ABSTRACT

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2014

SESSION III: FUNCTIONS OF FAMILY SOCIAL NETWORKS

Angelika TÖLKE, German Youth Institute, Germany
Heike WIRTH, GESIS - Leibniz Institute for Social Science, Germany

FAMILY FORMS, EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS AND THE WELLBEING OF PARENTS AFTER THE GERMAN REUNIFICATION: THE EFFECT OF DIFFERENT ECONOMIES AND CULTURES

Keywords: Employment patterns, parents, wellbeing, eastern and western Germany

Introduction
Changes in family lives are closely related to the societal context. Germany offers an example par excellence for analyzing these effects. After a joint past until the Second World War, Germany was divided into two separate and independent parts: German Democratic Republic (GDR) and Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). For about 40 years family policies and labor market policies in the GDR and FRG were characterized by opposite guiding principles. In the GDR full-time employment of women was commonplace and their participation in the labor market was strongly supported by the government even if they had small children. Public facilities for childcare were sufficiently offered starting in the first year of life of children. In the Federal Republic of Germany most people tend not to approve the labor force participation of mothers. It was a common opinion that pre-school children - especially up to kindergarten age - were likely to suffer if their mother worked. Facilities for childcare usually started at the age of three, often only half-day; child care for smaller children usually had to be organized privately. Moreover, in West Germany married couples in contrast to those cohabiting were supported by the state in different ways. For instance, they received tax benefits if one partner stayed at home. On the other hand, in East Germany the family status did not imply far-reaching consequences.

After German reunification in 1989 the family policies of both parts of Germany were harmonized, meaning that the policies prevalent in western Germany were transferred to eastern Germany. However the well developed facilities of publicly financed childcare were largely maintained in
eastern Germany whereas in western Germany the availability of childcare facilities was only gradually improved over time. The labor markets were different in both parts of Germany with a significantly higher unemployment rate in the eastern part.

Hence, our paper focuses on how the marriage behavior as well as the employment behavior has changed since reunification. To what extent does the employment behavior of married and cohabiting parents in eastern Germany falls in line with western Germany? Have patterns of employment of parents in eastern and western Germany converged over the last two decades or have differences persisted? The focus of our analyses covers the changes of the following three main patterns of employment: (1) the traditional employment pattern which is characterized by a male breadwinner and a female homemaker, (2) the semi-traditional employment pattern with the man working full-time and the woman working part-time, and (3) the egalitarian employment pattern where both partners work about the same amount.

Moreover, a further aim of this paper is to examine the impact of employment patterns and family status on mothers and fathers well being in both parts of Germany. The analyses of the wellbeing in one’s family cover three dimensions with the following aspects: (1) Personal strain: worries; stress; overwhelmed with parental role. (2) Leisure time: family, partner or individually centered activities. (3) Fulfillment of family life: family climate; happiness in partnership; joy of mother-/fatherhood (cf. Tölke, Angelika/Wirth, Heike 2013).

Hypotheses

(1) Stating a general decrease in marriages we expect that the situation in western Germany will become more like the one in eastern Germany. (2) The increasing number of employed women in western Germany might end up in more egalitarian employment patterns implying a convergence from west to east. (3) Based on widespread attitudes in western Germany the labor market participation of mothers results in being overburdened and in a suffering of all family members. Consequently the well being should be lower in egalitarian working couples at least in Western Germany; eastern couples might be familiar with this working arrangement because of their (or their parents) experiences in the former GDR.

Data and Methods

Data from the German Microcensus 1991 to 2009 are used to describe the changes in family status and in the employment behavior of parents in eastern and western Germany. The German Microcensus is a 1% sample of the total population living in Germany and is conducted by the Federal Bureau of Statistics. The data provide information on the economic and social situation of the population as well as on employment, the labor market and the educational system.

The analyses of the well being of mothers and fathers employ data of the cross-sectional survey Growing up in Germany (AID:A) conducted in 2009 (Rauschenbach, Thomas 2012). The focus of AID:A is on children’s, teenager’s and adult’s life circumstances, their stresses and strains, their family structure as well as their socio-economic situation. Thus the AID:A data enable us to examine the everyday family life. In total AID:A includes 25,000 individuals aged 0 to 55 years. In our analysis we study mothers and fathers aged 18 to 55 living with at least one child under the age of 18 years.

In the first part of our analysis we describe changes in marriage patterns and employment patterns at intervals of five years starting in 1991. Eastern and western Germany is compared and the descriptive results are differentiated by the age of the youngest child in the household. In order to study the wellbeing of fathers and mothers several items were selected from AID:A and three main dimensions were defined via exploratory factor analysis: personal strain, leisure time, and fulfillment of family life.

Main Findings
How have the employment patterns of parents changed over time? In both parts of Germany there is an increase in semi-traditional working arrangements (man working full-time, woman working part-time) and a decrease in egalitarian employment patterns with both partners working equal amounts. Contrary to our expectations, in western Germany the family status seems to become less important for the employment pattern of parents but it didn’t gain importance in eastern Germany. Nevertheless, even 20 years after reunification there are remarkable differences in the labor force participation in eastern and western Germany. Parents living in the eastern part are more likely to have egalitarian working arrangements than those in western Germany. Moreover, in eastern Germany the age of the youngest child is less important in determining parent’s pattern of employment than in the West. In western Germany the parental division of labor market participation is still strongly influenced by the age of children. For couples living with children under the age of 3, the traditional employment pattern (male breadwinner/housewife) is predominant. In families with school age children, there is a trend towards semi-traditional employment patterns, with the man working full-time and the woman working part-time. Even though the facilities for childcare for pre-school children have improved in western Germany, the percentage of couples practicing an egalitarian employment pattern has decreased. Thus it seems that couples in western Germany are still bound to the traditional gender-based division of labor whereas parents in eastern Germany adhere more to egalitarian patterns. In eastern Germany most mothers currently working part-time would like to work more and many of those who are not employed would like to work. Their current working arrangements are often not chosen voluntarily but are a result of the difficult labor market in eastern Germany. Employment patterns work as time-frames for the everyday life of families and affect the division of housework, the responsibility for childcare and other family activities to a large extent. Therefore, we expected that the wellbeing and personal strain of mothers and fathers would differ with respect to their currently practiced employment pattern. However, our results give evidence that there is neither a systematic correlation between employment patterns and wellbeing nor between employment patterns and personal strain. Beyond this, one compelling finding is that although one would expect more “double burden” in eastern German families as these parents more often practice egalitarian working patterns the opposite is the case. Parents in eastern Germany spend more leisure time with their family and are happier with their family life than their counterparts in western Germany. In comparison East-German fathers are on average the happiest group studied followed by East-German mothers. On average West Germans are less happy with their family life. To explain these differences further analyses will be continued which will focus on the role of fathers. The quality of relationship and parenthood might depend on their egalitarian involvement in household tasks and childcare responsibilities. But even cultural norms and habits experienced during the time of the former GDR such as perceiving ones family as a “retreat” might also play a role here. Besides these east-west differences the family development (i.e. the number of children and the age of the youngest child) is important for determining wellbeing. With increasing age of the youngest child worries and stress increases in the east and west as well as for mothers and fathers, whereas the number of children is a major concern only for mothers. Family enlargement with a second child reduces the wellbeing of mothers significantly compared to the one-child family stage.

References