Work, health and wellbeing over the life course from a gender perspective: Evidence from two British birth cohorts

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Background

• Previous work cohort of British women born in 1946 showed long-term homemaking associated with poorer health in mid-life.

• Subsequent decline of the male-breadwinner model and marriage as social institutions, increasing diversity in family forms.

• These social changes may represent increased health opportunity
  —gender equality – women increasingly access resources through paid work rather than marriage, long-term ‘homemaking’.
  —greater choice, eg., delayed parenthood.

• and/or increased (health) risk
  —family as a site for tension and negotiation.
Aim: to characterise work, partnership and parenthood in combination across the adult life courses of British men and women in three cohorts and examine the potential impact on health and wellbeing.

Research questions:

1. Are men and women becoming more similar in the ways they combine paid employment and family life?

2. Are work-family typologies characterised by stable work and partnership histories combined with later parenthood linked with better health and wellbeing in mid-life?

- Sequence analysis is increasingly being used to states and transitions across life courses, but most examine the family, or employment, or the family and employment in the same study, but separately.

- Three previous studies using multi-channel sequence analysis to examine work and family life courses in combination, none in UK.
Datasets

**NSHD**
- Birth 1946
- 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13 yrs
- 15 yrs 1961
- 19, 20, 22, 23, 25 yrs
- 26 yrs 1972
- 31 yrs 1977
- 36 yrs 1982
- 43 yrs 1989
- N = 3,012

**NCDS**
- Birth 1958
- 7 yrs 1965
- 11 yrs 1969
- 16 yrs 1974
- 23 yrs 1981
- 33 yrs 1991
- 42 yrs 2000
- N = 9,616

**BCS**
- Birth 1970
- 5 yrs 1975
- 10 yrs 1980
- 16 yrs 1986
- 26 yrs 1996
- 30 yrs 2000
- 34 yrs 2004
- 38 yrs 2008
- 42 yrs 2012
- N = 8,158

**Datasets**
- NSHD
- NCDS
- BCS

**N**
- NSHD: N = 3,012
- NCDS: N = 9,616
- BCS: N = 8,158
Deriving work, partnerships & parenting histories using annual information ages 16-42:

**Work:**
- F/T employment
- P/T employment
- Homemaker
- Other not employed

**Partnerships:**
- Married
- Cohabiting
- Not in a live-in partnership

**Children:**
- No children in hhold
- Children <5yrs in hhold
- Children 5-16yrs in hhold

**Sequence analysis:**
- Dynamic Hamming method (Lesnard, 2006)
- Conceptual approach – comparing everyone in our sample to a set of ‘ideal types’
### ‘Ideal types’ (i)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideal type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Early stable’</td>
<td>Continuous full-time employment; married from age 21; children from age 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Later stable’</td>
<td>Continuous full-time employment; cohabiting age 26-27, married from age 28; children from age 30.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Cohabiters’</td>
<td>Continuous full-time employment; cohabiting from age 26; children from age 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Childless’</td>
<td>Continuous full-time employment; married from age 21; no children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Career’</td>
<td>Continuous full-time employment; not living with a partner, no children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Divorced lone parent’</td>
<td>Continuous full-time employment; married from 21-37, single from age 38; children from age 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideal type</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Late career break’</td>
<td>Employed full-time until age 29, homemaker from age 30; married from age 26; children from age 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Early career break’</td>
<td>Employed full-time until age 22, homemaker from age 23-30, employed part-time from age 31; married from age 21; children from age 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Part-time work’</td>
<td>Employed full-time until age 22, part-time employed from age 23; married from age 21; children from age 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Homemakers’</td>
<td>Employed part-time 16-21, full-time homemaker from age 22; married from age 20; children from age 22.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Teen parent’</td>
<td>Homemaker until age 24, employed full-time from age 25; married from age 32; children from age 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Weak ties’</td>
<td>Full-time employed 16-22, other not employed 23-26, full-time employed 27-28, other not employed 29-32, full-time employed 33-34, other not employed 35-38, full-time employed 39-40, other not employed age 41; single throughout; no children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Work-family life courses in the 1946, 1958 and 1970 cohorts

- Weak ties
- Teen parent
- Divorced lone parent
- Homemaker
- Part-time
- Early career break
- Late career break
- Career
- Childless
- Cohabiters
- Later stable
- Early stable

N=1487

N=4684

N=4932

N=3810

N=4348
Possible biological stress responses to occupation of particular work-family life courses.

NCDS 1958 cohort age 44-46 biomarkers collection

Inflammation
  - C-Reactive protein
  - Fibrinogen
  - Von Willebrand factor

Cortisol
Association between work-family types (16-42 yrs) & C-reactive protein (45 yrs)

‘Fully adjusted’ models include Rutter behaviour scales (both mother & teacher reported at 16 yrs), educational attainment (23 yrs), own occupational class (42 yrs), smoking status (42 yrs), ‘harmful drinking’ (AUDIT Questionnaire 44yrs), BMI (42 yrs)
Association between work-family types (16-42 yrs) & fibrinogen (45 yrs)

‘Fully adjusted’ models include Rutter behaviour scales (both mother & teacher reported at 16 yrs), educational attainment (23 yrs), own occupational class (42 yrs), smoking status (42 yrs), ‘harmful drinking’ (AUDIT Questionnaire 44yrs), BMI (42 yrs)
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Regression coeffs

Association between work-family life courses (16-42yrs) & AUC cortisol (45yrs)

- Gender adj
- Fully adj

‘Fully adjusted’ models include Rutter behaviour scales (both mother & teacher reported at 16 yrs), educational attainment (23 yrs), own occupational class (42 yrs), smoking status (42 yrs), ‘harmful drinking’ (AUDIT Questionnaire 44yrs), BMI (42 yrs)
Impact on wellbeing in later life of occupation of particular work-family life courses.

NSHD 1946 cohort age 60-64 data collection

- Diener Satisfaction with Life Scale
- 28 item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ)

Extended work-family sequences to age 59 and added early retirement groups
Association between work-family life courses (16-59 yrs) & Deiner Life Satisfaction score (60-64yrs)

Regression coefficient

Gender-adjusted

Fully adjusted

‘Fully adjusted’ models include gender, childhood social class, childhood behavioural difficulties (parent reported age 15), educational attainment, occupational class of head of household (age 53), doctor diagnosed health conditions.
Association between work-family life courses (16-59yrs) & GHQ28 score (60-64yrs)

Regression coefficient

Gender-adjusted

Fully-adjusted

‘Fully adjusted’ models include gender, childhood social class, childhood behavioural difficulties (parent reported age 15), educational attainment, occupational class of head of household (age 53), doctor diagnosed health conditions.
Are men and women becoming more similar in the ways they combine paid employment and family life?

Men and women are becoming more similar in the ways they combine paid employment and family life due to more women adopting continuous full-time employment rather than any shift in men’s employment patterns to accommodate parenthood.

Women remain much more likely than men to take a career break and/or working part-time.

Dramatic emergence of ‘Career/No family’ -- both men and women working full-time without entering partnership or parenthood by 42.

Parenthood increasingly delayed and combined with long periods of cohabitation.
Are work-family typologies characterised by stable work and partnership histories combined with later parenthood linked with better health and wellbeing in mid-life?

In 1958 British birth cohort:

Teen parents have higher levels of inflammation in mid-life independent of education, occupational class, and health-related behavior in adulthood.

Suggestion that educational advantages associated with delayed parenthood linked with advantageous occupational class, relatively healthier lifestyles and, ultimately, lower levels of systemic inflammation in mid-life.

In 1946 British birth cohort:

Long-term homemakers had lower life satisfaction and more symptoms of psychological distress.

Childless men and women had lower life satisfaction regardless of marital relationships.
Thank you