

**ICS PhD project 4:
A life-course perspective on work-care patterns and their consequences**

Aim

To improve our understanding of economic gender inequalities by 1) taking an integrative perspective on work-care patterns incorporating both child care and informal care and by acknowledging that previous care roles likely induce later care roles and 2) assessing consequences of different work-care patterns for economic outcomes of men and women.

Theoretical background

The deeply gendered nature of work-care divisions in post-industrialized countries worries policymakers and the general public. Policy measures meant to tackle the resulting unequal economic outcomes for men and women are typically focused on young parents (e.g., parental leave and daycare provisions). But in current-day societies the demand for another type of care, informal care provided to family and friends, is rising due to welfare state reforms and population aging. This type of care is also less concentrated in one particular part of the life-course and less predictable in intensity and duration. This means that throughout extended periods of life the need to combine work and care - be it for children or other family members - arises for ever larger parts of the population.

Social science research into the interrelations of paid work and care has treated childrearing and informal care mostly as separate life domains. 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. However, by focusing on relations between work and care at a single stage in the life-course, previous research neglects 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 (unintended) path dependencies and anticipation. This project therefore examines work-care trajectories in a more integrated and complete perspective than previous research by (a) focusing on patterns over the lifespan and (b) taking a broader perspective on care, which includes childrearing as well as informal care provided for family and friends. This project's first research question is which work-care trajectories can be distinguished and whether these trajectories differ between men and women. Core theories used in family sociology predict specialization over the life-course in either work or care. In contrast, based on increased options and normative pressure to combine work and care we may expect hybrid work-care trajectories as well. Gender role theory predicts women to be overrepresented in care-dominated trajectories. Because the differences between men and women in providing informal care tend to be smaller than in providing childcare, our integrated perspective on care may yield a more nuanced picture of this.

The second research question relates to the consequences of work-care trajectories in terms of economic outcomes (e.g., wages). This project examines whether the impact of work-care trajectories on economic outcomes differs for men and women, and depends on institutional and cultural variations in macro and meso contexts (e.g., countries, workplaces, occupational groups). Existing literature argues and shows that providing care (regular child care as well as informal care) deteriorates economic outcomes, in particular for women. Care-dominated trajectories are therefore expected to result into cumulative economic disadvantages over the life-course. However, we argue it is important to also consider potential self-selection into certain work-care trajectories, originating from a preference for communal roles.

Research design

The lifecourse approach implies the use of (panel)data containing prospective and retrospective information about paid work and care tasks (for the Netherlands the LISS panel, including a module on 'retrospective caregiving careers' and panel data from other countries, e.g., DE: GSOEP, UK: BCS70/BHPS). Advanced statistical techniques will be used to identify work-care trajectories (e.g., (multichannel) sequence analysis) and the consequences for economic outcomes.

Literature

- Aisenbrey, S., & Fasang, A. (2017). The interplay of work and family trajectories over the life course: Germany and the United States in comparison. *American Journal of Sociology*, 122(5), 1448-84.
- Carmichael, F., & Ercolani, M. G. (2016). Unpaid caregiving and paid work over life-courses: Different pathways, diverging outcomes. *Social Science and Medicine*, 156, 1-11.

Project initiators

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Location

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