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Title

Attitudes towards gender equality and couples' work-family arrangements in Switzerland in the last 20 years

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Abstract

Women and men roles have evolved in Western societies since the mid-20th century. Women entered the labour market and are now as numerous as men in achieving higher education, while men are increasingly involved in childcare and domestic tasks. In parallel, normative values, in particular regarding gender roles, have changed towards more equality. However, research results show that life courses remain markedly gendered in Switzerland, the transition to parenthood being the main trigger for it (Le Goff and Levy 2016). Therefore, the aim of the study is to assess the extent to which couples' work-family arrangements vary between 2000 and 2017 and whether it is associated with changes in gender attitudes in Switzerland.

Literature on couples' work-family arrangements has put forward three main approaches to explain these differences: the pragmatic choices regarding partners' time availability and their human and economic resources; the institutional context, that is for example existing family and school systems, work policies and the state support for work-life balance; and the cultural factors taking the form of a system of norms regarding gender equality as well as individual gender attitudes to explain differences in work-family arrangements. Taken separately these approaches are insufficient to fully understand the process at play. Consequently, in this paper we use a life course perspective in which agency and norms are framed by contextual constraints and opportunities (Elder et al. 2003).

The study addresses couples' work-family arrangements in relation to each partner attitudes towards gender equality in the Swiss context. We also account for the evolution within couples over time, when they go through different life stages with a focus on the key transition to parenthood. We build on the existing literature in several ways. First, we take into account both partners' attitudes towards gender equality to study their effect on the couple's share of paid work, housework and childcare. Second, we consider the impact of gender equality attitudes in couples' work-family arrangement throughout their life course. Third, we are interested in the evolution of gender attitudes in line with the changes in work-family arrangements during the last 20 years.

We use the Swiss Household Panel data collected from 2000 to 2017 to investigate how gender attitudes evolve over time and affect couples' work-family arrangement. First analyses assess the evolution of attitudes towards gender equality in the Swiss population and have been conducted on all respondents aged 18-64. To study the association between the partner's and the respondent's attitudes, as well as the relationship between both partners' attitudes and the couple's work-family arrangement, we further restrict our analyses to cohabiting couples (married or not). To account for variations overtime within individuals and couples, we use fixed effect regressions. Variations between individuals and couples are assessed through pooled OLS regressions.

Bibliography

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