

‘Work-life balance’, the family cycle and changes in satisfaction with leisure time

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Sixty years ago, Alva Myrdal (1965) commented on the relatively greater ‘cumbersomeness’ of children in modern, market-based societies. This points to how there are specific periods in individuals’ lives, especially those linked to family and professional transitions, which often bring about conflicting demands on time. Gershuny (2003) recently noted the importance of family stages on men’ and women’s pattern of time use and its potential long-run consequences. However, within the ‘work-life balance debate’ more attention has tended to be paid to the ‘work’ side of the equation, rather than the substantial falls in fertility levels and increase in the amount of time dedicated by families to childcare over recent decades. This analysis uses respondents’ satisfaction with their amount of leisure time as a measure of the ‘time pressure’ in their lives, and takes advantage of the longitudinal nature of the ECHP to examine the impact of family transitions like partnership formation or the arrival of new children in a household upon such time pressure, comparing women and men in different household types, with different employment histories and other characteristics (age, level of education, income). The ECHP allows us to link changes in satisfaction with leisure time to the characteristics of respondents and households *before* these transitions took place, as well as changes associated with progression in family stages itself. Limitations of the data unfortunately mean that the UK and Germany are excluded from the analysis. We are particularly interested in comparing the effects of the arrival of children with other changes in respondents’ status (such as changes in working time or activity status and the formation or dissolution of partnerships) upon time pressure. Comparisons across countries allow us to examine the effect of different social policy contexts. Comparing household characteristics (e.g. single vs. dual parents; presence, age and number of children; labour market situation of each of the parents; their relative contribution to the family income; and whether childcare is purchased) allows us to examine the effect of the rise in women’s employment and the nature of any move away from the ‘male breadwinner’ division of responsibilities between career and family.

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Myrdal, Alva (1965): *Nation and Family*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Gershuny, Jonathan (February 2003) “Time, through the Lifecourse, in the Family,” *Working Papers of the Institute for Social and Economic Research*, paper 2003-3. Colchester: University of Essex.

Table XY: Estimation of covariate effects on changes in satisfaction with leisure time (pk004), Logit discrete model, for men/women (ECHP, 8 waves).

	Increase in satisfaction						Decrease in satisfaction					
	Denmark	The Netherlands	France	Italy	Spain	Greece	Denmark	The Netherlands	France	Italy	Spain	Greece
Constant												
Age (+ age ²)												
Education - ref. primary												
Education: secondary												
Education: tertiary												
Family status - ref. single												
Living with parents												
Living in couple: cohabit												
Living in couple: married												
Separated/divorced/widowed												
Activity status - ref. working: employed												
In education												
Working: self-employed												
Unemployed												
Retired												
Other inactive												
Type of contract - ref. permanent												
Temporary												
Working hours - ref. 35-40												
0-25												
26-34												
40 +												
Partner labour status - ref. employed												
Unemployed												
Inactive												

Birth of child - ref. no birth

1st child

Subsequent children

Number of children present

Age of youngest child

0-3 years

3-5 years

6-16 (or still in school)

+16 (or after end of school)

Household income

Share contribut. to income

Looks daily after child(ren)

Pays for childcare

Events

+: 90% significance

*: 95% significance

**: 99% significance level