Parent-Child Leisure among Cohabiting and Married Households in Four Countries

Christina M. Wolfe, M.A.
The Pennsylvania State University
211 Oswald Tower
University Park, PA 16802
Email: cwolfe@psu.edu
Office: (814) 863-2763
Cell: (225) 202-2294
Fax: (814) 863-7216

Extended Abstract

Shared family leisure activities provide a crucial link in developing a supportive relationship between parent and child in addition to promoting child development through social and physical activity. However, leisure activity is constrained by time in paid employment, childcare and housework for parents and by time in educational activities for children. Craig and Mullan (2012) have showed in previous cross-national work that while labor force participation varies among mothers varies by country, time spent in parent-child leisure does not. I extend their analyses to assess differences in parent-child leisure time by national context, including maternal labor force participation and availability of publicly funded childcare, and individual characteristics, including hours worked per week and age of child using recent time diary data from the United States, the United Kingdom, Norway and Germany. I also improve upon their work by looking at the effects of cohabitation as compared to marriage on parent-child leisure time.

In both cases, national and cultural context are strong influences upon time spent with children. Expectations of gender roles vary by national context as do institutional supports. Policy and cultural context may influence concrete resources and opportunities available to parents (e.g., the length of the standard workweek), and normative expectations about behavior (e.g., acceptability of cohabitation) (Heuveline and Timberlake 2004, Hook 2010). To investigate this idea, I use countries from three welfare state regimes – the United States and the United Kingdom representing the liberal, Norway representing the social-democratic, and Germany representing the conservative regime. Liberal welfare states are characterized by a hands-off approach to employment and family affairs. Individual choice and the primacy of labor market forces shape gender relations within the employment and family sectors. In contrast, social-democratic countries are characterized by a range of universal policies that seek to support work-family balance for both men and women. Conservative countries also have an array of "family-supportive" policies, but in general, the focus of these policies is to support male-

breadwinner/female-caregiver families (Esping-Andersen 1990). I select these countries because each is an exemplar of its type, and each has high-quality, publicly available time use data.

Substantial variation exists across these countries in the demographic composition of families, including rates of cohabitation, step-parenting, and fertility. The percentage of children living in a two-parent family ranges from 86 percent of children in West Germany to 76 percent in the United Kingdom. Among children living in a two-parent household, a smaller percentage in West Germany (6%) and the United States (8%) are living with cohabiting parents than in the United Kingdom (14%), Norway (17%), and East Germany (19%) (Hyggen and Skevik 2002; Kreider and Fields 2005; Office for National Statistics 2005; Ostner, Schmitt, and Dede 2004a). I expect the effect of cohabitation on parent-child leisure to vary across the countries as the meaning of cohabitation varies across these contexts. Children living with two parents in the United States (13%) and the United Kingdom (12%) are also more likely to be living with a step-parent (married or cohabiting) than in Germany (8%) or Norway (5%) (Engstler and Menning 2004; Hyggen and Skevik 2002; Kreider and Fields 2005; Office for National Statistics 2005). Fertility rates also differ across countries. Germany, both East and West, has a lower total fertility rate than the other countries. Recent research suggests that this is now reflected in German fathers' ideal fertility (Knijn, Ostner, and Schmitt 2006). Fathers in Germany may be both a more select group (higher rates of childlessness) and less likely to live with multiple children than fathers in the other countries.

Data

The data used in my analyses are from four time use surveys conducted in the early 2000s. For the United States, I use the American Time Use Survey (ATUS) 2003 conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Respondents reconstructed the previous day using computer assisted telephone interviewing. One adult per household constructed a diary, recording only main activities. The other three datasets followed the Harmonised European Time Use Survey guidelines with some small variations. In contrast to the ATUS, the others used paper diaries that respondents completed throughout the day. The diaries

contained 10-minute time slots and provided space to record secondary activities. Germany's Time Use Survey 2001-2002, conducted by the Federal Statistical Office, collected diaries from all household members for three days. Norway's Time Use Survey 2000-2001, conducted by Statistics Norway, collected diaries for two days from one adult. The United Kingdom's National Survey of Time Use 2000-2001, conducted by a research company commissioned by the Office for National Statistics, collected diaries from all household members for two days.

I restrict my sample to partnered and employed parents residing with children under the age of fourteen (i.e. social, but not necessarily biological, parents). The resulting sample sizes are listed in Table 1. Note that in Germany and Norway respondents may provide multiple cases to a regression, particularly on weekdays, because studies gathered multiple diary days. Also, note that I have the most statistical power in the United States and Germany, less in the United Kingdom, and the least in Norway.

Measures

I create measures of number of minutes spent in parent-child leisure by country on the respondent's diary day. Variables are the lowest common denominator available in all datasets. I show descriptive statistics in Table 1. Individuals living in a cohabitational household are coded as 1. Sociodemographic controls include age, sex and level of education. Because it may be easier to plan and participate in leisure activities with multiple children, I control for number of children in the household. As young children spend more time in shared leisure than older children, I control for the presence of a child in the household under the age of 6. As time is a finite resource, minutes spent in other activities such as employment are expected to limit the number of minutes spent by with children and in shared leisure activities. Therefore, I control for the respondent's employment status and whether the respondent worked on his or her diary day. I also control for employment status of the respondent's partner.

Analyses

Multivariate analyses focus on differences across countries in the effects of variables on time spent in shared leisure activities with children. I begin by modeling minutes in parent-child leisure in each country. All analyses are weighted using the weights provided in each dataset, which account for sampling design, day of the week, and non-response. I cluster standard errors by respondent in order to account for multiple diaries per person (non-independence).

Most time use variables have a significant amount of zeros, creating an irregular distribution. Because this irregularity violates assumptions of normality, some fear that OLS estimates will be biased and instead utilize Tobit models for censored data. However, others have argued that because Tobit models assume that some zeros represent unobserved negative values, they are inappropriate for time use data as respondents cannot spend fewer than zero minutes in an activity. Unlike Tobit, OLS coefficients sum to zero and the intercepts sum to 24 hours. Additionally, coefficients generated though OLS models remain stable whether generated from a single diary day or a weekly average (Gerhsuny & Egerton, 2006). Therefore, I use OLS models for multivariate analyses shown here.

Results

By examining the effect of union type across countries, I show that no statistically significant differences exist between married and cohabiting families in regards to shared parent-child leisure. Mothers spent fewer minutes in parent-child leisure than did fathers in all countries except for Norway, where no statistically significant differences were found. In the United States, respondents with a college degree spent fewer minutes in parent-child leisure than did respondents without a college degree. While parents in all four countries spent fewer minutes in parent-child leisure on diary days on which they reported having worked, they also reported a greater number of minutes spent on the dependent variable on weekend days. Respondents in the US and Germany who reported having a partner who was employed spent slightly fewer minutes in parent-child leisure than did parents without an employed partner.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics (Weighted)

Variable	United States Mean	United States Std. Dev.	United Kingdom Mean	United Kingdom Std. Dev.	Germany Mean	Germany Std. Dev.	Norway Mean	Norway Std. Dev.
Number of Minutes Spent in Leisure	53.16	97.58	79.57	102.82	33.01	64.74	44.91	67.93
Age	35.78	7.41	35.59	6.94	38.36	6.30	35.19	6.64
R is Female	52%		52%		49%		48%	
Cohabiting Household	4%		13%		3%		31%	
R has College Degree	47%		30%		43%		39%	
Number of Children in Household	2.01	0.89	1.83	0.82	2.00	0.89	1.96	0.82
Youngest Child < 6	60%		62%		46%		67%	
Diary on Weekend Day	29%		28%		32%		30%	
Employment Status	0.90	0.58	1.04	0.68	0.97	0.67	1.15	0.56
Partner's Employment Status	0.94	0.62	1.27	0.63	1.05	0.69	1.15	0.59
R Worked on Diary Day	54%		51%		46%		53%	
N	4609		2861		7176		1257	

Table 2. OLS Regression of Parent-Child Shared Leisure on Multivariate Predictors (Weighted)

	United States			United Kingdom			Germany			Norway		
	b		se	b		se	b		se	b		se
Age	-0.76	***	0.2	0.05		0.3	0.24		0.14	0.65		0.35
R is Female	-19.09	***	2.67	-22.47	***	3.85	-5.64	***	1.55	-7.18		4.37
Cohabiting Household	-6.76		6.48	0.81		5.37	2.25		4.04	6.61		4.39
R has College Degree	-12.27	***	2.62	-1.29		3.87	0.81		1.45	-6.82		3.98
Number of Children in Household	-3.6	*	1.41	3.6		2.19	0.06		0.81	-3.05		2.41
Youngest Child < 6	-1.59		2.95	0		4.13	-6.91	***	1.66	-0.88		4.88
Diary on Weekend Day	33.09	***	3	20.47	***	4.25	22.03	***	1.7	25.92	***	4.65
Employment Status	0.87		2.27	4.39		2.79	1.33		1.13	2.35		3.6
Partner's Employment Status	-6.38	**	2.02	3.03		2.84	-3.69	***	1.02	-2.65		3.33
R Worked on Diary Day	-22.96	***	3	-33.04	***	4.22	-18.88	***	1.77	-16.86	***	4.5
Constant	104.61	***	9.39	80.99	***	14.3	31.81	***	6.06	34.38	*	16.85
r2	0.08			0.05			0.08			0.07		
N	4609			2859			7176			1257		