

***Work-life imbalance in extended working lives:
domestic divisions of labour and partners'
perceptions of job pressures of non-retiring older
workers***

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This paper

“future research and policies surrounding retirement need to: focus on the household, not the individual”

(Loretto and Vickerstaff, 2013)

- This paper considers whether extending working lives might affect relationships in coupled households
- Focusing on:
 - Implications for domestic divisions of labour within households
 - Partners’ perceptions of job pressures
 - Role of job control



Overview of presentation

- Background and existing evidence
- Research questions and hypotheses
- Data – European Social Survey
- Results
- Summary and discussion



Background and motivation

- Policy debate largely frames the issue of retirement in terms of individual decision-making
- But decisions about retirement are also social decisions – involving considerations of others, especially partners
- Partners often aspire to retire simultaneously – or intend to minimise the time when only one partner is retired (e.g. Humphrey et al., 2003, Smeaton and McKay, 2003).
- Often a sense that extending working lives is inherently desirable – but understanding whether this is the case also needs to take into account social and familial relationships



Retirement and domestic divisions of labour: existing evidence

- On retiring, time spent on housework typically increases
 - although extent depends on partner's work status and prevailing gender roles
- Existing research has shown that upon retiring, domestic workloads are shared more evenly among couples (e.g. Leopold and Skopek, 2015)
- Though some evidence that couples return to their pre-retirement patterns in time
- Perceptions of what is a fair division are subject to social and cultural norms
- Some evidence linking (excessively) unfair divisions of domestic labour to adverse effects on wellbeing and relationship stability



Hypotheses

This paper explores the relationships between working beyond retirement age, domestic divisions of labour and partners' experiences of this extended working life.

We examine three hypotheses:

- H1: couples in households extending working lives beyond the typical retirement age sustain (unequal) domestic divisions of labour (DDL) also found among couples close to, but not yet retired from work
 - H2: In the absence of an equalisation in DDL typical for couples of retiring age, partners of post-ERA workers are more critical of the pressures associated with paid work than partners of pre-ERA workers
 - H3: Partners are more accepting of post-ERA working if non-retiring older workers are allowed more control over managing their working day
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Data: European Social Survey (ESS)

- Collects data on social and political attitudes, beliefs and behaviours
- Cross-country, cross-sectional survey, conducted across Europe (28 countries in 2010)
- In this study we use data from the 2010 ESS
- Person-based (not household-based) survey
- Remains the most recent European survey to contain questions about:
 - household divisions of labour *and*
 - partners' perceptions of the respondents' workload
 - as well as labour market status



Countries included in the study

North	East	South	West
Finland	Bulgaria	Spain	Belgium
Denmark	Hungary	Greece	Switzerland
Estonia	Poland	Croatia	Germany
Lithuania	Russian Federation	Portugal	France
Norway	Slovakia	Slovenia	United Kingdom
Sweden	Czech Republic	Israel	Ireland
			The Netherlands



ESS questions

- Household divisions of labour:

“About how many hours a week, in total, do you personally spend on housework?”

“And what about your spouse or partner? About how many hours does s/he spend on housework?”

- Partners’ perceptions of workload:

“How often do you find that your partner or family gets fed up with the pressure of your job? (Never, hardly ever, sometimes, often, always)

Note: relying on respondents to respond accurately on their partner’s behalf



Defining retirement ages

- Effective retirement age (ERA): mean age at which workers typically retire
- Identify ERA that applied in 2010 (year of survey) – available from OECD (differs by country and by gender)
- We focus on two groups of older workers:
 - Pre-ERA: Individuals up to five years younger than the ERA
 - Post-ERA: Individuals up to five years older than the ERA
- Chosen in order to focus on comparatively similar age cohorts
- Limiting max age to ERA+5 also reduces risk of health becoming primary reason for leaving employment



Older workers' work and job characteristics

- 47% of pre-ERA individuals, and 16% of post-ERA individuals, were in paid work in 2010
- Some differences in occupational distribution – post-ERA workers more commonly found in professional occupations and less commonly in skilled trades
- Average number of years with current employer similar for both groups
- Similar levels of job control for pre-ERA and post-ERA workers



Occupation, tenure and weekly working hours

	<=ERA (up to - 5yrs)	>ERA (up to +5yrs)
Occupation:		
Professionals	20.1	27.2
Technicians and associate professionals	16.9	11.8
Service workers, shop and market sales service	13.1	15.3
Legislators, senior officials and managers	11.9	12.4
Craft and related trades workers	10.0	4.4
Elementary occupations	9.9	11.6
Clerks	8.8	8.3
Plant and machine operators, assemblers	6.4	5.1
Skilled agricultural and fishery worker	2.9	3.9
Years with current employer:		
Mean	19.2	17.7
Median	17	16
Weekly hours:		
Mean	40.2	38.7
Median	40	40



Job control

	<=ERA (up to - 5yrs)	>ERA (up to +5yrs)
Can decide when to start/finish work		
Not at all	48.6	44.1
A little	20.0	16.8
Quite true	11.9	13.0
Very true	19.5	26.1
Choose or change pace of work (scale 0 [low]-10 [high])		
Mean	6.85	6.96
Median	8	8
Decide how daily work is organised (scale 0 [low]-10 [high])		
Mean	7.12	7.69
Median	8	9



Results (H1)

- H1: couples in households extending working lives beyond the typical retirement age sustain (unequal) domestic divisions of labour also found among couples close to, but not yet, retired from work
- No (statistical) difference in hours spent on housework for pre-ERA and post-ERA workers
- Or in the hours they reported for their partners
- Pre-ERA workers spent on average three hours fewer on housework than their partners, compared with almost eight hours fewer for post-ERA workers
 - Driven by fewer partners of post-ERA workers being in paid work
- Suggests divisions of domestic labour become more unequal in post-ERA coupled households in which only one partner is in paid work



Domestic divisions of labour, pre- and post-ERA workers

	<=ERA (up to - 5yrs)	>ERA (up to +5yrs)	
Hours spent doing housework each week			
Mean (Std. Err)	12.94 (0.62)	10.90 (0.78)	
Median	10	8	
N	1,257	358	
Hours partner spends doing housework each week			
Mean (Std. Err)	15.72 (0.66)	18.31 (1.33)	
Median	12	15	
N	1,257	350	
Difference between own and partner's housework			
Mean (Std. Err)	-2.81 (0.78)	-7.45 (1.38)	**
Median	0	-6	**
N	1,239	348	



Results (H2)

- H2: In the absence of an equalisation in DDL typical for couples of retiring age, partners of post-ERA workers are more critical of the pressures associated with paid work than partners of pre-ERA workers
- No differences between pre and post-ERA workers in proportion stating job prevented them from giving time to their partners or family
- Partners of pre-and post-ERA workers showed similar levels of concerns about pressures of their partners job
- No association between partners' concerns and division of domestic labour



Job and work life balance satisfaction, pre- and post-ERA workers

	<=ERA (up to - 5yrs)	>ERA (up to +5yrs)
Satisfied with balance between time on job and time on other aspects (scale 0 [low]-10 [high])		
Mean (Std. Err)	6.64 (0.1)	6.83 (0.18)
Median	7	7
Job prevents you from giving time to partner/family, how often...		
Never	16.6	23.0
Hardly ever	22.6	26.3
Sometimes	35.8	29.9
Often	22.3	18.4
Always	2.7	2.5
Partner/family fed up with pressure of your job, how often...		
Never	33.9	34.4
Hardly ever	24.3	28.2
Sometimes	30.6	26.3
Often	9.9	8.7
Always	1.2	2.4



Results (H3)

- H3: Partners are more accepting of post-ERA working if non-retiring older workers are allowed more control over managing their working day
 - Model A indicates positive association between job control and partners' concerns (regardless of ERA status)
 - But – partners' concerns over job pressures were lower for post-ERA workers with a high level of control, than for pre-ERA workers with a high level of control (Model B)
 - Less concern where respondent less likely to report tiredness from work
 - Results unaffected by inclusion of additional controls (Model C)
 - Suggests partners may be more accepting of post-ERA working if older workers have greater control over their working day
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Partner/family is always or often fed up with pressure of your job, regression results

	Model A			Model B			Model C		
	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	P>t	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	P>t	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	P>t
ERA status: working beyond ERA	0.89	0.32	0.755	2.67	1.94	0.178	3.27	2.66	0.147
Job control: allowed to decide how daily work is organised									
high level of control [score 7 – 10]	2.66	0.99	0.008	3.26	1.51	0.01	3.25	1.69	0.023
ERA status#Job control									
Post-ERA#high level of control				0.23	0.20	0.087	0.17	0.17	0.072
Too tired after work to enjoy things like do at home									
Never, hardly ever, sometimes				0.16	0.05	0.000	0.15	0.06	0.000
N observations			1,664			1,650			1,187

Note: all models include country dummies ; model C also controls for total household income, respondent's share of household income, hours worked, industry, occupation, time spent on housework, health and partner's employment status



Summary

- Households with post-ERA workers display very similar unequal divisions of domestic labour as pre-ERA households
- No evidence to suggest that partners of post-ERA workers were less accepting of the effects that job pressures were having on family life than partners of pre-ERA workers
- Older workers' ability to organise their daily work mediates their partners' perceptions of the strain caused by the job
- This effect is stronger for those working beyond the ERA:
 - Suggesting post-ERA workers may use this flexibility to manage their working day in a way that is more conducive to balancing work and family life, compared with pre-ERA workers

