

## **Time with children, time at work: Changes in Germany between 1991/92 and 2001/02 and in Austria between 1992 and 2008/09**

### *Extended abstract*

It has become rare for women to interrupt their employment career for an extended period of time after the birth of a child. Consequentially, within families the dual earner model increasingly replaces the male earner model. Both partners work in 55% of couples in Germany when their youngest child is aged three to five and 65% in Austria (Statistik Austria 2011; Statistisches Bundesamt 2011). These couples face the challenge to combine work demands with time for their children, ideally to the satisfaction of all family members.

This study depicts trends in the child-care time of parents with children under the age of six based on time-use data for Germany from 1991/92 and 2001/02 and for Austria from 1992 and 2008/09. Its main aim is to determine which processes underlie these developments, with a focus on the role played by the employment arrangement of the couple.

It is crucial for families to spend time together. Family solidarity and identity require personal communication and interaction. As Presser states: “[I]t is important to recognize that time is the central organizing feature of family activities” (1989: 536). Shared family time is regarded as very important both by parents and children (Shaw und Dawson 2001) and is closely related to satisfaction with the family (Zabriskie und McCormick 2003). In the popular and scientific discourse it is commonly argued that families suffer from time famine. Studies based on time-use paper offer only limited empirical evidence for this claim since they document that time with childcare increased during the past decades in many Western countries (Gershuny 2000; Gauthier et al. 2004). This observation is especially puzzling in view of the increased labour force participation of mothers.

This study demonstrates that the time spend with childcare has remained relatively constant during one decade in Germany while it clearly rose in Austria during the 16-year period. The use of decompositions techniques allows clarifying which part of these trends is due to changes in the population composition (e.g. increase of employed mothers) and which part can be traced back to behavioural changes (e.g. more involvement of fathers) (Firebaugh 1997). To date, similar studies were only conducted for the United States. Germany and Austria are classified as conservative-corporatist welfare states, characterised by long parental leave of (currently) up to 36 months, high financial transfers to families, lack of child care places for under 3 year olds, re-entry of mothers in the labour market on a part-time basis and little initiatives for men to stay home with the kids. In such a context, the extent that parents dedicate to childcare may be different than in the liberal Anglo-American countries.

The analysis is based on data from the time-use surveys conducted in Germany in 1991/92 and 2001/02 and in Austria in 1992 and 2008/09. The respondents noted their activities in time intervals of five to fifteen minutes during 24 hours. The German data comprise two and three days respectively, the Austrian include one day. Information pertaining to childcare as primary and secondary activity as well as co-presence of the child is available. In this study, primary childcare is utilized since it was shown to be most consistent over time and across countries (Folbre et al. 2005;

Mullan und Craig 2009). Time use surveys produce more reliable results than retrospective questions on the amount of time needed for certain activities (Gershuny 2000). This study targets families with children under the age of six because of their high care demand and because decisions about the parent's return to the labour market are taken in this period. All four surveys contain information from both parents enabling the analysis on the level where the negotiation process takes place. The number of working hours is a key factor for child care time, since time spent outside the home on the job is not available for children. The couple's employment arrangement therefore constitutes a focal point.

Three main findings emerge from this study. First, the increase of care time in Austria can predominantly be attributed to structural changes in the population composition. Unsurprisingly, developments in the employment participation play a major role. The spread of part-time work and the declining number of fathers with non-employed partners have a positive effect on time dedicated to childcare. Additionally, the expansion of the number of mothers and fathers with tertiary education raises child care time. These developments more than offset the negative impact of the decrease of the number of non-employed and full-time employed women. In Germany, childcare time changes only marginally and both components yield a weak effect. Nevertheless, the positive effect of the increase of the number of part-time workers and the negative effect of the decreasing number of housewives hold also for this country.

Second, the employment of mothers has relatively little consequences for children, because this development is counterbalanced by other trends (e.g. higher education, fathers' involvement) and because women are very well able to protect time with their offspring. For instance, in both countries full-time and part-time employed mothers spend similar numbers of hours with their children. Previous research has highlighted that employed mothers decrease time for their personal activities, like social activities or sleep, and housework (Statistisches Bundesamt 2003) to preserve time with their children.

Third, particularly non-employed mothers and full-time employed fathers spend 2008/09 in Austria more time with their children than 16 years before. This development should not only be regarded as positive. Especially employed women may get under pressure to conform to these high time norms, but also men—still full-time employed—seem to increasingly articulate time-based conflicts. Already childless couples mention these normative expectations when reflecting about family formation (Fliegenschnee Forthcoming).

## Literature

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