

Spatial Mobility and the Gender Wage Gap within German Families

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1. Introduction

In international comparison, the gender wage gap in Germany is exceptionally large and persistent since the mid-1990's (European Commission 2010). This form of gender-specific social inequality within the employment system still aggravates over the life course, since the wage growth over age is stronger for men (Fitzenberger und Wunderlich 2000). Despite a vast literature on this topic, the impact of internal spatial mobility attracts comparatively little attention. Spatial mobility, however, is of great importance for two reasons. At first, it has become a reality for half of the economically active German population (Schneider et al. 2008). And there is evidence of a growing importance across cohorts (Rüger und Becker 2011), especially concerning long-distance commuting (Schneider et al. 2008). Secondly, spatial mobility plays a crucial role with respect to the gender wage gap (see Ch. 2). On the one hand, women are considered to be comparatively immobile due to family reasons leading to a disadvantage in wage growth. On the other hand, they are regarded as tied movers as well, who have to accept a wage loss in the course of family migration in favor of a higher family income due to the spouse's wage gain. For Germany, however, evidence on the effect of spatial mobility, especially commuting, on the gender wage gap is rather scarce as are in-depth explanation models considering the family and employment context.

The paper to be presented therefore aims at closing this research gap and adds to the existing literature in two ways: At first, the distinct and likewise interrelated effects of two forms of spatial mobility, long-distance migration and commuting, on individual wages of men and women within families are assessed. Secondly, the influence of structural characteristics capturing the linkage of the family and employment system mediating or moderating the mobility-wage-relationship is taken into account. In the first part of the presentation, an empirical model on these issues will be presented. In the second part, the empirical model is tested on basis of the *German Family Panel pairfam* ("Panel Analysis of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics").

2. Literature review and research gap

Most of the literature on the effect of spatial mobility on wages of men and women within families deals with *family migration*. The assumption is, that family migration can lead to an individual wage increase of one partner and a corresponding wage loss of the spouse, the „tied mover“, which is overcompensated by an increase in family income (Mincer 1978; Sandell 1977). Cooke et al. (2009) confirm this assumption for married couples in the USA and the UK. Battu et al. (2009) by contrast show for married as well as cohabitating double-career couples in the UK that migration leads to a wage premium for both partners. A negative wage effect for women – and not for men – only occurs

when the partner moves due to job reasons and is thus the primary mover. This points to the relevance of gender and family norms often neglected by household economics. For Germany it can be shown (without directly referring to wages) that only in couple households with traditional role allocation the career of the male breadwinner is dominating (Jürges 2006). Concerning wages no significant effect of household migration for women compared to female stayers (Nisic 2010) as well as to men (Lersch 2012) can be found, even if the male partner earns the bulk of the household income.

Widely neglected in the field of gender-specific wage inequality within households is the role of another form of spatial mobility: *commuting*. Early evidence for the USA refers to a positive effect of commuting distance on wages, being larger for men especially in double-earner households (Madden 1980). The only German study as yet shows that women register relative wage drops due to smaller commuting distances compared to men, especially when cohabitating with a partner (Auspurg und Schönholzer 2013). Until now, migration and commuting have not been examined as two substitutional and likewise temporally interrelated forms of spatial mobility (see Pfaff 2012). Van Ham (2001) analyses the joint (and thus indistinguishable) influence of both forms on vertical job mobility and finds a positive effect only for men. For women, spatial mobility only pays off if there is no partner in the household. Madden und Chiu (1990) cannot find any gender effect of a specific combination of residential and job locations. The only German study as yet assessing the (potential) different effect of migration and commuting within partnerships on individual labor market chances uses an experimental factorial design (Abraham und Schönholzer 2012). Commuting seems to be a rather problematical substitute for migration. The commuting partner is regarded as a mixture of *tied mover* and *tied stayer* insofar as he evaluates the labour market chances in the destination region much more positive than the partner staying at home, therefore being suboptimal mobile and bound to the region of origin likewise.

Compared to the previous literature, the analyses to be presented are the first to address the actual respective effects of long-distance migration and commuting on wages of men and women within German couple households. Additionally, the study integrates the moderating and mediating influence of interrelated employment and family characteristics. This approach allows to detect the social mechanisms (see Hedström / Swedberg 1998) underlying the simple causal relationship between mobility and wages and to reveal the heterogeneity behind an (potential) weak overall effect likewise.

3. Data, Methods, and Empirical Model

This research design calls for a data set that comprises comprehensive longitudinal information on spatial mobility, employment as well as partnership and family. In this respect, the *German Family Panel "pairfam"* – a yearly retrospective panel survey of the German birth cohorts 1971-1973, 1981-1983 and 1991-1993 starting in 2008 – is well suited (Huinink et al. 2011). Currently the fifth panel wave is available, the sample period therefore ends in 2012. Only the two oldest cohorts are examined, being at the age of 41-43 respectively 31-33 in the last wave.

The effects of migration and commuting on individual wages (calculated as the yearly average of the individual gross hourly wage) are assessed using fixed-effect panel models in order to control for unobserved heterogeneity within persons over time. Moreover, the models control for self-selection of the individuals into employment. They are separately calculated for women and men, since the gender variable is constant over time and drops out of a joint wage equation. However, several models for the whole population are conducted as well, thereby including a gender variable interacting with theoretically derived time-varying covariates.

The main independent variables are migration, being defined as a change in primary residence over a distance of at least 30 kilometers, and commuting as a temporal distance between workplace and home of at least one hour. Additionally, the effect of the interplay of the employment and family systems mediating and moderating the mobility-wage relationship is captured by the inclusion of (respectively interaction with) variables on the gender division of work within the households as well as the occupational gender segregation.

4. References

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