

Work-related overnight travel and family formation. Disentangling the interplay between spatial mobility and parenthood using panel data

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Background and Research Question

Changing labour market conditions in the context of globalisation comes along with an increasing need for highly qualified employees who engage in projects at changing places of work (Boltanski/Chiapello 2006). “The past few decades have witnessed a considerable increase in business travel, especially among managers and professionals” (Gustafson 2014: 63). Previous studies have stressed out both positive and negative aspects of work-related travel activities for individuals and their family members. On the one hand, work-related travel can be perceived as a resource that facilitates access to other highly valued resources, such as career advancement and higher income (Aguilera 2008). Moreover, travelling can be perceived as a source of stimulation and enrichment, as it entails new experiences and might be accompanied by a sense of freedom and independence (Presser/Hermesen 1996; Gustafson 2006; Rüger/Ruppenthal 2010). On the other hand, work-related travel reduces the availability of the travelling employee for family members and inhibits them to engage in family-related activities, especially when travels require staying away from home overnight (e.g. Roehling/Bultman 2002; Joeng et al. 2013; Bergström Casinowsky 2013).

Given the persistence of traditional gender norms in both family and work domains, work-related travel may be a source of work-family conflict predominantly for women. In accordance with this assumption, the probably most repeatedly confirmed finding is the differential access to work-related overnight travel of men and women, with work-related travel being a predominantly male activity (Presser/Hermesen 1996; Gustafson 2006). Additionally, recent research has shown that work-related overnight travel is related to family situation and that this relationship is moderated by gender. In a recently published study based on a survey of US workers conducted in 2002, having family-related care responsibilities was found to be negatively associated with the frequency of work-related overnight travel, particularly for women (Joeng et al. 2013). Similarly, in a study using data from national travel surveys conducted in Sweden, having young children was found to be negatively related to women’s travel behaviour when compared to childless women, while for men no significant effect was found in this regard (Gustafson 2006). For the German context, Rüger et al. (2011) showed that individuals who have spent many nights away from home for work-related travel reasons are more likely to be childless than non-mobile individuals and that this correlation is mainly based on corresponding differences between mobile and non-mobile women.

Hence, preliminary empirical results strengthen the notion of a more or less pronounced irreconcilability of work-related overnight travel and parenthood, particularly in the case of women. However, these findings are based on cross-sectional data. As a consequence, the interpretation of these findings is limited as cross-sectional data do not allow controlling for the causal direction of this correlation. Are women who are confronted with the demand for frequent overnight trips reluctant to have children under these circumstances? Or do family care responsibilities rather strengthen women’s efforts to minimize the prevalence of work

travel, resulting in a reduced probability of traveling for work-related reasons when young children are present?

The presented paper applies longitudinal analyses based on a German data set in order to gain a better understanding of the correlation between work-related travel behaviours and family formation.

In general, the correlation between work-related overnight travel and parenthood could be a result of two distinct causal relationships: On the one hand, fertility might affect mobility behaviour. On the other hand, mobility might affect fertility behaviour. Each relationship might contribute to the correlation found in cross-sectional data.

Accordingly, the paper will address the following research questions:

- 1) Does the birth of a first child affect the probability of traveling for work-related reason? Are there differences by gender?
- 2) Does work-related travel affect the transition to first parenthood? Are there differences by gender?

Given the persistence of traditional gender norms, for women, I expect that the probability of traveling for work-related reason will decrease after the birth of a first child. Moreover, I assume to find a negative effect of work-related travel behaviour on the probability of transition to first parenthood only in the case of women.

As men are still predominantly ascribed to the role of the (main) breadwinner, I expect no such negative effects here. More likely, I expect positive effects, as work-related overnight travel might be correlated with higher earnings. Hence, traveling for work-related reasons might rather be supportive with regard to parenthood for men, leading to an increase of travel activities after the birth of a first child and a positive effect of work-related travel activity on the probability of transition to first parenthood.

Data

The empirical analysis is based on data of the 2008-launched German Family Panel “pairfam” which is an annually collected longitudinal study for researching partnership and family dynamics in Germany (Huinink et al. 2011). More than 12,000 randomly selected individuals of the three birth cohorts 1971-73, 1981-83 and 1991-93 have participated in the initial sample of wave 1 (2008/09) (cohort-sequence design).¹ Starting in parallel with pairfam's wave 2, a second panel study, “DemoDiff”, was conducted which closely follows the design of pairfam, but only comprises respondents residing in Eastern Germany at the time of first interview (Kreyenfeld et al. 2012). Meanwhile, the DemoDiff subsample has been fully integrated into the pairfam data.

The pairfam-survey records central aspects of job-related spatial mobility based on a typology of mobile living arrangements which has been applied for the first time to the studies of Schneider et al. (2002a/b). As the study respondents are asked to provide information about the number of nights they did not stay at home for job-related reasons in each wave, pairfam provides the opportunity to analyse the prerequisites and potential consequences of overnight work travel by means of a prospective study design.

¹ Additionally, partners, children and parents of these anchor persons are interviewed (multi-actor design).

The study at hand uses data of the anchor-respondents of all six waves of the pairfam-study (2008/09–2013/14) as well as data of the anchor-respondents of all five waves of the DemoDiff subsample (2009/10–2013/14), provided by pairfam-release 6.0 (Brüderl et al. 2015). The analyses are restricted to the two birth cohorts 1971-73 and 1981-83. The number of analyzable cases due to this selection amounts 9,557 (pairfam, cohort 71-73: 4,052; pairfam, cohort 81-83: 4,016; DemoDiff, cohort 71-73: 738; DemoDiff, cohort 81-83: 751). However, the case numbers differ depending on the respective analyses.

Methods

To answer the first question, fixed-effects estimates will be assessed which are based on a comparison of an individual's mobility behaviour before and after the birth of a first child (within-comparison). These estimates control for all (unobserved) stable characteristics of the respondents. With panel data at hand, this method is superior to other methods that produce estimates based on between-individuals-comparisons, as, to some degree, biased results caused by unobserved stable characteristics can generally be expected (Allison 2009). The analyses will assess the effects of a first parenthood on the *occurrence* of overnight work travel (i.e. having at least one work-related overnight stay in last three months) by means of binary logistic regressions as well as on the *frequency* of overnight work travel (i.e. number of work-related overnight stays in last three months) by means of negative binomial regressions.

Using discrete-time event history analysis, the paper further investigates the effects of work-related travel behaviour on the probability of transition to first parenthood. Different levels of mobility intensity (1-5 nights away from home during the past three months; more than 5 nights away from home during the past three months) will be tested.

First findings

Fixed-effects estimates clearly confirm a negative effect of entering first parenthood on the occurrence of overnight work travel as well as on the frequency of overnight work travel for women. Contrary to my expectations, a negative effect of entering first parenthood on the occurrence and frequency of overnight work travel can be also found for men. Hence, this result points out that men are rather eager to reduce the extent of work travel in order to devote more time to family-related activities when young children are present. However, the strength of the negative effects differs markedly by gender, pointing to the fact that child care responsibilities are far more an obstacle to work travel for women than for men.

In contrast, the hypothesized positive relationship between parenthood and work-related overnight travel for men can be found with regard to parenthood decisions. Discrete-time event history analysis reveals that full-time working men who have spent more than five nights away from home for work-related reasons during the past three months are more likely to enter first parenthood than full-time working men with no work-related overnight travel during that time. In the case of women, the effects of work-related overnight travel are found to vary markedly by age. For fulltime-working women aged 25-27 who have spent more than five nights away from home for work-related reasons during the past three months, a lower probability to enter first parenthood can be found in comparison to full-time working non-mobile women of the same age. In contrast, focussing on women aged 28-31, work-related overnight travel activities are found to have a positive effect on the transition to first parenthood. These results might reflect a postponement of the realization of parenthood to

higher ages, when women are confronted with mobility demands during their early stage of their occupational career. However, these preliminary findings reveal that experiences with work-related overnight travel might play a different role in the context of fertility-decision making depending on the life stage of women.

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