

The effects of unemployment on couples' division of labor

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Abstract

Despite of large changes in gender inequality in education and the labor market, the division of labor within households is still highly gendered with women carrying out much more housework than men (e.g. Bianchini et al. 2000, Bianchini et al. 2012). Previous research has suggested that the employment status of both partners plays an important role, but most previous studies have relied on cross-sectional data (e.g. van der Lippe et al. 2017) meaning that they cannot take into account selection on unobserved characteristics.

This paper aims to complement the few available longitudinal studies (e.g. Gershuny et al. 2005, Gough and Killewald 2011) by analyzing the effects of transitions from employment into unemployment on the household division of labor using data from the German Socio Economic Panel (SOEP), 1992-2015. We estimate fixed effects regression models to examine the effects of unemployment of one partner on the housework hours of both partners as well as couples' total amount of housework allowing for a detailed picture of changes in the division of labor. Moreover, the data enable us distinguishing between hours in housework and childcare as well as differentiating different tasks of housework (e.g. female-typed tasks such as washing, cleaning, cooking and male-typed tasks such as repairs).

Already Marie Jahoda and her colleagues observed in their famous Marienthal study (1975) that women tend to increase their housework hours during unemployment while men did not, but this gendered reaction to unemployment has rarely been analyzed in recent times (e.g., Shamir 1986, Gough and Killewald 2011). An analysis of the potential gender differences in the consequences of employment transitions for the household division of labor also provides a good opportunity to test different theories and hence contributes to the ongoing debates about the persistence of the gendered division of housework.