

## **Trends in women's employment dynamics: examining the changing role of the woman's and her partner's social position**

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to investigate how the educational and occupational status of both partners in a couple shapes employment dynamics over women's life courses. Social stratification research has often highlighted that people's labour market outcomes are affected by the social status of their family of origin. Much less examined is the question to what extent people's employment outcomes are influenced by social status combinations in the family context in adult life.

Previous research on partner effects is based on competing hypotheses and has provided mixed results. Some studies have found that people's careers benefit from having a high status partner, which is attributed to the role of cultural and social capital transmitted between partners (Baerts, Deschacht, & Guerry, 2011; Bernardi, 1999; Bernasco, Graaf, & Ultee, 1998; Verbakel & Graaf, 2008). On the other hand, research in Germany and other European countries showed that women married to a higher status man were more likely to leave paid employment and less likely to re-enter the labour market (Blossfeld, Drobnic, & Rohwer, 2001). The latter could be explained by Becker's economic theory of marriage, whereby gender differences in expected labour market returns lead to gender role specialization within couple households.

We improve on the existing research by examining the role of the interrelationship between the social and educational status of both partners, and examining whether the effect of household human capital constellations on female employment dynamics have changed over cohorts. Investigating the role of the relationship between partner's social status is especially relevant in light of the trend partnerships to be formed between people who are similar in terms of educational level and social position (Blossfeld & Tim, 2003). Brynin & Schupp (2000) find that it is especially partnership constellations of high human capital homogamy that affect people's wages positively. We will examine whether this also holds for employment dynamics in a longitudinal perspective. A second way in which we add to the current state of research is examining whether the effects of partner's human capital on female employment transitions has changed over the cohorts. We hypothesize that in younger cohorts the negative effect of the status of her partner on women's employment will be less strong.

The analysis is performed on the German Socio-Economic Panel Study. It comprises an event history analysis of labour market exit and labour market re-entry to either full-time or part-time employment for German women aged 20 to 40. We investigate differences between four cohorts of women born between 1960 and 1980.

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