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Early Child-care Types, Parents’ Well-being and Work-Family Balance: What you arrange is how you feel

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Abstract

Objective: A growing body of literature has investigated the relationship between child-care availability and mothers’ employment as well as child development. Research has remained silent on how different child-care types relate to parents’ individual well-being. Therefore, this study investigates what child-care patterns, parental, non-institutionalized and institutionalized care, parents of 0 to 4-years old children use and, how these arrangements relate to different domains of parents’ subjective well-being (SWB); namely, life satisfaction, satisfaction with living together and positive and negative affects.

Background: Working parents rely on non-parental child-care to enable them managing the simultaneous demands of work and family. The literature distinguishes parental, formal and informal child-care as well as mixed arrangements, with formal, or institutionalized child-care receiving most attention. Informal child-care is most often provided by grandparents. Despite a growing interest by researchers and policymakers, evidence on the relationship between different child-care arrangements and parental outcomes that are related to their quality of life is lacking. This study contributes to the existing literature by empirically testing how different child-care arrangements (parental, formal and informal child-care arrangements and mixed adaptations) compare in their relationship with several dimensions of parents’ SWB (life satisfaction, satisfaction with living together, positive and negative affects). We investigate the Swiss case which is particularly interesting for studying how early child-care types relate to different domains of parents’ SWB, as child-care is limited in offer and costly.

Data and sample: Our analyses are based on a subsample of the Swiss Household Panel (SHP). The SHP is a longitudinal national representative computer assisted telephone (CATI) survey. Since 1999, this survey follows a random sample of private household living in Switzerland on a yearly basis, whereby all household members aged 14 and older are interviewed. As the variables of interest were not available in all waves, for the purpose of our research a subsample of individuals who participated at, at least one wave of the SHP between 2002 to 2017 (16 waves) have been selected, and who have at least one child aged 0 to 4 years.

Method: The sample on which the analyses are based on consists of multiple observations of the same individuals over time. Therefore, the structure of the data consists of observations nested within individuals. As multiple observations of the same individual are correlated, the assumption behind regular regression models of independent observations is violated. To address the dependence between the observations that are nested within an individual, we rely on multilevel models. Such models control for unobserved heterogeneity between individuals and, therefore, resolve endogeneity problems (if the assumptions are met). It is also possible to

assume that slopes vary across individuals. Whereas an analysis of covariance assumes that the relationship between the covariates and the outcomes is the same across groups in multilevel models this variability is modeled in the regression slope. In all models, grandparental care is the reference group which the other care-types are compared to.

Results: From a descriptive perspective, among parents with young children (0 to 4 years old) grandparents is the most common child-care type followed by formal child-care. The main result is that, overall, individuals whose children are taken care of by grandparents tend to have more positive outcomes. Compared to grandparent child-care, the use of formal and mixed child-care modes is related to reduced levels of life satisfaction. Relying on relatives, institutions or mixed child-care modes tend to decrease the positive affects. Moreover, in comparison to grandparental child-care mixed child-care modes tend to increase the negative affects. Finally, concerning the relationship dimension, individuals who use institutional child-care or relatives as well as a mixed arrangement tend to be less satisfied with living together than individuals with grandparental care.

Conclusion: Several preliminary conclusions can be drawn from the analyses. Overall, the type of the adopted child-care arrangement affects the analyzed dimensions in heterogeneous ways. The varying results for the different indicators show that it is crucial to take into account the complexity of each dimension. For this reason it is important to have a set of items for the emotions as well as for the dimension that assesses the difficulty to combine work and family. Overall, grandparental care positively influences several dimensions of parents' SWB. This can probably be explained by the fact that often grandparents are more flexible and less rigid in terms of opening hours as compared to other care arrangements. This is likely to offer parents psychological relief and emotional support helping them maintaining a better overall quality of life.