

How family policies and gender culture moderate husband effects on women's labour market outcomes in Europe?

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Abstract

Understanding the way in which individual's labour market outcomes are influenced by other household members has become indispensable and very timely against the background of current demographic and social developments like the rise of female employment and the increasing trend of assortative mating. Previous research on the question how the male partner's labour market position affects female employment has provided mixed results: some studies have indicated that women married to a higher earning partner are less likely to be employed, while others have found that women's occupational attainment and wages benefit from having a high status partner (e.g. Verbakel & de Graaf, 2008; Shafer, 2011). Moreover, Blossfeld and Drobnic (2001) have shown that the way in which the husband affects female employment differs between welfare states, but to date there is no research explicitly testing which country characteristics contribute to the cross-national differences.

In this study, we conduct multilevel analyses of the EU-SILC data whereby the moderating effect of macro level determinants like parental leave regulations, split or joint taxation, childcare provision, female employment rate and the gender wage gap is examined. Our aim is to investigate how family policies and gender culture matter in moderating the effects of the husband's socio-economic position on the wife's labour market outcomes in European countries. The general hypothesis is that women's work hours and job level will be less affected by their partner's education level and occupational position in countries with better family policies - such as maternity leave and childcare provision - and countries with higher cultural support for gender equality and maternal employment.

To test the differences in husband effects across 28 countries in Europe, the analysis is based on the comparable micro-data from the European Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC). We use the EU-SILC 2018 longitudinal panel dataset which provides the respondents' and their adult household members' socio-demographic profile and longitudinal information on their employment situation from 2015 to 2018. The analyses are restricted to women living with a heterosexual partner and aged from 25 to 55. Taking the advantage of longitudinal data, we estimate the influence of the husband's educational and occupational position at time t_0 on women's working time and job level at t_1 . A time-lag between dependent variables and independent variables is opted for to minimize problems of selectivity and reversed causality. Country-level data including measures of family policies and gender culture stem from the OECD Database and the European Social Survey (ESS). The analytical strategy involves multilevel analysis with cross-level interactions between the country-level factors and the husband's education, occupation and earnings.

The preliminary results show that there is substantial cross-national variation in the effects of the husband's labour market position (occupation & earnings) on their female partner's job level and work hours. We find for instance that the husband's job level is positively associated with women's work hours in countries like Estonia, France and Poland; while this association is negative in countries like Germany, Hungary and Italy. Whereas in countries with less support for working women a higher educated partner reduces the work hours of women, this is less the case in countries with support for working women. The opposite is true for countries with a strong attitudinal support for traditional gender roles.

References

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