involvement at any point in the life-course is the result of a series of decisions and events over time and thus of (often unintended) path dependencies and anticipation is neglected (MacMillan & Copher, 2005).

This study therefore examines work-care patterns as part of family-employments trajectories in an integrated perspective across early- and mid-adulthood (ages 26 to 46) and taking a broader perspective on care, which includes childrearing as well as informal care provided for family.

In addition, we will explore how socio-economic status predicts family-care-employment configurations and trajectories and examine the interdependent relationship between gender attitudes (measured at several points across adulthood, see Table 1) and family and family-care-employment configurations and trajectories.

Finally, we will use early (age 10 and 16) predispositions to caring as indicated by occupational interest tests and ability assessments to account for self-selection into care and work roles based on a preference for communal roles.

Data & Methods

We use data from the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70) which sampled 17,000 babies born in a single week in England, Scotland and Wales in 1970 and followed these respondents over their life-course (Elliott & Shepherd, 2006). Data up to age 46 are currently available and include detailed information

about family transitions and relationships, education and employment, (gender) attitudes and early abilities and interests as well as health outcomes at mid-life (Sullivan, Brown, Hamer, & Ploubidis, 2023). We use data from the panel waves collected at ages 26, 30, 34, 38, 42 and 46 to construct men's and women's life-course trajectories with regard to the domains of family (partner, children, household composition), care (household and childcare tasks, informal care) and employment. Table 1 shows the relevant information and sample size for each wave.

We use latent class analysis to identify family-employment configurations at each age and subsequently assess individuals' trajectories with regard to the combination and order of configurations using panel regression models.

As an example of how family-care-employment configurations will be conceptualized, we present preliminary findings for age 26. Table 2 presents descriptive statistics of the variables used as input for the latent class analysis conducted in Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 2012). The preferred model (based on the LRT test and lowest BIC value) was a five-class model.

Table 1. Relevant information and sample size per wave of the BCS70

	Age 16	*Age 26*	*Age 30*	*Age 34*	*Age 38*	*Age 42*	*Age 46*
	(n=11, 621)	*(n=9,003)*	*(n=11,261)*	*(n=9,656)*	*(n=8,874)*	*(n=9,841)*	*(n=8,581)*
Input for family-work configurations							
Household composition		x	x	x	x	x	x
Partnership status		x	x	x	x	x	x
Parenthood status		x	x	x	x	x	x
Employment		x	x	x	x	x	x
Employment partner		x	x	x	x	x	x
Child care			x	x		x	x
Housework			x	x		x	x
Informal care					x	x	x
Key antecedents and consequences							
Education		x	x	x	x	x	x
Income		x	x	x	x	x	x
Education partner			x	x	x	x	x
Income partner		x	x	x	x	x	x
Attitudes (gender, family)	x	x	x			x	x
Occupational interests / skills	x	x	x				
Parental socio-economic status	x						

Preliminary findings and outlook

Table 2 presents the results of the preferred five-class solution. Upon examination of the class patterns of the conditional probabilities, we labelled the care-employment configurations as "full-time working singles" (40%), "childless dual-earner couples" (34%), "parents – work diverse" (13%), "parents – main earner" (8%) and "single parents" (4%) The family-employment configuration most prevalent in early adulthood is that of full-time working single where the classification single refers to partnership status rather than household composition since the latter shows that people in this class most often live in the parental home (0.53), but also with other adults (0.21) or indeed alone (0.25). The second largest class consists of people who co-reside with their partner (cohabiting or married), have no children and both work full-time. The third and fourth class consists of parents with various employment arrangements. One differentiation is that of a main earner in the class consisting of 8% of the sample versus a variety of employment combinations in the other class (13%). But the differentiation of partnered parents in two separate classes may in part be a result of

over extraction or driven by the main respondent being a man (main earner class) versus a woman (diverse work class). Closer examination of these preliminary results is necessary. Finally, the smallest class with only 4% of respondents consists of non-employed single parents.
Because later ages will involve more input information on care tasks, how exactly the family-care-employment configurations will look is hard to anticipate as are the relationships between the different types of configurations over time. A potential finding concerns the question whether we will observe specialization over the life course in either work or care or whether more hybrid work-care trajectories, for instance in which individuals combine care and work simultaneously or successively, can be identified as well.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of input variables for family-employment configurations at age 26 and conditional Probabilities (n=7,992)

		Descriptives whole sample (%)	*Conditional Probabilities and class size*				
			Full-time working singles (40%)	*Childless dual-earner couples (34%)*	*Parents – work diverse (13%)*	*Parents – main earner (8%)*	*Single parents (4%)*
Household composition[a]	*No other adults*	13.7	0.25	0.01	0.01	0.01	**0.80**
	Partner	52.1	0.01	**0.92**	**0.93**	**0.95**	0.04
	Parents / siblings	23.5	**0.53**	0.04	0.05	0.04	0.02
	Others	10.7	0.21	0.04	0.02	0.01	0.14
Partnership status	*Single*	44.5	**1.00**	0.00	0.00	0.00	**1.00**
	Cohabiting	29.7	0.00	**0.45**	**0.65**	**0.72**	0.00
	Married	25.8	0.00	**0.55**	0.35	0.28	0.00
Parenthood status	*No children*	72.7	**0.97**	**0.97**	0.13	0.00	0.00
	1 child	15.9	0.03	0.03	**0.41**	**0.63**	**0.58**
	Two + children	11.5	0.00	0.00	**0.46**	0.37	**0.42**
Employment status	*FT*	73.7	**0.81**	**0.94**	0.00	**1.00**	0.17
	PT	7.98	0.04	0.03	0.35	0.00	0.19
	In education	2.91	0.05	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.02
	No work	15.42	0.10	0.02	**0.63**	0.00	**0.61**
Employment status partner	*No partner*	44.8	**1.00**	0.00	0.00	0.00	**1.00**
	FT	38.8	0.00	**0.83**	**0.62**	0.33	0.00
	PT	3.4	0.00	0.04	0.04	0.21	0.00
	In education	5.7	0.00	0.10	0.15	0.05	0.00
	No work	7.4	0.00	0.04	0.20	0.41	0.00

Note: Conditional probabilities indicate the probability of being at a particular level on an indicator variable conditional on being in that latent class. [a] Household composition refers to the presence of other adults; all household types may contain children. "Others" refers to relatives other than parents/siblings and non-related adults.

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