The development, educational stratification and decomposition of mothers’ and fathers’ childcare time in Germany. An update for 2001-2013

Abstract:
This study updates empirical knowledge about (1) the development, (2) the educational stratification, and (3) the decomposition of mothers’ and fathers’ childcare time in Germany with the most recent time use data. Using time series data from the German Time Use Study 2001/2002 and 2012/2013, we analyze time budgets for total childcare and six specific childcare activities on weekdays and weekends and estimate OLS regressions and Oaxaca decompositions. The study found that (1) total childcare time has increased for mothers and fathers between 2001 and 2013 and that this change is predominantly due to increased time for basic childcare. (2) It also found consistent evidence of an education gradient only for reading time with children. (3) If there is significant change of time budgets between 2001 and 2013, this change seems to be driven by behavioral change rather than changing demographics. Our empirical findings on childcare time in Germany do not provide evidence of dynamics and stratification but rather of stability and similarity across parents’ educational levels. Besides the updates on German parents’ development, stratification and decomposition of time use for childcare, these analyses show that change in total childcare is not due to a proportional change over all single activities but due to changes in a few activities only.

Key words: time, childcare, Germany, mothers, fathers

Zusammenfassung:

Schlagwörter: Zeitverwendung, Kinderbetreuung, Deutschland, Mütter, Väter
Introduction

In Germany, the role of the family as a learning environment and the parents’ contribution and support for the development of their children are traditionally of high socio-political importance. In this context, several recent international studies have highlighted that the time mothers and fathers spend on childcare is beneficial for the development and well-being of their children (e.g., Altintas 2016; Bonke/Esping-Andersen 2011; Hallberg/Klevmarken 2003; Kalil/Ryan/Corey 2012; Sayer/Gauthier/Furstenberg 2004; Dotti Sani/Treas 2016). There is early evidence in the literature that parents’ time with children, shared parent-child activities and parental interaction with their children are positively linked to children’s outcomes in later life (already, e.g., Leibowitz 1974, 1977). Further, there is ample evidence that parents’ time for childcare is highly stratified: highly educated mothers and fathers tend to spend more time on childcare – and particularly developmental childcare – than lower educated parents (e.g., Altintas 2016; Dotti Sani/Treas 2016; Kalil/Ryan/Corey 2012; Sayer/Gauthier/Furstenberg 2004). This different investment behavior in children aroused a discussion about ‘diverging destinies’, that is, an increasing inequality with “important implications for long-term patterns of attainment and achievement” between children of higher versus lower educated parents (Kalil/Ryan/Corey 2012: 1362; McLanahan 2004).

However, to date, there is little and somewhat outdated evidence on these issues for Germany. The most recent time-use studies covering Germany (Berghammer 2013; Dotti Sani and Treas 2016) only cover periods until the early 2000s and, thus, the subsequent period until 2012/2013 is, as yet, unexplored. Besides official statistics (Statistisches Bundesamt 2015, 2017), there is no single ‘case study’ of parental time investments in their children in Germany. Germany has only been part of a few internationally comparative time use analyses (e.g., Berghammer 2013; Gauthier/Smeeding/Furstenberg 2004; Dotti Sani/Treas 2016). These previous analyses have focused more on general trends of aggregated time budgets and have not considered developments for more specific childcare activities. Yet, as studies have shown, analyzing the composition of total time for childcare and its development yields additional evidence of parental behavior regarding the interaction with their children (Craig/ Powell/Smyth 2014).

In light of this, we contribute to the literature on parental childcare time in a number of ways. First, we provide an update of previous work in Germany. This is done by analyzing the developments in women’s and men’s childcare time over the most recent ten years using data from the 2001/2002 and 2012/2013 German Time Use Study. Second, we analyze trends for six specific childcare activities, subdividing total parental time use to a greater extent than before in the literature. Third, we provide evidence of the education gradient of total and specific childcare time in Germany over this decade in order to update knowledge on the social stratification of time use. Fourth, we do a decomposition analysis of time use developments between 2001/2002 and 2012/2013. The aim here is to assess the relative contribution of changing demographic distributions versus changes that are statistically independent from population parameters on childcare time, again primarily focusing on mothers’ and fathers’ education.