Squeezing Birth into Working Life. Household Panel Data Analyses Comparing Germany, Great-Britain, the Netherlands and Sweden

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Increasingly young women in all European countries educate themselves for a lifelong labour market career. How do births fit into a young woman’s curriculum vitae? This book takes a welfare state comparative perspective on this issue, analyzing relevant macro policies from four countries whose political views on the combination of work and family differ, namely Germany, Great-Britain, the Netherlands and Sweden and the effects of these macro policies on the micro economic labour market and fertility behaviour. For this purpose household panel data are utilized, organizing all available waves of the German Socio Economic Panel (GSOEP), the British Household Panel Study (BHPS), the Swedish HUSsällens ekonomiska levnadsförhållanden (HUS) and the Dutch labour supply panel collected by the Organisatie voor Strategisch Arbeidsmarktonderzoek (OSA), into fertility and work histories on a month to month basis around the date of giving birth to a child.

Within the welfare state comparative framework, hypotheses on women’s labour market transitions in connection with child birth, women’s share in joint family earnings around the birth of the first and second child, the timing of having the first child and a subsequent child in a woman’s life, are derived from human capital theory and theory on labour supply. The analyses present substantial differences between the countries in women’s labour force attachment and earnings in the period of childbearing which can be explained by the macro policy differentials. However, the differences in woman’s timing of first birth between countries are much smaller. By analyzing women’s potential earnings curves and women’s wages, labour force participation and hours of work after giving birth the gain in women’s lifetime earnings by postponement of maternity is put forward comparing the 1980s and 1990s.