



Negotiating work and family across the life course: a comparison of birth cohorts

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Arguably, for women today, one of the great challenges in negotiating the life course is managing the timing and responsibilities of childbearing within expectations or needs to maintain a connection to the labour market. This paper explores how different this relationship between childbearing and work is for women of different birth cohorts, from those born in the 1940s through to those born in the 1970s. The analysis also considers changes in education and relationship formation across these cohorts, and how they relate to work participation. Participation in full-time versus part-time work is also explored.

The paper makes use of Wave 4 of the Negotiating Life Course Survey data. The main focus is on the work history data, in which information were collected on respondents' participation in paid work for every year since turning 15 years old. Similar details of participation in education are also incorporated in this analysis. Further, these data are related to the detailed birth and relationship histories of each respondent. More detailed examination of employment is considered through analysis of the occupation history, to determine how the occupational status of employed women has changed across birth cohorts, and to analyse differences according to education, relationship status and childbearing.