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# Full-time Working Couples and Their Life Course

## An Analysis of Leaving Full-time Employment

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### Abstract

In the initial phase of family formation a majority of all spouses works full-time. As a result most couples start off as full-time working couples. We used complete career reports of 2.014 couples from the Netherlands to answer the question of which life-course events and individual social resources determine a couple's exit from dual full-time employment. We estimated the probability of leaving full-time work with dynamic competing risk models. Our results indicate that family transitions such as a first childbirth, family growth and mobility cause a couple to leave full-time work. Results also showed that men raised in high educated families favour an arrangement in which their wife works part-time as opposed to becoming a housewife. By contrast, a high status occupation keeps women in dual full-time employment.

**Keywords:** Full-time working, Couples, Event history analysis, Life course

## 1. Introduction

In this article we analyse the transition from full-time work by both spouses to a different arrangement of working hours in the Netherlands. Over the last 40 years, Dutch society has experienced historical changes, creating new opportunities for women in the labour market (Hakim, 2000). Increased educational levels, economic welfare, women's emancipation and a growing availability of childcare facilities are all foundations for female labour market participation, resulting in a rise of dual working couples. Still, the number of full-time working couples in the Netherlands is rather low compared to other Western countries (De Graaf and Vermeulen, 1997; Hakim, 1997; Henkens, Grift and Siegers, 2002; Smith, 2005). This begs the question of why couples in the Netherlands that almost all started initially as full-time working couples stopped doing so.

Couples' decision to discontinue full-time employment is undoubtedly a tough one (Moen and Roehling, 2005). Paid labour yields financial opportunities and supports building an own occupational career. Yet, full-time work may cause serious fine-tuning problems between caring tasks, leisure, social contacts and work obligations (Gershuny and Sullivan, 1998; Roehling, Moen and Batt, 2003). Many scholars have focused on women's transitions from full-time to part-time work, and investigated new patterns in the division of paid and unpaid labour between men and women (Hakim, 1997; Stanfors, 2006; Van der Lippe and Van Dijk, 2001). This research definitely has resulted in an enhancement of scientific knowledge on the occupational careers of women. It has hardly addressed questions at the couple level though. Female participation has remained the focal point of most studies, overlooking the fact that decisions on working full-time are taken by women and men in a family context.

In this article a life-course perspective is used to investigate the full-time working of couples in detail. The growing interdependency of occupational careers of husbands and wives calls for research that acknowledges this (Abroms and Goldscheider, 2002; Blossfeld and Drobnic, 2001; Han and Moen, 2001; Mano-Negrin and Kirschenbaum, 2000). We think progress can be made on at least four domains. First, we here consider dual full-time work as the outcome of a negotiation process that takes place among spouses. Although we do not study these bargaining processes, it may be assumed that discussions on a spouse's contribution to paid and unpaid work leads to a balanced choice for a specific work arrangement. Second, we will use information on life-course transitions to understand at what points in life couples discontinue full-time work. More specifically, a first childbirth, a growing family and moving to another city may be observed as important transitions that may lead to a reorientation of a couple's work arrangement. Third, we will make a distinction between various exit options by applying a competing risk model. Couples may transfer into a new household working status as a result of women scaling back in working hours, women fully breaking off paid employment, or men scaling back or becoming a housekeeper. Specific expectations on the occurrence of these exit options will be discussed. Fourth, in order to deal with work related preferences as causally prior to work related choices we explicitly study socialisation aspects. We differentiate between individual socio-economic resources and parental background features since these aspects are likely to be relevant in explaining the shift from full-time work (Dryler, 1998). To answer the research questions we will employ life-course

information on 2,014 full-time working Dutch households from four representative surveys conducted between 1992 and 2003.

## **2. From an Individual to a Couple Perspective**

In recent decades, scholars have frequently focused on the difficulties women face when combining paid labour and family responsibilities (Roxburgh, 2002). It is shown that for women the presence of young children and the accompanying household chores seriously interfere with an occupational career. Accordingly, women are more likely to prefer jobs and working hours that do not get in the way of family obligations (Drobnic, Blossfeld and Rohwer, 1999; Hakim, 1997). Women's decision to scale back working hours or to stop working completely is most likely driven by significant life events, like cohabitation, marriage, occupational mobility (of the spouse) and childbirth (Abroms and Goldscheider, 2002; Drobnic and Blossfeld, 2001; Hendrickx, Bernasco and De Graaf, 2001; Henkens, Grift and Siegers, 2002; Stanfors, 2006). In Europe it is found that women who kept on working after a first childbirth are most likely employed part-time (Blossfeld, 1997; De Graaf and Vermeulen, 1997). Moreover, life events cast their shadow into the future, as for women they often remain a restriction in their occupational career. Consequently, re-entry of women into full-time labour occurs only marginally (Drobnic, Blossfeld and Rohwer, 1999; Stanfors, 2006).

A possible flaw of research done so far might be that it zooms in exclusively on women's participation in paid labour and hardly pays attention to couples working full-time. The concept of interlinked careers of spouses however is meaningful in decisions taken on working hours (Abroms and Goldscheider, 2002; Macmillan and Copher, 2005). Scholars occasionally include individual characteristics of spouses in their empirical analyses, but usually central questions remain at the individual (female) level. A widely used argument for this actor-oriented research design is that there is simply little variation in male employment, as husbands overwhelmingly have full-time jobs (Hendrickx, Bernasco and De Graaf, 2001). For the Netherlands this assumption is at least questionable. Statistics Netherlands shows that the share of male employees working part-time increased from 9% in the early 1990s to 14% in 2003 (CBS, 2006). It is precisely this development that calls for a 'coupled' view on the allocation of paid work. As women increasingly enter the labour market and the number of part-time working men rises, a need for research that incorporates information on both men and women increases. This argumentation stresses that actual choice on working hours should not be studied as isolated individual acts. We assume that working arrangements are the result of negotiation processes between the two partners in a household. Consequently, investigations on the outcomes of these negotiations cannot be fully understood by looking at characteristics of women alone (Coltrane, 2000; Han and Moen, 2001; Moen and Sweet, 2003).

Previous research on coupled action explicitly deals with how partners reach a mutual understanding on their work arrangement (Corijn, Liefbroer and De Jong Gierveld, 1996; Thomson, 1990). Although we do not have detailed information on negotiations that take place within a household, shifts from a full-time employment status to an alternative work arrangement can be observed as the factual outcomes of these negotiations between spouses.

Certainly, negotiation processes between spouses are affected by previous work related preferences of both partners (Hakim, 2000). We will try to account for such prior preferences by incorporating aspects of the parental background and individual socio-economic characteristics.

### **3. Life Course Events and Full-Time Employment**

#### *3.1 Family Related Events*

In the literature on life-course transitions, a first childbirth is considered to bring about considerable change in the distribution of paid and unpaid work (Hendrickx, Bernasco and De Graaf, 2001; Stier, Lewin-Epstein and Braun, 2001; Stanfors, 2006; Van der Lippe and Van Dijk, 2001). A theoretical rationale of why a first childbirth affects the work allocation of spouses can be derived from New Home Economics, where the household is a production unit with time and monetary constraints (Becker, 1981). It is presumed that the partner who is relatively most productive in either paid or unpaid labour will specialise, because for a household that yields most profits. Becker's pivotal assumption is that women have better nursing and childrearing qualities, and are therefore more likely to specialise in unpaid labour (Becker, 1981 p. 38). At the event of a first childbirth, the need for care, nursing and education increases. Additional money maybe required to support the family. Thus, when couples start a family there is a higher chance of women discontinuing full-time employment as a result of specialisation.

On top of this, the birth of a first child triggers commonly accepted gender roles that are adopted during socialisation. This presumption, which is usually referred to as 'doing gender', calls attention to the culturally prescribed caring roles of women, whereas men's roles are usually directed at paid work (Bittman, England, Sayer, Folbre and Matheson, 2003; De Vault, 1991; Hakim, 2002). To sustain these culturally prescribed roles, gender identities have to be produced and reproduced in recurrent everyday social interaction. Women may therefore be expected to scale back their working hours when a first child is born, while men keep on working (Bielby and Bielby, 1992). Although more progressive values on sex roles have gained popularity among the population at large, traditional values on the raising and rearing of children are still believed to influence a couple's decisions on their work arrangement (Moen and Smith, 1986).

Recent research also indicates that the transition into parenthood is closely connected to (latent) preferences on the reduction of working hours, i.e. working in part-time jobs (Barber, Axinn and Thornton, 2002; Hakim, 1997, 2002). A first childbirth, then, is believed to alter a person's preferences on the combination of work and care (Clarckberg and Moen, 2001; Lee, MacDermid, Dohring and Kossek, 2005). These studies imply that having a child causes people to appreciate their family life more, which results in a reduction of working hours. These arguments lead to the following hypothesis on childbirth: The chances of discontinuing full-time employment as a couple will be higher at the moment a first child is born. From the theoretical notions above it seems most likely that women have a higher chance of discontinuing full-time employment than men, increasing the odds of a shift to a single-earner male, or traditional dual-earner construction.

In addition, keeping up full-time work for a couple may be more difficult as a family expands. According to time availability arguments (Coverman, 1985; Hiller, 1984), juggling full-time work and care for a larger number of children is more difficult. Especially when children are under the age of 12, the chances of spouses discontinuing full-time employment may be higher. From this age and beyond, children are more likely to be able to spend time without supervision, and older children may keep an eye on younger ones. Hence the family-size hypothesis reads: The chances of discontinuing full-time employment as a couple will be higher when the number of children under 12 years of age increases. Again, for women the chances of discontinuing full-time employment are probably greater, given the economic and normative arguments indicated above.

Generally, married couples are more traditional than cohabiting couples. Previous studies have shown that for women marriage actually increases hours of unpaid work and reduces participation on the labour market (Abroms and Goldscheider, 2002; Clarckberg, Stolzenberg and Waite, 1995; Kirkpatrick Johnson, 2005). Others argue that marriage itself has little impact on paid labour beyond being a parent of young children (Cohen and Bianchi, 1999). For this reason, it remains to be seen whether there is an additional effect of marriage regarding spousal exit from full-time work. We do believe that in general married couples are more traditional, and cohabiting couples have more progressive values on work and life integration. Our expectation on married versus cohabiting couples therefore reads: The chances of discontinuing full-time employment as a couple are higher for married couples than for cohabiting couples. Marriage may trigger traditional sex roles, increasing the likelihood of exiting to an arrangement where women work less or do not work. On the other hand, for cohabiting couples we expect the odds of a reduction in men's working hours to be very strong, as they adhere to more progressive values on work and life integration. This may lead to more part-time employment among men.

### *3.2 The Event of Geographical Mobility*

Previous research hardly ever studied geographical mobility as a relevant turning point in a couple's work allocation career (Wethington, Pixley and Kavey, 2003). This may seem surprising, since relocation signifies a substantial change in people's lives. Couples move for various reasons, for instance to find a better house or local environment, to start a new job or to improve job opportunities (De Jong and Fawcett, 1981). Empirical studies indicate that migration regularly takes place for the sake of a husband's career, especially in the case of long-distance moves – hence it often causes unemployment among female spouses at the new location (Bielby and Bielby, 1992; Mulder and Van Ham, 2005). In particular, lower educated women then seem to experience difficulties finding a new job. Having young children in combination with geographical mobility also hampers the re-employment of women (Smits, 1999).

How exactly does residential mobility affect a couple's full-time employment? First, moving to another city tends to be an improvement for one spouse. There is little chance that both partners will have a preferred job at a new location at the same time. This is known as the 'tied mover' effect: spouses of persons who accept a job at a sizeable distance have a higher chance of becoming unemployed (Van Ham, 2001). Migration over a small distance probably will not affect a couple's full-time employment, as commuting is a realistic option. Still,

travelling from home to work consumes additional time. A reduction in working hours of this travelling spouse, thus, may be a serious option to save time. Second, settling in a new and unfamiliar town is a time-consuming process. One needs time to adjust to the new job situation, become familiar with the environment and (re)build social contacts. This, too, might lead to a higher chance of couples discontinuing full-time employment. The geographical mobility hypothesis reads: The chances of discontinuing full-time employment as a couple will be higher when couples move to another city, and the greater the distance they move, the higher the chances of discontinuing full-time employment. As stated above, we think moving affects predominantly women in their employment. Consequently, we expect women's chances of discontinuing full-time employment to be higher than men's.

#### **4. Social Background and Full-time Employment**

So far, we have addressed a couple's transition from full-time employment as a result of life-course events. A common difficulty when estimating such transition probabilities is that prior preferences may account for the actual event. Decisions on the division of working hours within households may reflect preferences that are rooted in a person's individual background (Dryler, 1998; Stanfors, 2006). For instance, a first childbirth may be seen as an important reason to discontinue full-time employment, but it may well be that couples already made decisions on scaling back their working hours prior to the actual childbirth. Although these work related preferences are hard to measure in retrospect, we expect them to be largely accounted for by features of a person's family socialisation, educational attainment and occupational status position. In other words, in this article the absence of any direct measure of prior preferences is counteracted by the use of these structural conditions.

##### *4.1 Family Socialisation*

Individuals' preferences are shaped during interactions with peers in the context of the family, school and workplace (Hagestad, 1990). It is realistic to assume that children who have grown up with a working mother socialised in a context where female labour participation was more accepted (Glass, Bengtson and Dunham, 1986; Starrels, 1992). Maturing with a working mother will transmit more progressive attitudes on work and care to young adults than growing up with a mother who has not been in paid employment (Moen, Erickson and Dempster McClain, 1997). Next, the educational level of the parents may further contribute to the level of progressive work related values. Growing up in a family with higher educated parents will probably affect a person's preferences on the combination of work and care, since the higher educated adhere less to traditional opinions about sex role attitudes than the lower educated (Hyman and Wright, 1979). A progressive background hypothesis then reads: The chances of discontinuing full-time work as a couple will be lower for couples that grew up with a working mother and higher-educated parents. We presume this socialisation effect will be found especially among men, since for them progressive sex roles will lead to a favouring of a more equal sharing of work and care, and subsequently a higher chance of discontinuing full-time employment. In contrast, for women such a progressive family background will probably improve the chances of pursuing a professional career, so a reduction of working hours is less likely.

##### *4.2 Educational Attainment and Occupational Status*

Another aspect of prior preferences is grounded in a person's individual resources. Educational investments demand realisation of the acquired capital on the labour market (Becker, 1964), and therefore it is clear that the higher educated will participate more in full-time paid labour than the lower educated. Research has also shown that higher levels of schooling go along with progressive values on sex role attitudes, the use of childcare facilities, work commitment, and the acknowledgment of the job-reward potential of women (Desai and Waite, 1991; Drobnic, Blossfeld and Rohwer, 1999; Gornick and Meyers, 2003). Hence for the higher educated, the risk of exiting full-time employment is expected to be lower. A similar argument can be made for job status. It seems likely that people in high-status occupation are less keen on scaling back in working hours. The financial status and intrinsic benefits of a high position probably leads them to stay in full-time employment to a larger extent than people from lower status jobs. The individual resources hypothesis thus reads: The chance of discontinuing full-time work as a couple will be lower for couples with high educational levels and high occupational status positions. Once more, for men these aspects of progressive prior preferences will most likely enhance their chances of exiting full-time employment, while for women these chances will be reduced.

## **5. Data, Method and Measurement**

### *5.1 Family Surveys of the Dutch Population 1992, 1998, 2000 and 2003*

We test our hypotheses on the discontinuation of full-time employment as a couple with the Family Surveys of the Dutch Population (De Graaf, De Graaf, Kraaykamp and Ultee, 1998, 2000, 2003; Ganzeboom and Ultee, 1992). The Family Surveys are cross-sectional datasets with retrospective questioning. Every set contains different respondents that were randomly sampled from the adult Dutch population between 18 and 70 years of age. Primary respondents and their partners, in total 3.213 couples in 4 years, participated through face-to-face computer-assisted interviews and a written questionnaire. The interviews contain the complete educational and occupational career, the entire family history, and housing records of both spouses collected using retrospective structured questioning. While the primary respondent answered the written questionnaire, the interviewer conducted a computer-assisted interview with the spouse and vice versa. The formulation of the questions and the surveys' format is comparable over time.

Previous research on the quality of retrospective questioning has shown that respondents are rather accurate in recalling characteristics, like occupation, education and the birth of children (De Vries, 2006; Van der Vaart, 1996). The significance of an event, for instance a job change or a marriage, affects the strength of the memory trace, and therefore salient characteristics are less subject to measurement error or recall decay than less salient aspects such as attitudes or emotions (Eisenhower, Mathiowetz and Morganstein, 1991). Above and beyond, should any measurement error exist, it would only be problematic if a systematic measurement error was associated with either the independent or the outcome variables. In our samples there is no reason to suspect such systematic errors exist.

### *5.2 Method*

In order to test our expectations we use discrete time models (Allison, 1984). In doing so, we intend to find a better understanding of the influences of life-course transitions on a couple's



exit from a full-time working status. Not only is the timing and occurrence of events better dealt with by event history analyses, it also provides us with the ability to model family dynamics more realistically than would be possible with cross-sectional data (Heaton and Vaughn, 1995). With the use of the retrospective questions we constructed a couple-period file in which every record holds information on both spouses for that specific calendar year. Since we want to model the likelihood of discontinuing full-time employment by couples, the risk set starts at the moment both spouses are employed full-time. This can be anywhere along the life course. A couple works full-time when both spouses work at least 35 hours a week. From here on, the histories of couples are recorded in the couple-period file. Each record holds information for a particular year, i.e. job level, number of children, married or cohabiting, etc. The risk period ends when a shift from dual full-time work to an alternative working arrangement takes place. Note that both left and right censoring is possible since the observation period is limited. Spouses may have had previous relationships in which they were at risk (left censoring), but our surveys do not contain information on the careers of previous spouses. Further, events may take place after the interview was conducted (right censoring). It is generally assumed that censoring of the risk period does not cause serious problems in event-history analysis (Allison, 1984).

An exit from full-time work is defined threefold, using a competing risk model (Yamaguchi, 1991). Couples that discontinue full-time work have three outflow options: (a) a single-earner male household (women discontinue paid employment and become full-time housekeepers); (b) a combination household (women reduce their working hours and start part-time employment); (c) a role-reversal arrangement (men decide to work part-time, or become full-time housekeepers). The shift to a situation where both spouses work part-time is rare; we observed six cases, and we assigned them to the role-reversal state. We used the official definition from Statistics Netherlands to tag spouses for full-time work, part-time work or non-employment: 35 hours per week or more is considered full-time work, part-time work equals 12 to 35 hours a week, and someone working fewer than 12 hours is considered non-employed. Couples shifting from full-time work to non-employment of both spouses were removed from the risk set (9 couples). Table 1 provides an overview of the data.

**Table 1. Representation of the dataset <sup>a</sup>**

	1992	1998	2000	2003	total
Number of (ever) full-time working couples	445	552	435	582	2014
Number of full-time working couple years	1838	2284	2217	3349	9688
Transitions from full-time work to either ...					
a) women discontinuing paid employment	293	301	259	278	1131
b) women reducing working hours	93	172	118	186	569
c) men reducing hours or discontinuing paid employment	19	19	24	42	104
	405	492	401	506	1804

a A spell in the dataset starts when both spouses work full-time.

Source Family Survey Dutch Population 1992, 1998, 2000 and 2003

Compiling all four surveys into a couple-period file yields 3213 male-female couples, 2014 of which started full-time employment at some point; 62.6% of all couples worked full-time at least for a while. In total we analysed 9688 couple years with complete information, observing 1804 events. Couples that once worked full-time and changed their working status were allowed to re-enter if they restarted full-time work (150 couples). This violates the assumption of independent events. To control for this, we included a dummy in all models indicating multiple events by a couple, which is not significant in any of the models (not reported).

### *5.3 Measurements*

A first childbirth is measured as the year in which the first child is born, coded '1' in the year of birth and '0' in all other years. Family size measures the number of children below the age of 12 in a couple year. A couple has a score of '1' when they are married and a score of '0' if they cohabit. Geographical mobility is '0' in all years, except in those years couples moved to another city under the condition that the geographical distance is larger than 30 kilometres. For those years we calculated the distance in kilometres in a straight line from the place of origin to the place of destination. We included geographical distance as the natural log of distance in kilometres, since the experienced difference between a relocation of 200 or 230 kilometres is probably smaller than the difference between moving 30 or 60 kilometres. Family background is quantified as the maximum years of education of the parents and whether spouses were raised in a family with a working mother (0/1). We measured years of educational attainment of both wives and husbands (in each couple year), and the occupational status of both spouses (in each couple year) using the standard International Socio-Economic Index (ISEI) (Ganzeboom, De Graaf and Treiman, 1992).

We also included time-varying controls of duration and age. Duration was modelled as the length of time that couples are at risk, coded in segments of 5-year periods. Female age in 10-year categories was included; including both the age of women and men is problematic because of multicollinearity. Time period is included (calendar year), since the chances of couples exiting full-time employment may decrease or increase over time. Next, the hazard of discontinuing full-time employment may be related to the actual labour market conditions at the time. In an economic recession with high levels of unemployment, an exit from full-time employment may occur earlier as a result of discharges and a downsizing of firms. To control for these conditions we included national unemployment rates per year from 1948 to 2003. Table 2 gives a description of the variables. All continuous variables are bottom-coded to '0' (original value minus the minimum). Occupational status scores are divided by 10, so parameter effects reflect a 10-point increase or decrease on the ISEI status scale.

**Table2. Description of measurements: time-varying and time-fixed variables.<sup>a</sup>**

	minimu m	maxim um	mean	std
Time-varying variables				
duration	1.00	38.00	5.62	5.89
female age	17.00	66.00	30.58	8.59
national unemployment rate	0.70	11.70	5.52	2.80
time period	1948	2003	1985.32	10.51
occupational status - female	10.00	90.00	49.60	14.11
occupational status - male	10.00	88.00	49.53	15.10
first childbirth	0.00	1.00	0.11	0.31
family size	0.00	1.00	0.49	0.81
married couple	0.00	1.00	0.84	0.37
geographical mobility	0.00	6.91	0.09	0.66
Time-fixed variables				
educational level of parents - female	6.00	20.00	9.92	3.13
working mother during childhood - female	0.00	1.00	0.12	0.33
educational level - female	6.00	20.00	13.79	3.68
educational level of parents - male	6.00	20.00	9.65	3.13
working mother during childhood - male	0.00	1.00	0.13	0.34
educational level - male	11.00	20.00	15.21	3.47

a N=2.014 couples, 9688 years, calculations made on couple-year file

Source Family Survey Dutch Population 1992, 1998, 2000 and 2003

## 6. Results

### 6.1 A Description

Figure 1 presents a flowchart of the various exit options in an event history analysis of full-time working couples. Among all couples, 62.6% has worked full-time at some point and is therefore eligible for entering the risk set. A majority of couples stop working full-time somewhere along their life course, with a 52.7% exit to a single-earner male household, a 27.0% exit to a combination household, and 5% to a role-reversal arrangement. Of all full-time working couples, 15.3% keeps working full-time over the life course. Note that for these couples the event of leaving full-time employment may take place in the future (right censoring).

The numbers displayed in Figure 1 are consistent with reports from cross-sectional data; research on such data since the 1990s shows that about 15% of all Dutch couples are working full-time (Van Gils and Kraaykamp, 2004). Here we observe that many couples worked full-time at some point in their life course (62.6%), but only few remain so.

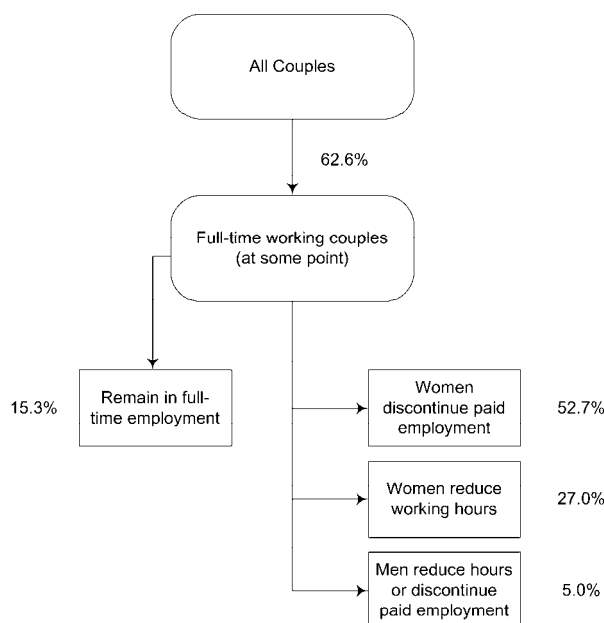


Figure 1. Full-time working couples and their exit possibilities

### 6.2 Event History Analyses of Leaving Full-time Employment

In Table 3 we present the results of a competing risk event history analysis for exiting full-time work. The regression coefficients displayed are log odds. The exponential function (exp) of the unstandardized coefficients (b) can be interpreted as follows: with every unit increase in a certain parameter, the odds of experiencing the drop-out event into another working arrangement are expected to change by a factor of  $e^b$ , all other aspects held constant. In Table 3 a couples' likelihood of discontinuing full-time work is regressed on family socialisation aspects, individual resources, relevant life-course transitions and some control variables. Model 1 introduces the controls, duration, age, labour market conditions and time period. Model 2 adds the family socialisation aspects and individual resources for women, and Model 3 includes these aspects for men. Finally, in Model 4 the life course events are introduced.

Model 1 shows the effects of duration. The longer the full-time employment spell of spouses, the lower the probability that women will reduce working hours or stop working completely. No significant duration effects are found for men. Hence exits occur primarily during the first five years of a couple's life course (reference category). The odds of couples choosing an arrangement where the wife is not in paid employment after 6 to 10 years is a factor 0.63 lower ( $e^{-.47}$ ) than the first five years, and a factor 0.25 lower ( $e^{-1.39}$ ) for couples that have been working full-time for at least 16 years. A similar pattern can be observed for the effects of female age on exiting full-time employment. The likelihood of changing a work arrangement before age 35 is highest, especially when it comes to a female partner who stops working or reduces her working hours. The significant negative effects when women have crossed the

age of 35 (contrasted with women under the age of 25) indicate that career transitions away from dual full-time employment foremost happen at an earlier age.

Surprisingly, a high national unemployment rate is only negatively associated with the likelihood of exiting to a single-earner household. Every unit increase in the national unemployment rate (percentage) decreases the risk for couples to leave full-time employment for a single-earner household by a factor of 0.96 ( $e^{-0.04}$ ). This is contrary to our expectations. A possible explanation might be that full-time working couples value job security more at times when the threat of losing a job is high. A high unemployment rate does not affect the risks for the exit to a combination or role-reversal household. Over time, we observe a trend that is similar to earlier research on cross-sectional data; over the years, the odds of entering a single-earner male household seriously decline by 6% yearly ( $e^{-0.06}$ ), whereas the odds of inflow into a combination household with a full-time working male and a part-time working female increase 4% yearly ( $e^{0.03}$ ).

With Model 2 we describe the effects of a wife's parental socialisation and her individual resources on the likelihood of leaving full-time employment as a couple. The effects of a wife's occupational status clearly stand out. A high occupational status for women decreases the risk of an exit from full-time employment – a firm confirmation of our subsequent hypothesis. With every additional 10 ISEI status points, the odds of exiting to an arrangement where wives are not employed or employed part-time diminishes by a factor of 0.86 ( $e^{-0.15}$ ) and 0.89 ( $e^{-0.11}$ ). Also, in accordance with our expectations, having had higher-educated parents slightly decreases a woman's odds of leaving full-time work. Growing up in a higher-educated family with modern sex-role attitudes might be the proposed mechanism behind this association. In contrast with our hypotheses is that higher-educated women themselves have a slightly higher chance of discontinuing full-time work – a 2% increase with every additional year of schooling. It might be that these women can afford it to a larger extent to stop working, either financially or with respect to their future career opportunities. No significant effects of female individual resources or parental socialisation for the exit to part-time work were found.

**Table 3. Discrete time event history models: log odds for couples' exit from full-time employment**

	single-earner male family (women discontinue paid work)				combination household (women start working part-time)				role-reversal arrangement (men start working part-time or housekeeping)			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
intercept	.60**	.93**	.98**	-.87**	-3.70**	-3.58**	-3.76**	-4.66**	-4.48**	-4.59**	-4.56**	-3.77**
duration in years 1-5 (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
6-10	-.47**	-.48**	-.49**	-.73**	.08	.09	.13	.12	.01	.01	.01	.11
11-15	-.73**	-.80**	-.81**	-1.24**	-.77**	-.77**	-.71**	-.61*	-.23	-.25	-.23	-.10
16-20	-1.39**	-1.50**	-1.50**	-1.66**	-.74	-.77	-.71	-.67	-1.69	-1.72	-1.70	-1.57
>20	-.16	-.32	-.33	-.45	-.78	-.82	-.74	-.78	-.20	-.24	-.22	-.05
female age	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
< 25 (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
26-35	.03	.12	.13	-.08	.05	.07	.02	-.06	-.22	-.20	-.20	-.15
36-45	-.93**	-.81**	-.80**	-1.02**	-.80**	-.74**	-.80**	-.79**	-.42	-.41	-.40	-.24
> 45	-.64*	-.49	-.49	-.36	-1.32**	-1.22**	-1.29**	-1.31**	.58	.59	.62	.80
national unemployment rate	-.04**	-.04**	-.04**	-.03*	-.02	-.02	-.02	-.02	-.02	-.02	-.02	-.02
time period (0=1948)	-.06**	-.06**	-.06**	-.04**	.03**	.04**	.03**	.04**	.01	.01	.01	.00
educational level of parents – female	-.02*	-.02	-.02	-.02	.03	.03	.01	.01	.00	.00	-.00	-.00
working mother during childhood – female	.09	.12	.12	.14	-.04	-.04	-.07	-.07	-.49	-.50	-.50	-.51
educational level – female	.02*	.02*	.02*	.02*	.02	.02	.02	.02	.03	.03	.03	.03
occupational status – female	-.15**	-.14**	-.14**	-.10**	-.11**	-.11**	-.14**	-.13**	-.04	-.04	-.04	-.05
educational level of parents – male	-.00	-.00	-.00	-.00	.05**	.05**	.05**	.05**	.01	.01	.01	.01
working mother during childhood – male	-.23*	-.23*	-.23*	-.17	.01	.01	.01	.05	.18	.18	.18	.13
educational level – male	.01	.01	.01	.01	-.00	-.00	-.00	-.00	.01	.01	.01	.00
occupational status – male	-.04	-.04	-.04	-.05	.07*	.07*	.07*	.07**	-.02	-.02	-.02	-.03
first childbirth				.80**				1.02**				.39
family size				.48**				-.09				.01
married couple				1.03**				.51**				-.67**
geographical mobility				.13**				.13*				-.09
log likelihood	-5594.09	-5558.82	-5545.51	-5339.85	-5594.09	-5558.82	-5545.51	-5339.85	-5594.09	-5558.82	-5545.51	-5339.85
nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	.148	.157	.160	.212	.148	.157	.160	.212	.148	.157	.160	.212

Significance \* (p&lt;0.05); \*\* (p&lt;0.01)

Source Family Surveys of the Dutch Population 1992, 1998, 2000 and 2003. Models controlled for re-entry into the risk set; N = 2.014 couples, N= 9.688 couple years.

Model 3 introduces male parental socialisation and individual resources. Some interesting findings are observed. First, we establish that when a male partner had a working mother, the odds of a couple ending up in a single-earner male household are significantly lower ( $e^{-23} = 0.79$ ). This confirms our hypothesis on the effects of a progressive socialisation for men and their preference for a union with a working wife. At the same time, a high educational level of a husband's parents increases the likelihood of exchanging a full-time working household for an arrangement where his wife works part-time; this amounts to a 5% increase for every additional year of parental education. Both effects seem to emphasize the importance of men's socialisation in terms of progressive sex-role attitudes which have shown to contribute strongly to preferences for certain working arrangements later in life. Second, it is surprising that the educational and occupational resources of men hardly matter when it comes to exiting full-time work as a couple. Only for the exit to a combination household with a full-time working male and a part-time working female occupational credentials are important; an additional 10 ISEI score increases the odds for this arrangement when couples decide to exit dual full-time work by 7.3% ( $e^{.07}$ ). This nicely illustrates that effects of a high occupational position are reversed for men and women; highly qualified men prefer a part-time working wife, whereas highly qualified women prefer full-time employment.

In Model 4 we investigate which life-course transitions are associated with the likelihood of couples discontinuing full-time employment. As we hypothesised, the birth of a first child greatly increases the likelihood that a full-time working couple will choose a different working arrangement. The actual gendered roles of men and women in a couple are clearly demonstrated by our results. The odds for couples choosing an alternative working arrangement where the wife is not working and the husband is employed full-time constitute a factor 2.23 greater ( $e^{.80}$ ) in the year a first child is born. Yet, the odds of them choosing a construction where the wife remains employed but scales down her working hours are 2.78 times larger ( $e^{1.02}$ ) than in other years. These results are a confirmation of Becker's specialisation hypothesis. After childbirth men seem to specialise in paid employment and women in unpaid labour. Becoming a parent seems no reason for men to scale back their working hours.

Family size is only of importance for the odds on the exit to a single-earner male situation; each additional child causes a 62% higher odds of choosing a working arrangement with a full-time working male and a non-working female over the other work arrangements. Next, marriage affects the odds of discontinuing full-time employment, especially for women. The odds for married couples entering a single-earner male arrangement constitute a factor 2.80 higher ( $e^{1.03}$ ) than for cohabiting couples. The same holds for the exit to a combination household with a part-time working wife, a factor of 1.66 ( $e^{.51}$ ). Yet, marriage seems to seriously decrease the likelihood of switching to an arrangement where men work fewer hours than women. Marriage reduces the odds of role reversal by a factor of 0.51 ( $e^{-.67}$  or 96%). Again, this supports our gendered hypothesis on the effects of marriage and cohabitation.

Geographic mobility is clearly associated with the probability of exiting full-time employment. Apparently moving has this negative effect for women only; the odds of them

discontinuing full-time work is a factor 1.14 higher ( $e^{.13}$ ). This result is a confirmation of the gendered tied-mover hypothesis; if a male spouse moves, the female partner is often forced to discontinue full-time employment, and ends up unemployed or has to take on part-time working. The effect sizes are equal for a shift to a combination household or a shift to a single-earner male family.

## **7. Conclusions and Discussion**

In this article we argued that in order to explain transitions in couples' working arrangements, the focus should be not solely on women's participation. We think explicit questions at the couple level should be the starting point of analyses on a family's work arrangement. Here we studied to what extent family events, socialisation in the family of origin, and individual resources could explain how some couples discontinue a full-time working state. The exit from full-time employment as a couple is regarded multi-shaped, as a couple may decide on various exit strategies: women who discontinue paid employment, women who reduce paid employment, or men who either reduce hours or discontinue paid employment. To gain insight into the transitions that couples go through, we used a dynamic competing risk model. A total of 1804 transitions from full-time work were observed over 9688 couple years, enabling us to study systematically the exit from full-time work by couples in the Netherlands.

From the event history analyses it may be concluded that a couple's departure from full-time employment is determined mainly by family events. Marriage, a first childbirth and geographical mobility are the relevant factors that explain a couple's reallocation of working hours. It must nonetheless be stressed that these events are more influential for women in a full-time working couple than they are for men. The consequences of getting married, becoming a mother and moving to another city tend to lead to a situation in which a female spouse most often reduces her working hours. In this respect, one could say that family events are highly gendered, especially when it comes to their actual effect on a couples' work arrangement.

Personal socialisation and resources matter for a couple's decision to exit full-time employment too. These effects seemed influential in all models, and confirm the arguments on prior preferences that are shaped during socialisation earlier in life. Again, these aspects work rather differently for men than for women. For men, a progressive socialisation in the family of origin clearly leads to a more progressive attitude on sex roles, resulting more often in a household arrangement where women reduce their work hours instead of leaving the labour market. For women, socialisation effects hardly matter, but a high occupational status leads them to stay in full-time work to a greater extent; they are less likely to quit their working hours than women in lower-ranked occupations. It thus seems that, for women success in their occupational career prevents them from reducing working hours.

What this study shows is that it is profitable to focus on the life courses of couples instead of those of women only. As Jacobs and Gerson (2004) stressed in earlier work, an analysis of husbands' and wives' employment separately may miss much of the music in family-level changes. Since decisions on work and family are made in conjunction within a household,



this is true indeed. Although we are convinced that research on the decisions couples make should be analysed using couple information, this study does not challenge the existing knowledge on work transitions. Our results, however, do indicate that emphasising the couple as a unit of analysis may lead to additional insights. First, it is concluded that a couple's decision to scale back on working hours is not only dependent on characteristics of the female spouse, but also on characteristics of the male. The substantial effects of a male's parental socialisation and his occupational status are good examples in this respect. Second, we think that it is important to establish the odds of leaving full-time employment controlling for relevant life-course events. As life-course events occur at the couple level, these odds can only be validly ascertained looking at a couple-level life-course. Finally, our contribution might be important for the ongoing public debates on the division of paid and unpaid labour. In the Netherlands there is a vivid rising trend in the number of men working part-time. Although we were unable to explain the choice for a role-reversal arrangement in more detail (due to a lack of statistical power), with more men working part-time questions about couples will become even more urgent in the near future.

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