

Job-related spatial mobility and its relation to family development in Europe: Evidence from a cross-sectional study in six European countries

Norbert F. Schneider, Heiko Rüger, Silvia Ruppenthal

We are facing times with high mobility demands. Mobility has almost evidentially become a permanent factor in many occupational areas and at many levels of business hierarchy. Today, the economy, industry and politics naturally expect workers to become or to stay mobile.

But job-related spatial mobility is an ambivalent phenomenon. It opens the door for people to new experiences and new opportunities but involves also new strains and coercions.

The current dynamic of mobility does *not* develop *solely* as a result of globalisation of the economy and society. Changes within family and partnership patterns have an independent influence on mobility as well. The increased employment rate of women and especially that of highly qualified women is important in this context. Against the background of this change in traditional role models, the former close connection between job and residential mobility has become less tight. Unlike in the past, women no longer move with their husbands because wives are either subject to their own mobility demands or do not want to or cannot give up their jobs. Couples use recurring forms of mobility, such as weekend commuting or daily long distance commuting, to combine partnership and work. The social process of individualism offers people options to shape their partnership and family situation, allowing them an opportunity to adapt their living arrangements to changing social and economic demands.

As a result of these circumstances two developments can be expected: First a rise of job-related spatial mobility during the last decades. Second a substitution of residential forms of mobility for recurring ones.

Increasing mobility requirements are furthermore a consequence of changes in the employment situation. More and more workers with short term contracts are confronted with having to change their employer, their job and their place of work several times in the course of their lives. Moving is mostly not an option in such a situation.

While mobility and mobile lifestyles have become highly valued traits within the labour market, various studies also point to the negative consequences of increased mobility. The question arises as to the effect of increased mobility on mobile individuals, their families and their social relationships. It can be hypothesised that intensified mobility requirements have effects on family development and on family life and they aggravate the compatibility of family and professional life – especially for women.

During the research project *Job Mobilities and Family Lives in Europe* a representative survey has been carried out among more than 5500 25 to 54 years old persons in six European countries (France, Germany, Spain, Poland, Belgium, and Switzerland). To obtain a bigger empirical basis of mobile people an oversampling procedure has been undertaken to get enough mobile persons for differentiated analyses.

Altogether more than 7200 Europeans were interviewed with standardised questionnaires by telephone (CATI) during summer 2007. An exception was Poland where CAPI technique promised superior random sampling.

Three topics are in the focus of the study: First we wanted to get reliable data about the relevance and diversity of job-related spatial mobility in Europe. A second focus of the study was directed to the causes and circumstances of job mobility. The data give information about the reasons why people become mobile and how they frame their mobility – as opportunity, necessity or coercion. A third topic concerned the consequences of mobility for family, subjective well-being, job career, and social relations.

In distinction from traditional mobility research, which is mainly focussed on migration, a broader concept of mobility has been developed. Aside from permanent transnational migration this concept integrates further types of mobility, such as semi-migration, commuting and other small-scale movements – phenomena that are becoming more and more important in contemporary modern societies.

As regards the study at hand we distinguished between present and former mobility experiences and between recurring (e.g., daily long distance or weekend commuting) and residential (e.g., relocating) types of mobility.

Concerning family development we analysed three indicators: the likelihood of childlessness, the average number of children and the age at first birth.

Multivariate binary-logistic and OLS regression analyses were performed. All analyses were differentiated by sex. Coefficients were adjusted for educational level (based on ISCED), age, survey-country, number of employers during professional career and full-time vs. part-time employment. For the reason of case numbers analyses were not differentiated by country. The reference group for all analyses were persons without any experiences with mobility, the so called “Unchallenged”. All analyses have been done with the age group of 37 to 44 years old persons. The reasons are that former mobility experiences are not too far away and the probability for having further children is not too high.

Results show big differences among men and women concerning the interrelationship between mobility and family development. There are no or only weak effects in the case of men. If there are interpretable effects one can say that mobility has positive effects on family development. Among women there are strong negative effects: Mobility may lead to a postponement and a fewer number of children in average. On the other hand one can say that childlessness significantly increases the willingness to be or to become mobile among women. The interrelation between mobility and family development seems to be complex and based on the data of a cross-sectional survey it is not possible to give any reliable information about causal relationships.

However, mobility seems to be an important factor for the explanation of reproductive behaviour in modern societies and should receive more attention in future research on fertility.

Selected publications from the project:

Schneider, Norbert F.; Ruppenthal, Silvia; Lück, Detlev; Rüger, Heiko and Dauber, Andrea (2008): Germany – A Country of Locally Attached but Highly Mobile People. In: Schneider, Norbert F.; Meil, Gerardo (eds.): *Mobile Living Across Europe I. Relevance and Diversity of Job-Related Spatial Mobility in Six European Countries*, Opladen & Farmington Hills: Barbara Budrich Publishers, 105-149

Schneider, Norbert F.; Rüger, Heiko and Münster, Eva (2009): Job-related mobility in Germany. Forms, incidence and sequelae for health, well-being and family life, *Arbeitsmed.Sozialmed.Umweltmed.*, 44, 7, 400-409