The role of part-time employment for mothers in Germany:
Stepping Stone in the East, Dead End in the West?

Julia Simonson, Laura Romeu Gordo, Nadiya Kelle
(German Centre of Gerontology, DZA)

Abstract
After childbirth many mothers in Germany restart working by means of part-time employment. This seems to be double edged. On the one hand, part-time work can be the first step towards full re-entry into the labor market; on the other hand it often implicates low-grade career opportunities and thereby entails the risk to be a dead-end for women’s careers.

In the present paper we explore part-time employment of mothers in Germany. First, we investigate what are the regional differences in part-time employment after childbirth and how these differences change with time. Second, we analyze whether part-time employment after childbirth leads to subsequent full-time employment concentrating in regional differences and changes with time.

For this purpose we examine employment histories of women from age 15 up to 45, based on the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP). To track changes over time we observe biographies of three different cohorts born in years 1936-45, 1946-55, and 1956-65. In order to answer the research questions we first track transitions from childbirth into part-time employment across cohorts to identify changes in usage of part-time employment over time. Then, transitions from part-time to full-time work are to be followed up in order to see if part-time work after childbirth increasingly lead to subsequent full-time employment.

Our results show that West German mothers increasingly use part-time employment as an alternative to non-employment. For East German mothers we do not find a gain in usage of part time as an entry employment after childbirth. Regarding the role of part-time on subsequent employment we do not find significant changes over time but we do find important differences between East and West Germany. The transition rate from part-time into full-time employment is significantly higher for East German women than for West German women.

Overall we can conclude that part-time employment in East Germany is less used than in West Germany, and women who opt for part-time employment mostly use it as a stepping stone into full-time employment. On the other hand, in West Germany part-time employment after childbirth is usually prolonged which might have negative consequences for the subsequent employment biographies.

Keywords: Women’s career, employment biography, part-time employment, event history analysis, German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP)