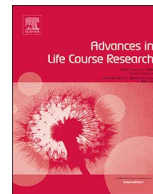




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Intergenerational determinants of joint labor market and family formation pathways in early adulthood

Outi Sirniö^{a,e,*}, Timo M. Kauppinen^b, Pekka Martikainen^{a,c,d}

^a Population Research Unit, Department of Social Research, University of Helsinki, Finland

^b National Institute for Health and Welfare, Helsinki, Finland

^c Centre for Health Equity Studies (CHES), Stockholm University and Karolinska Institutet, Sweden

^d Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, Germany

^e Department of Sociology, Stockholm University, Sweden

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ABSTRACT

Early adulthood life courses have become diversified in recent decades, but little is known about how different dimensions of early life courses (i.e., education, labor market participation and family formation) co-evolve and are associated with parental background. This study describes the most typical joint labor market and family formation pathways of young adults and assesses whether belonging to these pathway groups is associated with parental origin. We use annually updated register-based data and analyze Finnish men and women born between 1972 and 1975 with follow-up until their mid-30s. By using multichannel sequence analyses, we identified six distinct pathway types to adulthood that are defined by educational attainment, labor market participation, and family formation, and demonstrate that these pathways are primarily dominated by the educational achievements of young adults. Educational choices and trajectories, thus, also strongly shape the patterns of other life paths and events in early adulthood. Gender differences were particularly evident for pathways characterized by low education, women entering pathways dominated by early partnership and motherhood, and men remaining without a partner or any children. We further show that parental resources – particularly parental income – predict the paths upon which the young adults embark. Parental resources in particular are most strongly linked with the educational differentiation between the paths.

1. Introduction

Since the 1970s, the life courses of young adults have become de-standardized and differentiated, notably in industrialized countries: educational expansion, cultural and value changes, and the uncertainty of youth employment, for example, have increased the variety of pathways to adulthood (see Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011; Shanahan, 2000 for an overview). Consequently, adult roles and economic autonomy are achieved via postponed and possibly more diversified life trajectories than in previous years. In life course research, educational transitions; labor market integration during the first years after schooling; and family formation patterns, including leaving the parental home, union formation, and parenthood, are considered the key life events in the pathway to adulthood (e.g., Macmillan, 2005; Müller & Gangl, 2003; Settersten, 2007). Increasing variability in the pathways to adulthood may have occurred through increasing heterogeneity in the timing, ordering, and duration of these decisive events.

The life course approach acknowledges that life is a

multidimensional process (e.g., Elder, 1995, 1998). A life course includes several parallel processes, such as family and employment trajectories, that influence each other. Previous research has suggested that the timing of different life course events during early adulthood regarding labor market participation and family formation are highly interrelated as time-use decisions concerning each event are made simultaneously (Gauthier & Furstenberg, 2002). Acknowledging this interdependency is crucial, especially when the aim is to understand gender differences in adult outcomes (e.g., Evertsson et al., 2007; Korpi, Ferrarini, & Englund, 2013; Mandel & Shalev, 2009): Women's labor force participation is subject to disruption and instability due to childbearing, for example. Consequently, concentrating on single events insufficiently reflects the complexity of processes that define the transition to adulthood (e.g., Aassve, Billari, & Piccarreta, 2007; Elder, 1995, 1998; Levy & Bühlmann, 2016).

Our first aim is to describe pathways to adulthood as joint education, labor market participation, and family formation patterns in Finland, a Nordic context with extensive redistributive policies and

* Corresponding author. Present address: Demography Unit, Department of Sociology, Stockholm University, 106 91, Stockholm, Sweden.
E-mail address: outi.sirnio@sociology.su.se (O. Sirniö).

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comparatively high gender equality. By combining these dimensions of early-adulthood transitions, our aim is to holistically explore the interconnected patterns of education, employment, departure from the parental home, formation of a union, and entry into parenthood. Using sequence and cluster analysis, our longitudinal approach allows a versatile framework to study life course transitions. Whereas traditional variable-based methods, such as event-history analyses, concentrate on certain transitions or outcomes, analyzing pathways as a whole enables life courses to be studied as a process (e.g., Abbott, 2001; Aisenbrey & Fasang, 2010; Billari, 2001). Compared to the latent class analysis, sequence analysis is more sensitive to the timing and ordering of the transitions, which is particularly crucial in the analyses of the processes of emerging adulthood that are based on long follow-up data (see Barban & Billari, 2012, for a comparison between latent class analysis and sequence analysis).

By creating a pathway typology of most prevalent combinations of labor market participation and family formation patterns, we are able to capture regularities in early-adulthood pathways. Previous studies, which were often based on older birth cohorts and smaller samples, on different typologies usually distinguish at least three types of regularly occurring pathways to adulthood (Osgood et al., 2005; Salmela-Aro, Ek, & Chen, 2012; Schwanitz, 2017; Sironi, Barban, & Impicciatore, 2015). First, the typologies often included a “traditional” or “fast-starting” pathway group of those who enter the labor market early coupled with a low level of education, and form a union and have children at a younger age. Second, those educated to the highest level are often characterized as a group of their own, including belated family formation transitions. Third, a group of those having a slow transition to adulthood is identified, distinguishing those who gain their independence late, in regard to leaving the parental home, graduating from school, starting a family, and/or entering the labor market. Although we may expect to find pathway groups in line with these previous findings, our analyses are based on a younger cohort and register-based data without non-response and loss of follow-up.

Life course events regarding labor market participation and family formation are also socially patterned. A wide body of literature shows that family of origin is strongly related to the likelihood of different life events in early adulthood, namely educational transitions (e.g., Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997; Breen & Jonsson, 2000; Jackson et al., 2007; Lucas, 2001), labor market success (e.g., Barone & Schizzerotto, 2011; Breen & Jonsson, 2005; Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2011; Härkönen & Bihagen, 2011; Wolbers, 2007), and family formation (Liefbroer & Elzinga, 2012; Nisén et al., 2014; Raab et al., 2014; Rijken & Liefbroer, 2009; Wiik, 2009). However, previous research on the association between parental background and offspring's early-adulthood pathways concentrates most frequently on specific isolated transitions, while holistic approaches to life course seldom incorporate information on one's family of origin.

The second aim of this study is to assess the association of family background with combined education, labor market participation, and family formation pathways. This is a novel approach because only a few previous studies have examined the contribution of parental background on children's life courses with a multidimensional approach on the life events (c.f., Aisenbrey & Fasang, 2017; Sironi et al., 2015). With our approach, it is possible to more comprehensively assess the contribution of parental background on early-adulthood pathways. Further, our view on family background is multidimensional as well: Instead of solely using one indicator of parental origin, we analyze the role of different parental resources. Economic and cultural resources and family structure may contribute differently to the propensity to follow each early-adulthood pathway type. Previous research has indicated that different indicators of parental background are not interchangeable; instead, they reflect somewhat different aspects of the family of origin (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2013; Jaeger, 2007; Torssander & Erikson, 2010; Vauhkonen et al., 2017). Bourdieu (1984) stated that differences in the amount and the composition of economic and cultural capital define one's position in the social strata, but the

distribution of these resources is not symmetrical: For example, values and attitudes differ among families with low cultural and high economic resources. As our outcome, the pathway to adulthood, is also multidimensional, the approach of incorporating multiple measurements of various types of parental resources allows for better analysis of the association between socioeconomic conditions in the family of origin and their children's transition to adulthood.

2. Background

Children mature through interactions between social, cultural, and demographic factors (Elder, 1998). Along with other contextual circumstances, individuals face differing opportunities and constraints according to their position in the socioeconomic hierarchy. The current structure of stratification and familial socioeconomic resources influences a child's actions and goals (e.g., Goldthorpe, 2007). In life course approach, life is seen as a process occurring amidst different social fields such as the family, the labor market, cultural norms, and institutions. Life-course transitions within and between these fields have consequences for individuals' lives in the future. These transitions consist of experiences, attainments or failures, social roles, and growth or loss of resources, which accumulate over time. The probability to experience successful transitions is considered dependent on childhood living conditions and the resources provided by parents. Thus, family background crucially shapes the life courses of offspring: The children of the most and the least affluent families have differing resources and capacities to navigate the transitions in early adulthood (e.g., Elder, 1995, 1998; Elman & O'Rand, 2004; Furstenberg, 2008; Levy & Bühlmann, 2016).

2.1. The association of family background with the offspring's outcomes

More parental resources provide children with better chances for more favorable life paths. Socioeconomic conditions in the family indicate the extent and the quality of available parental resources that facilitate children's educational attainment and attachment to the labor market. Parental income and other monetary assets reflect economic conditions in the childhood family, including available material resources and economic security. Families also differ in terms of their cultural resources (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986), which are often linked with parental educational qualifications. This observation refers to the level of beneficial traits and access to human capital that indicate knowledge and cultural and behavioral norms (e.g., Becker & Tomes, 1986; Mayer, 2009). Parental resources can be utilized as investments to promote offspring's pathway to adulthood. Higher social position also creates favorable circumstances that, via socialization and role modeling, affect offspring's outcomes (e.g., Becker & Tomes, 1976; Coleman, 1988; Musick & Mare, 2006). For example, parents may directly and indirectly transmit preferences regarding the transition to adulthood to their children (e.g., Billari & Liefbroer, 2007; De Valk & Liefbroer, 2007). Parental resources increase the quality of the parent-child relationship, which in turn fosters offspring's attainment (Conger, Conger, & Martin, 2010). Previous studies suggest that parents with more socioeconomic resources more effectively influence their children's family formation plans (e.g., Axinn & Thornton, 1992; Barber, 2001; Billari & Liefbroer, 2007), possibly via more active participation in the long-term planning of offspring's future and by being more informed of the risks related to choices that are made during early adulthood (Farkas, 2003; Kim & Schneider, 2006; Wiik, 2009).

These mechanisms to explain the association between parental background and offspring's outcomes assume, however, that children are in frequent contact and interaction with their parents during the course of childhood and adolescence (e.g., Beller, 2009; Biblarz & Raftery, 1993; Coleman, 1988). Since family structure has diversified notably within recent decades, it is likely that more variation in the amount of parental contact is also noted between families.

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