

Employment Characteristics of Women during Childbearing Period and Subsequent Workplans

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Introduction

The focus of our research is on the characteristics of mother's employment activity during pregnancy and their plans for future employment (labour market reintegration). In Hungary, the period of maternity leave varies considerably both before and after childbirth, partly due to the diversity and extent of certain elements of the support system. Suspension of active work is a common practice even from the beginning of pregnancy (4th-12th gestation weeks), while for the maternity leave period the Hungarian system provides benefits (of varying amounts) and a guarantee of continued employment until the child is 3 years old. Within these two broad time bands, the timing of employment activity of mothers during their pre- and post-pregnancy period shows great diversity. A range of determinants may underlie these timing patterns like social policy systems, value orientations, structural elements of the labour market and socio-demographic determinants. Using the results of the Hungarian longitudinal birth cohort study, named "Cohort '18 – Growing Up in Hungary" (Veroszta, 2018), we aim to observe the timing patterns of mothers labour market activity during their pregnancy period and their reintegration plans after childbirth. We then seek to identify the above determinants of these timing patterns. To this end, we arranged the respondents into four groups based on the length of their labor market inactivity period during pregnancy and the time of their (planned) post-natal employment reintegration. In the first step of our analysis, we examined the socio-demographic and employment characteristics of these timing groups. However, in the later steps we plan to extend the analysis to occupational characteristics and value orientations as well. Our preliminary results are intended to support the view that the working habits of Hungarian women with young children are still traditional, although maternity benefits allow them to work while receiving benefits.

To provide a theoretical foundation for our research, there are several studies on the monitoring of the process and characteristics of employment after childbirth (McGovern et al, 2000; R. Fedor-Toldi, 2017; Makay, 2017a). Leitheiser and Veroszta (2021), on the basis of the Cohort '18 data, found that "[...] *the modern male-female role perceptions, the female-dominated occupations, the favourable income levels, the residential day-care provision, but especially lower numbers of children already present and planned, shorten the planned time to return to the labour market during pregnancy*" (Leitheiser-Veroszta, 2021:199). Moreover, in one of his studies, Kapitány (2019) highlights the importance of access to childcare for municipalities, as mothers who plan to send their children to nursery are likely to plan to start working before the age of three of their children. Fedor and Toldi (2017) finds in a study that, in terms of age, younger age groups are more likely to return to work earlier after childbirth, and by educational attainment, mothers with higher education are more likely to start working before the child is one year old. In his research, Makay (2017) confirms the accelerating effect of high educational attainment on return to work but adds that the accelerating effect is even more pronounced after the birth of the second child compared to those with lower educational attainment. In the case of partner status, several divergent views can be observed. While R. Fedor and Toldi (2017) and McGovern et al. (2000) found in their research that single mothers tend to have shorter time spent at home after childbirth, Hofferth and Curtin (2003) observed that this is more the case for married mothers. Another important aspect that Percheski (2008) highlights in her study is that when examining the impact of relationship status, we should not ignore the labour market activity of the partner. Klerman and Leibowitz (1990) find that, although higher educational attainment and higher personal income may accelerate women's post-partum employment, the presence of a high-income spouse - which implies

higher household income overall - may slow it down. In addition to the partnership situation, the number and age of existing children are also important factors influencing the return. Data from the OECD (2020), Eurostat (2021) and the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (2019) show that in Hungary, the employment rate of mothers decreases as the number of children grows but increases with the age of the child. While only 16% of mothers with a child aged 0-2 years are in employment, the rate increases to 73% for mothers with a child aged 3-5 years and to 87% for mothers with a child aged 6-14 years (OECD, 2020).

Maternity leave policy in Hungary

In order to understand the future intentions of mothers to work, it is essential to describe the maternity support system. Although Hungary has an extensive maternity support system in place across Europe, and in most cases, it is possible to participate actively in the labour market while receiving financial benefits, the majority of mothers typically stay at home until the age of three of their children, focusing exclusively on child-rearing. This is partly due to the prevalence of traditional social role beliefs in Hungary, which are rather entrenched, according to which it is best for the child if the mother stays at home with the child until the age of three, without working, and partly due to the role of maternity benefits in providing a stable income (Makay, 2015; Makay, 2018). In Hungary, maternity leave lasts for 24 weeks, during which time the mother is entitled to 100% of her salary under the CSED - infant care allowance, from 1 July 2021, if she was insured for 365 days in the two years preceding the birth and her child was born within 40 days of the insured period or its termination. Under certain conditions, the benefit may also be claimed by those in higher education. After the end of maternity leave, mothers (or fathers) can take unpaid leave until the child is two years old without losing their job. During this period, the amount of the allowance under GYED (childcare allowance) is 70% of the previous salary. After the child reaches the age of two, the mother (or father) can receive a further year of child-rearing allowance (GYES). Although GYES is a lower, fixed amount paid by the state, it allows the child to stay at home until the age of three, when he or she reaches the entry-age for compulsory kindergarten (Makay, 2017).

Data and Methods

The findings of our analysis are based on the data of “Cohort ’18 – Growing Up in Hungary”, the Hungarian longitudinal birth cohort study which is currently being conducted by the Hungarian Demographic Research Institute (HDRI) of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO). The aim of this longitudinal study is to investigate the growing-up of children born in 2018-2019 and to map its characteristics and features. Due to its interdisciplinary nature, Cohort '18 can also investigate different sociological, demographic, psychological, health and economic issues. The data collection is currently in its fourth wave with families of three-year-old children, preceded by a survey with pregnant women, a survey at the child’s six-months of age and a survey at the child’s one and a half years of age (Veroszta, 2018). The dataset used in this analysis contains weighted data of 8,270 respondents participated in the first and second waves of the survey.

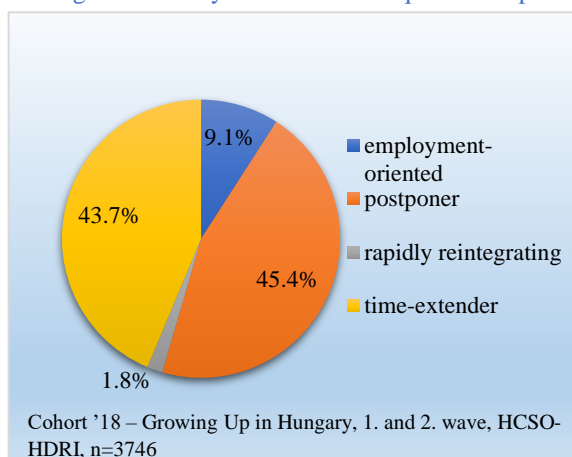
We excluded from the analysis mothers who were unemployed at the time of data collection. Furthermore, in order to get a clearer picture of the relationship between the timing of work activity during pregnancy and future workplans, we filtered out respondents who were on maternity leave with their previously born child at the time of the antenatal survey. After these restrictions a database of 3,746 mothers were available for investigation. In order to examine the timing of labor market participation around childbirth, mothers were classified into four categories, according to whether the mothers were still actively working in the third trimester of pregnancy, and whether they were already working when the child was six-months-old or planned to start working by his/her age of 1.. As the first step of the investigation descriptive statistics along socio-demographic and employment variables were used to explore the background characteristics of the timing groups.

Findings

Preliminary results show that 9.1% of respondents suspended work for only a relatively short time in both the prenatal and postnatal period – i.e., were actively working during the third trimester of pregnancy and timed the maternity leave until the child was up to one year old (*employment-oriented*). The proportion of pregnant women who suspended work for only a relatively short time in the prenatal period, but the maternity leave was timed longer, after the child's first birthday (*postponer*) was 45.4%. The proportion of mothers who went on sick leave early during pregnancy but they (planned) re-employment is timed relatively shortly after the birth-giving (*rapidly reintegrating*) was 1.8%. A further 43.7% of respondents suspended work for a relatively long time in both the prenatal and postnatal period (*time-extender*).

In case of type of employment, although the majority of mothers worked as employees in every subgroup, entrepreneurs and self-employed were over-represented (32.4%) among the employment-oriented mothers and under-represented among those who went on sick leave early and prefer to postpone their post-partum employment (2.9%). A similar trend can be observed in the share of unskilled workers and middle or senior managers. While managers are over-represented within the employment-oriented group of mothers (10.6%), the same proportion among time extenders is much lower. However, it is clear that 26.8% of the latter group had worked as unskilled worker during their pregnancy, compared with 5.2% of the former. According to the educational characteristics of the four categories can be stated, that the highest proportion (63.3%) of mothers with tertiary education is among those, who were actively working in the third trimester of their pregnancy and had already started working when their child was six-months-old or were planning to do so before the age of one (*employment-oriented*). The same proportion for those who had taken sick leave earlier in their pregnancy and planned to start working after their child's first birthday (*time-extender*) is 38.2%. A similar correlation was found for subjective financial well-being. While 40% of mothers in the former group easily or very easily covering household expenses, compared with 22.2% of mothers in the latter group. In terms of the number of children, among employment-oriented mothers 53.3% were expecting their first child, compared with 49.8% of mothers who went relatively early on sick leave but preferred to postpone their labor market reintegration after giving birth. There were no major differences between the categories by partnership and age groups. The majority of mothers among every category were typically already living with their spouse during their pregnancy and the majority were 35-49 year old.

Fig. 1. Frequency of mothers according to the timing of maternity leave and subsequent workplans



Tab. 1. Characteristics of mothers according to the timing of maternity leave and subsequent workplans

		employment-oriented	postponer	rapidly reintegrating	time-extender
Educational attainment (n=3661, $\chi^2=0.000$, Cramer's V=0.142)	up to 8 primary school years	2.1%	3.4%	10.3%	6.4%
	vocational training	7.6%	7.1%	19.1%	17.7%
	secondary	27%	29.5%	35.3%	37.8%
	higher education	63.3%	60%	35.3%	38.2%

<i>Subjective financial well-being</i> (n=3643, $\chi^2=0.000$, Cramer's V=0.094)	TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%
	expecting the first child	53.3%	57.7%	47.1%	49.8%
	expecting not the first child	46.7%	42.3%	52.9%	50.2%
	TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%
	with great difficulty	0.6%	0.4%	2.9%	0.9%
	with difficulty	3.7%	2.4%	5.9%	3.4%
	with minor difficulties	18%	20.3%	17.6%	27.1%
	relatively easy	37.8%	47.2%	48.5%	46.4%
	easy	29.9%	25.9%	22.1%	19.2%
	very easy	10.1%	3.8%	2.9%	3%
<i>Parity</i> (n=3661, $\chi^2=0.000$, Cramer's V=0.078)	TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%
	entrepreneurs/self-employed	32,4%	7,3%	25%	2,9%
	employee	67%	92,2%	75%	97,1%
	casual worker	,6%	,5%	0%	0%
	TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%
<i>Type of employment</i> (n=3661, $\chi^2=0.000$, Cramer's V=0.224)	TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%
	entrepreneurs/self-employed	32,4%	7,3%	25%	2,9%
	employee	67%	92,2%	75%	97,1%
	casual worker	,6%	,5%	0%	0%
	TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Cohort '18 – Growing Up in Hungary, Wave 1. and Wave 2., HCSO-HDRI, 2020
Cell values marked with bold: Significant cell-level differences by adjusted standardised residuals with a significance level of 0.5.

Conclusions

In our analysis, we examined the socio-demographic and employment background of four timing categories in order to characterize the short-term labour market reintegration strategies of women giving birth delimited by the peculiarities of the Hungarian family support system. After exploring the determinants of timing, preliminary results underline the previously formulated thesis that the employment decisions of Hungarian women with small children are largely influenced by traditional, family-centered values, characterized by a long period of inactivity, despite the fact that the conditions for early reintegration after childbirth have been incorporated into the maternity care system. It can also be shown that socio-demographic and employment background affects the timing decision of each group of mothers differently.

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