

How much time ‘left over’ for one’s self after paid and unpaid work? A comparison between childless couples and couples with children in France and UK

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

By the end of the nineties and the early 2000s, in most OECD countries the male-breadwinner household has been replaced by the dual-earner couple (OECD, 2007). Most mothers are in paid work, especially when children go to school. But while the rise in women’s participation in the labor market – in particular among mothers – has been accompanied by a decline in total unpaid work hours, an enduring gender asymmetry in family involvement is persisting in countries with different welfare regimes like UK and France (Bianchi and Milkie, 2010, Gregory and Milner 2010, Hook, 2010, Windebank, 2001). Against this economic and social background, changes over the last decades in families’ allocation of paid and unpaid work have been therefore well documented.

But what about the time ‘left over’ for one’s self after paid and unpaid work? Having children is time-consuming. And working concomitantly on a full-time basis is also associated with heavy time/spatial constraints. Therefore our aim here is to address the following issues: how much time is “left over” for one’s self after paid and unpaid work in dual-earner couples where both partners work full time? How strong are dissimilarities between men and women and between couples with or without children? And do differences vary across two countries – France and UK - with different welfare regimes in particular as far as childcare policies are concerned.

In the first part of our paper, their family-related policies (in particular the financial support for families with children through income taxation and family benefits) and the characteristics of childcare provision and childcare arrangements are described to set our results into their respective institutional and social policy context. Then methodology and results are presented. In the final section, adopting a national comparative perspective, we try to explain the similarities and differences observed between childless couples and couples with children and between fathers and mothers. Implications in terms of time cost of children for parents are also discussed.

Problematic and hypotheses

- 1) Setting the institutional and cultural context

During the period under examination (1998-2002) France and UK represented two different welfare regimes. They also differed in terms of support provided to working parents, and at the time the surveys were carried out UK was a laggard country as far as childcare provision was concerned. Public spending on childcare, including early education services, was low at around 0.5% of GDP compared with 1.4% in France (OECD, 2002).

Generous policies to support working parents in France

France is part of the cluster of countries whose welfare regimes are qualified ‘conservative-corporative’, sometimes also termed ‘continental’, ‘corporatist’, or ‘Bismarckian’ (Arts, Gelissen, 2002). Notable features are high levels of spending and payroll tax financing with most benefits dependent on previous contributions and socio-professional status. As far as the main social insurance programmes are concerned, e.g. pension, health care and disability, the French welfare state is consistent with this description. Its family policy is explicit, clearly defined, and generous in terms of cash benefits. The appointment of a minister responsible for family issues demonstrates the importance given to this issue. This translates into a system of transfers with their roots in a long-established *natalist* tradition which continues to favour large families. The taxation system favours married couples where only one of the spouses is in paid work. France also strongly differs from UK with regard to child care policy and public support to working mothers (Fagnani, 2007, Crompton, Ekert-Jaffe et al. , 2002 etc...). Along with the Nordic countries, France leads the European Union in public childcare provision and benefits aimed at reducing child care costs (Fagnani, Math, 2007). This is paid by the Family branch of the Social Security (National Family Allowance Fund, CNAF) and partly funded by social contributions paid by employers.

In the late 1990s, around 27 percent of children aged under 3 with both parents working full time attend a childcare centre and 18 percent are cared for by a childminder. Almost all children aged between 3 and 6 attended *école maternelle* on a full-time basis. There are generous childcare allowances and tax breaks for relatively well-paid parents to hire a licensed childminder or a nanny at home.

As far as child rearing norms are concerned, while it is largely accepted for a mother of a young child to work full time, it is still assumed that she retains most of the caring and household tasks. For example parental leaves are implicitly aimed at working mothers despite gender-neutral rhetoric of the decision-makers (Fagnani, Math, 2009). However highly-qualified mothers rarely avail themselves of parental leave because opportunity costs would be too high.

Low public spending on childcare in the UK at the beginning of the new millennium

The UK is classified as ‘liberal welfare’ regimes, sometimes also termed ‘Anglo-Saxon’ (Leibfried, 2000). Taxes and spending have long remained low compared to those of other affluent democracies. Many transfer programmes are still means tested. These welfare state arrangements operate in the context of liberal market economies.

UK puts a strong emphasis on vertical redistribution, favouring families with modest revenues. Since 1997 however, there has been a series of government initiatives including increased support for childcare and improved maternity leave provision. In 2002, financial support was given to 180,000 low and middle-income working families (OECD, 2011).

The introduction in October 1999 of the Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) and Child Tax credits on incentives to work a minimum of 16 hours each week has had a strong effect. Since then the share of mothers (with children 0-14 years old) working less than 30 hours per week has remained however much higher than in France: respectively 55.3% and 24.3% by 2007.

Societal norms and employment patterns

Wider societal norms while supporting maternal employment also reflect assumptions about mothers as the main carers - a view that the majority of the women share in both countries under examination. Consequently labour market activity rates of men and women differ. In France and UK, more women than men work part-time (Eurostat 2009). This is influenced by the gendered distribution of caring (European Working Conditions Survey, 2005). Moreover working-time regimes are key to understanding variation in men's and women's involvement in unpaid work across countries (Hook, 2010).

Employment patterns for couple parent families with a child (aged under 6 years) differed considerably (at the time the surveys were carried out) between the two countries and still differ nowadays. Share of couples where both parents work full-time are much less frequent in the UK than in France (Table 1). In the UK where the model of the 'modified male breadwinner model' still prevailed in the late nineties, women in couple parent families work much more frequently part time than their French counterparts. Conversely, in 2002, men full-timers in the UK worked some of the longest hours in Europe and more than their French counterparts (OECD, 2002). Indeed the long-hour culture is deeply entrenched in the British society along with the 'ideal-worker' norm.

2) Hypotheses

- Taking into consideration the strong selection bias in the UK and the multiple opportunities for dual-earner couples to rely on paid domestic help (declared or undeclared), we hypothesize that "leisure" will be more important in this country than in France for couple families all other things being equal.

- Family policies and in particular childcare policies matter and partly explain the differences between UK and France.

Data and methodology

We used data from the French INSEE 1998-1999 time use survey and the Time Use Survey 2000-2001 carried out in the UK.

In order to correct for the bias that follows from our selection of full-time participants in the labor force, 'leisure' is estimated with employment (Ekert-Jaffe, 2010 and 2011)

As a matter of fact, the selection bias is strong in the UK where mothers working full time were more likely to be highly qualified and career-oriented than in France: 41% were managers, executives and professionals and 22% were classified as intermediate level occupations. Around half of them could afford to rely on a declared home helper (either to clean the house and/or to care for the child). The others might have made the choice to hire an undeclared and less paid person.

On the other hand the majority of women who live with a partner and have no child or only one child aged more than three work full-time. As soon as they have a second child, most of them work part-time (usually a short part-time job). It is much less the case in France.

Some results

Childless couples have more time 'left over' for one's self after paid and unpaid work in the UK than in France (see table 2). This is especially the case for women irrespective of their economic status and women do better in this field than their male partners.

When both partners work full-time, women in the UK enjoy more time left over than their French counterparts as long as they have no children aged under three.

In couples having only one child aged under three where the man works full time and the woman part-time, time 'left over' for the mother is less important in the UK than in France: 14.7 hours compared with 15.3. This is attributable to the widespread and publicly subsidised childcare arrangements provided to working parents with children aged less than three in France.

In both countries it comes however as no surprise that time-related constraints are especially heavy when couples have young children at home: while gender asymmetry in paid and unpaid work is the rule, their time budgets are similarly constrained. However, the estimated time cost of a young child is higher in the UK. Like in France, this time cost is equally shared within couples. But to a larger extent than in France, the time left over for each spouse is depending on the degree of involvement of the mother in the labor market (in terms of the number of working hours), and is associated with a negative correlation. Contrary to France, as far as the family size is concerned, while childless women have more time left over than their partner, the burden of a large family is mainly borne by the mother.

Discussion

Time cost of children is depending on tax/benefit systems (in-kind and cash benefits) which play a key role in related paid and unpaid work decisions. But trade-offs and compromises in regard to the time devoted to the children are also strongly influenced by norms and values. Work/life balance policies matter. They mirror however the dominant value systems (and interact with them) in regard to childrearing and family obligations.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that time cost of children has been underestimated in both countries and that it is slightly higher in the UK when a couple has a young child aged under three. Why is it at stake that society needs to **recognize** the time costs of children for parents? If children are considered a 'common good' and will ensure the sustainability of our pension schemes, then the future of our societies will depend on the level of support provided to working parents.

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Table 1: Trends in Employment patterns for couple parent families with a child under 6: 1999-2007

	Both parents full-time 1999	Both parents full-time 2007	Man full-time, woman part-time 1999	Man full-time, woman part-time 2007	Man full-time, woman not working 1999	Man full-time Woman not working 2007	Neither parent and other 1999	Neither parent and other 2007
UK	19.5	20.2	38.4	37.1	29.4	29.4	7.0	13.3
FRANCE	31.3	38.4	19.7	21.8	35.1	29.6	2.4	10.3

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Source: OECD, Family database (updated 2010)
www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database

Table 2: Amount of time ‘left over’ for one’s self after paid and unpaid work per day (including weekends) in hours and minutes, according to woman’s economic status and by number and age of children under 15

Types of couples	Both working Full Time		Wife working Part Time		Wife not in paid work		Total	
	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman
France Total sample (with or without children)	15.2	14.5	15.3	15	15.5	16.7	15.3	15.2
UK Total sample (with or without children)	15.5	15.3	15.3	15.7	15.4	16.8	15.4	15.8
<u>Childless couples</u>								
France	15.5	14.7	15.5	15.2	15.5	17.3	15.5	15.4
UK	15.7	15.7	15.9	16.4	15.9	18.2	15.8	16.2
Number of children								
1 aged 3 - 14								
France	15.2	14.4	15.5	15.2	16.2	17.1	15.5	15.2
UK	15.4	15.1	15.4	16.2	15.3	16.9	15.4	15.8
1 aged under 3								
France	14.8	14.3	15.2	15.3	16.6	16.7	15.4	15.1
UK	13.9	14.4	14.7	14.7	15.6	15.8	14.8	14.9
2 aged 3-14								
France	15	14.4	15.1	14.6	15.5	16.4	15.2	15
UK	15.1	14.6	14.9	15.2	15.6	16.5	15.1	14.4
2 of which 1 under 3								
Fr.	13.6	13.6	14.9	14.8	14.5	15.8	14.5	14.9
UK.	(15.2)	(13.6)	14.5	14.8	14.9	15.6	14.8	14.9
3 aged 3 - 14								
France	13.9	13.6	14.4	13.8	14.7	15.7	14.4	14.4
UK	(14.3)	(14.9)	15.4	14.7	14.6	16.6	14.9	15.3

Reading: Among French dual-earner couples, 46% have 2 dependent children; on an average day (weekday or weekend), the man has 15.2 hours’ personal time (including sleep) and his spouse has 14.5 hours. Population of reference: couples aged under 60 of whom the man works full-time, where the completed questionnaire is fully usable and meet robustness conditions.

Source: INSEE Enquête Emploi du Temps 1998-1999 ; UK Time Use Survey 2000-2001.

Table 2 (continued): Characteristics of the households according to the number and age of children living in the household

Types of couples		Both working Full Time	Wife working Part Time	Wife not in paid work	Total Sample
2. Demographic features : insights Demographic selection	France	0.96	1.98	1.98	1.49
	UK	0.85	1.39	1.48	
Mean number of children					
Mean number of children aged 0-14	France	0.67	1.06	1.04	0.86
	UK	0.55	1.07	1.29	0.89
% couples with at least a child aged under 3	France	12	16	22	17
	UK	8	19	28	16
% couples with at least 2 children aged 0-14	France	18	38	35	40
	UK				
Total number of Households	France	1182	634	631	2447
	UK	657	542	315	1514
%	France	49	25	26	100
	UK	43	35	20	100
Number of Diaries Size Random drawing for UK	France	2364	1268	1262	4894
	UK	1801	1823	857	4181