

European Social Survey Round 2 module proposal.

Family, Work, and Welfare in Europe

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Introduction

The module we propose focuses on the inter-relation between work, family and welfare. These are critical factors for the quality of life of European citizens. The module addresses issues that are of central importance both for basic scientific research and for EU policy. In March 2000, the European Council decided that the union should adopt the strategic goal for the next decade of becoming 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy... with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion'. The module will contribute directly to the need for good measures for monitoring both the quality of jobs and social cohesion. It will combine the strength of 'objective' indicators for measuring job characteristics, family structure, and welfare with the fundamental importance of indicators of attitudes and life satisfaction, thus revealing how the citizens of Europe experience their jobs, families, and lives in general in the context of their values and preferences. In basic research terms, it will provide a means for developing the national traditions of research on these issues by providing for the first time high quality comparative data for the European societies. This is a precondition for any rigorous analysis of the implications of institutional and policy differences between countries for the quality of life of their citizens. It is an important feature of the module we propose that it will enable the separate study of working life and the family, while providing the basis for the study of how these areas of life interact (what we call family-and-work).

We believe that our proposed module is timely for several reasons. One is the need to monitor and analyse scientifically the implications for personal welfare of changes in the nature of work – including an increase in atypical work and a general (if gradual) upskilling of jobs – and in the nature of family and household structures – involving more single-person households, increased family dissolution, and more dual-earner families. One aspect of this is that individuals in some cases need to apply new strategies for coping with insecurity or risk, for example when unemployment increases, family stability decreases, at the same time as there are welfare state cut-backs. Another reason why the module is timely is that changes in work and family to some extent are reactions to and also influence policy and institutional arrangements that differ greatly among European nations; among these is the way parental obligations and rights and care for children are organized. A basic strength of our approach is that it does not only provide insights into work, family and welfare, but attempts to analyse the interactions between them. This is something that many scholars stress as one of the most important challenges for modern societies: everyday experiences of combining work and family obligations are crucial for life satisfaction and psychological wellbeing. Many of those in work are torn between time stress on the one hand and economic security and self-fulfilment on the other; children's quality of life may be both negatively and positively affected by parents' work-and-family relations; and one spouse's wellbeing is certainly dependent on the other spouse's gainful employment and contribution to household chores. Exploring these relations in a comparative perspective should add not only to a general understanding of sources of satisfaction and psychological strain among European populations, but also to the role of national welfare regimes in this process. It is also here that our proposal differs from other surveys that either concentrate on attitudes (such as the 2002 ISSP wave), or on conditions (such as the EU-SILC). Finally, the theme of this application speaks directly to major dimensions of inequality and problems of social cohesion. Gender relations are fundamental in negotiating work-and-family relations, and the exposed position of less advantaged socioeconomic and minority groups is an important factor, primarily because of the more precarious labour market position and the poorer job conditions they experience.

The team proposing the module is drawn from a network funded by the EU 5th Framework Programme in order to pilot a potential 'network of excellence' (Changequal). The work on this project has involved extensive reviews of the research literature on these topics, including a detailed examination and comparison of national data sources and indicators. This provides an excellent preparation for the development work that will be required for the module, assuring that we will be able to take advantage of an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of a wide range of existing survey indicators. In addition, the fact that the group

has successfully worked together on their existing project provides a strong assurance about their capacity for further collaborative work involving tight deadlines. As is outlined below, the existing network includes a number of experts on the issues dealt with in this application in addition to the five-person team. Also, the network is currently expanding, at this stage at least towards an inclusion of Italy, Estonia and The Netherlands, meaning that we will be able to draw on institutionalized collaboration of eight countries (quite apart from the extensive contacts the research group has with other international researchers and research groups).

Basic questions

Central to our proposal are the following questions about family-and-work:

- To what extent is modern working life in Europe possible to combine with family life? Do job characteristics such as increased flexibility facilitate a successful solution to the “double roles” of family and work, and are increasing job demands and stress in the job detrimental for this?
- In what way, and how much, do the possibilities of and problems in combining family and work correlate with job, family, and personal life satisfaction? Which work-and-family characteristics “produce” dissatisfaction and psychological stress – and which are conducive for coping with existing demands? Do difficulties in combining work and family affect preferences for employment on the one hand and for children on the other?
- How do the modern family and job structures affect gender relations? To what extent are women’s opportunities for a work career and for personal life satisfaction dependent on family obligations in different countries of Europe? Is a clash between preferences and structural constraints one reason behind the decrease in fertility in many European nations?
- To what extent do national policies (such as care service and parental leave schemes) enable men and women to reconcile work and family life? (I.e., do nations live up to the recent EU gender policy objectives under Pillar IV of the Employment Guidelines?)
- Do socioeconomic and ethnic-based inequality in employment opportunities and working conditions on the one hand, and family arrangements on the other, influence social cohesion? Do some groups in society, including women, have problems in participating fully in civil society, and does work and/or family strain lead to political apathy and lack of social integration among some disadvantaged groups of citizens.
- In ageing populations it is important to ask to what extent previous employment and conditions during working life, in combination with family characteristics (such as the number of and geographical distance to children) shape the wellbeing during old age. To what extent do job histories and family events and structure create social and economic resources and influence the health status and life satisfaction of people during retirement ages? Do welfare state arrangements alleviate lack of resources?

We believe that a high quality survey should provide ample opportunities of addressing a wide range of questions. Therefore, those we list above are only examples of questions in focus for the family-and-work dimension. We also aim at analyzing purely work-related issues (such as comparing skill development and skill mismatch across Europe; how job stress creates health problems, preferences for job security, etc.), as well as purely family-related problems (such as the life-satisfaction of adults and children in different family types; how the family in different welfare state configurations function as social support and/or a hinder for personal development, etc.). It goes without saying that the successful measuring of crucial life events, behaviour, attitudes and preferences within the family and work areas – in addition to the other ESS modules – will make the data an unsurpassed resource for a wide circle of researchers and policy makers. The members of our group expect to be among the first to analyse these data when they become available, in the expectation that analyses of high quality data on central societal issues will give us ample opportunities to publish the results in the best scientific journals.

Basic Principles of the Modules

The module is based on an approach that gives central importance to the need to combine 'objective' with 'subjective' indicators. It is necessary then to cover both actual conditions (resources) and behaviour on the one hand, and the beliefs, preferences, and values of individuals on the other.

The core information to be collected relates to the family and work context of the interviewee. Indirect information should be collected on the spouse and on children (although, as we discuss, the possibility of collecting a limited amount of information directly from children in the interviewee's family would be worth considering). Some indirect information on employers should also be collected.

For individuals, family and work relations have an important temporal dimension. A person's wellbeing and attitudes are not only formed by her current family status and work conditions; a recent divorce, long exposure to detrimental working environments, downward social mobility, or a couple's history of dividing paid and unpaid work are examples of events and biographies that have been shown to influence behaviour and shape attitudes. Hence, the adoption of a life-course perspective is a crucial feature of our approach. Collecting retrospective data that enable life-course analysis is unfortunately difficult (due to recall problems) and time-consuming. However, there are ways in which the timing of crucial events (such as divorce, unemployment, or birth of children) could be captured by few and straightforward questions. We intend to pinpoint a limited number of such events – events that are sufficiently important for responses to be reliable – and complement them with a few critical indicators of exposure (such as time with the current employer, total time out of the labour force, years married).

Given the width of the theme, we propose a 60 item (double) module.

Our approach to the selection of indicators is to draw as far as possible on what has been shown to work effectively in past surveys. There is now a wide range of indicators relating to work, family experience and personal welfare. They vary considerably however in terms of their technical merits. They differ both in terms of conceptual adequacy and in terms of the types of distribution they produce. The team has direct access to most of the existing surveys and will be able to make a detailed assessment of their properties.

In the sections that follow, we outline the types of measures that we would wish to include. Several of our proposed items are already included in the Modules of the ESS round I questionnaire, (those items are listed specifically). Even so, the present list is inclusive and has to be negotiated. We recognise that the art of questionnaire construction involves a tough-minded approach to determining priorities and that this will be a central aspect of the development work undertaken with the ESS team. At the same time, our experience has taught us that skilled question design can make possible the collection of very extensive information even within tight space/time limits.

Content of the Module

Work and employment

Employment and the quality of working life are of central importance for the overall quality of people's lives. With EU policy officially dedicated to a rise in employment rates, this will be true for an increasing sector of the population. National studies have consistently shown that the nature of work experiences has vital implications for people's psychological well-being, their physical health, their participation in activities outside work and their wider attitudes to society. Yet we still lack good data about the differences between countries in the nature and implications of work experiences and about trends across time. The European Foundation studies are valuable for the study of physical work conditions in industrial work environments, but their indicators on many of the key dimensions of work quality are inadequate and there is no possibility of addressing the key concern of our proposal which is to explore the links between work quality and other key dimensions of people's life experience.

Our point of departure will be to select items that will provide a robust portrait of the quality of work experiences on the key dimensions that past research has found to be of central importance. Aspects of work experience that will be addressed by the module will include work demands and work stress; length and type of working hours; job control and wider employee involvement; training and career opportunities; and employment security. Many studies examine such factors without considering the issue of people's values and preferences with respect to work, which imposes severe limitations on the interpretations that can be made. The significance to people's lives of particular job characteristics will depend partly on what they value about work. Such work values are likely to be rooted in longer-term factors such as the nature of the early family environment; previous employment and labour market experiences and distinctive national cultural patterns. Moreover, few attempts have been made to link work experiences to longer-term life preferences. Important policy issues in this respect are the implications of the quality of work for people's preferences about the continuity of employment and retirement age. The examination of work values and preferences is also of major relevance for the non-working population. The viability of policies to expand the workforce may depend crucially on the extent to which people believe that there are jobs of a type that they would like to take. This part of the module then will provide an important step forward in enabling us to study the implications of work experiences in the context of values and preferences.

Work: Areas of study and examples of indicators

Labour market and employment position. We also will collect in compact form synthetic information on key features of previous work career experience (eg first job; past unemployment and parental leave; previous experience of part-time and temporary work; duration of current job and employment status).

Current job: qualification needed, learning time, autonomy, authority, work involvement, psychological and physical demands, working hours (including overtime, travel, unsocial working hours, and flexibility), opportunity for skill development, career prospects, wage/income, collective representation, security.

Employer (indirect information): size, ownership, type of production, personnel policy (for instance with respect to combining work and family responsibilities).

Spouse: Economic activity, labour market position, occupation, branch of industry, working hours (incl. overtime, travel, unsocial/flexible), wage/income.

Other adults in the household (e.g. children): Employment status.

Work values and preferences: centrality of work (relative to non-work); preferences regarding job characteristics, working hours, and retirement age; attitude to trade union organisation; career orientation.

Unemployed and the non-actives: Most questions on previous labour market experience, work values and preferences could usefully be asked of all respondents (perhaps below a certain maximum age threshold). We also would hope to have a limited sequence of parallel questions to differentiate the situation of those in non-work employment statuses. In particular, these could focus on learning opportunities in their present context, on their degree of commitment to their current employment status and on the social pressures on them to change status.

Relation to ESS wave 1: Questions about respondent's economic activity (F8b-F11), employment status (F12-F13), occupation (F21), work tasks (F22), qualification needed (F23), employing organization's production (F24), trade union membership (F28), authority (F16-17) are already included in the Socio-demographic Module of the ESS questionnaire, as are questions about spouse's economic activity (F35), occupation (F37), work tasks (F38), and qualification needed (F39). Items addressing respondents' working hours (F19-F20) and unemployment experience (F25-F27) can be partly used. Questions asked under the heading of "citizen involvement" include work-related questions about how much say employees have (E30-E34), opportunities of changing jobs (E35-E36), possibilities of influencing the trade union (E38-E39), satisfaction with the workplace (E40), all of which will be considered in the proposed module.

Family

The role of the family for quality of life is undisputable. In a life-course perspective, the family is the crucial environment during the first years; the influence of the family on socialization and the continuous interaction during childhood and adolescence is of great relevance for the formation of an identity as well as for educational attainment and hence labour market opportunities; as adults, most form their own family with responsibilities towards a spouse, children and ageing parents – responsibilities that often have to be reconciled with the need and wish for gainful employment; and finally many rely on the family during their own old age. While the family is central for people in general, the degree to which they rely on the family for support differ vastly between European societies as patterns of family dissolution and nest-leaving, among other things, differ. With the expansion of “new” family forms it is surprisingly difficult to delineate how family patterns differ among modern societies; and it is an even more pressing task to study the consequences, or at least correlates, of different family patterns. Thus, one of the aims of this part of the module is to study how adults’ and children’s life satisfaction and wellbeing are related to family and living arrangements and events such as cohabitation, separation, “living together apart”, and family reconstitution. A particularly interesting question is of course to relate these to employment and working life conditions. The division of unpaid and paid labour between spouses, especially regarding time use is of great importance for gender relations and probably also for the reproduction of these relations. Related to this is the question of the logistic complexity in families with (especially small) children.

Family: Areas of study and examples of indicators

Household composition and civil status.

Retrospective information on cohabitation/marriage (including dissolution); birth of children, nest-leaving.

Normative beliefs about the family, the gender division of labour and the relationship between work and family.

Fertility preferences and (where applicable) plans

Household work: measures of hours per week and relative shares (including by others).

Informal care: approximate time per week spent caring for own children, or an elderly or disabled relative (by respondent and spouse); perceived need for external care (e.g., in order to work).

For families with children: childcare arrangements, indirect information on children (physical health and schooling), use of maternal and parental leave (where applicable).

Quality of and satisfaction with family life; time stress, stressful relations, social support.

Strain in negotiating work-family arrangements, satisfaction with the outcomes.

For those whose children have left home (also children to non-custodial parents): distance to children, social and economic support.

Relation to ESS wave 1: Questions about respondent’s civil status (F58) and household composition, including birth year of all household members (F59-F61, F64, F1-F4) are already included in the Socio-demographic Module of the ESS questionnaire.

Welfare/wellbeing

The focal point of our concern with the interplay of work and family situation is the way it affects the welfare of individuals. We take this as including the distinct dimensions of financial pressure; physical and psychological well-being; family cohesion; local social participation and societal integration. While there is a rich (if nationally bounded) tradition of research into the distinctive effects of work/non-work situation on the one hand and family situation on the

other for particular aspects of welfare, this module will provide the first in-depth analysis of the implications of specific inter-relationships of work and family experience. Again we will be concerned as far as possible to combine measures of 'objective' and 'subjective' welfare. For instance, it is frequently assumed that local social integration, or its converse social exclusion, can be adequately judged from indicators of the frequency of social contact. Yet people clearly differ (and this may vary culturally between societies) in their need for specific types of companionship. It is important then to include measures of the subjective experience of sociability or social isolation.

Welfare: Areas of study and examples of indicators

Economic resources: Income and wage, household amenities, size and standard of dwelling, type of housing, cash margin, social welfare benefits/exclusion.

General health status, psychological well-being/ stress.

Life satisfaction (in different domains).

Social support, social relations, social network, perceived social integration/isolation

Neighbourhood characteristics, security, service, school quality

Beliefs about how well personal interests are represented at societal level

Beliefs about harmony/conflict personal values and institutional structures (eg democracy, distribution of income and wealth, welfare provision)

The information for this section will be necessarily primarily collected from the interviewee. But one possibility is also to collect some direct information on children's well-being. It would be of exceptional value if it would be possible to assess some information directly from children in the household and thus study the relation between parents' work-and-family characteristics and children's wellbeing. Such data collection has been done, with great success, in both in the English BHPS and recently in the Swedish LNU and ULF surveys. The interviewee's children (age 10-15/18) were asked to fill in a short questionnaire while the parent was interviewed. Whether this approach can be developed for all of Europe has to be discussed with the ESS team. If included it might collect information about social relations, economic resources, school conditions, life-satisfaction, and psychological well-being.

Relation to ESS wave 1: Questions about respondent's subjective wellbeing (C1), social relations, activities and support (C2-C4), health status (C7-C8), and personal safety (C5-C6) are already included in the Subjective well-being and social exclusion module of the ESS questionnaire. Information on income source and size (F29-F31), financial buffer (F32) already exists in the Socio-demographic Module. Questions about citizen values (E22-E27) from the citizen involvement module could also be used, as could questions on social trust (Module A), political trust/values/activities (Module B), and human values (Module G).

Institutional information

Though it is outside of the questionnaire proper, we should add that it is of great value that the ambitious ESS strategy of gathering information on national characteristics (e.g., national policies, employment and industry structure, child care provision, parental leave regulations, labour supply in different family forms) is continued. The family-and-work relations are structured by societal institutions (e.g. family policy, labour market structure, tax system) and analysing how differences between countries in such institutions influence the quality of life of European citizens is a question of utmost interest.

The Research Team

The research team draws on the Changequal pilot Network of Excellence team, funded by the EU's Fifth Framework programme. The network is concerned to review the current state of research knowledge about the implications of economic change and inequalities of life chances for the quality of life. It consists of experts on life-course studies, work, and family; researchers who have dealt with the nature of work and family issues as such, as well as with the intersection between work and family. The team also has substantial experience in studying issues of gender, social class and ethnic inequality.

The research team also has great experience in international collaborative work – already manifested in the state-of-the-art reports that are the first output of the network – and that the combined academic contacts cover almost all of the countries involved in the first round of the ESS. Both Robert Erikson and Duncan Gallie have also been scientific and administrative leaders of major national and international research projects based on survey data.

It is worth emphasizing that the research team, and closest collaborators (also part of the network), have long and in-depth experience of designing surveys and of analyzing survey data. Their expertise thus lies not only in the theories and research questions in the area of the module, but also in the problems of transforming theories and research questions into survey instruments (operationalization being an often underestimated part of the study of scientifically and policy relevant issues). Thus, the Swedish Institute for Social Research runs since 30 years one of the major longitudinal studies based on a national sample, the Swedish Level-of-Living Survey (which started in 1968, with the most recent survey in 2000), to which is appended one survey on employers, one on young people, one of the elderly, and one on the unemployed. The Economic and Social Research Institute in Dublin has a dedicated survey unit which has been in operation for 30 years, and researchers there are involved in many surveys of direct relevance for this application, among them the Irish part of the ECHP survey. Helen Russell is currently devising a questionnaire for an employee survey in Ireland and was responsible for a survey on older worker's preferences for work and retirement. At the ESRI, Tony Fahey, who is coordinating the EF survey on "Monitoring Living Conditions and Quality of Life in the EU" and who is a member of the International Steering Committee for the European Values Study, and Dorothy Watson, manager of the Irish element of the ECHP I and member of the EU-SILC task force, will be significant resource persons for the application team. Duncan Gallie has long experience in designing surveys on employment and work skills, e.g., for the work module in the Eurobarometer. In the French team in the network, Louis-André Vallet has been involved in the French Family Survey of 1998 and is currently involved in the design of the most recent FQP survey; and Clothilde Lemarchant is involved in the 2002 ISSP module on family and work. Josef Brüderl adds, as one of the principle investigators of the large scale upcoming German Family Panel Survey, expertise in family and demographic data collection and analysis, as well as on statistical issues.

With Robert Erikson as the principal investigator, the administration of the research team will be located at the Swedish Institute for Social Research, Stockholm University, with Jan O. Jonsson as coordinator and drawing on the expertise of Michael Tåhlin, Anders Björklund, and Joakim Palme, as well as other collaborators. Jonsson and Tåhlin have been involved in the Swedish Level-of-Living survey since 1981 and are the current leaders of that project.