

DUAL EARNER FAMILIES AND WORK-LIFE 'INTEGRATION': NON-MATERNAL CHILDCARE AND MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT

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TABLE RONDE 5

The feminisation of managerial and professional employment is one of the major changes to have taken place over the last 20 years (although women are still not represented in these groupings to the same extent as men). Professional and managerial women are more likely to be in employment than women in other social groups, thus the incidence of 'dual earner' households will be higher than in other classes. A minority of professional and managerial households, however, will be single earner families, supported by the man's income (which is likely to be higher than average).

The paper presents some of the empirical findings of a recent GeNet project (www.genet.ac.uk), 'Class Gender, employment and Family'. The project included over ninety work-life interviews with doctors, accountants, and employees in retail and finance. All interviewees had a child under the age of 14, and both men and women were interviewed. It also draws upon relevant quantitative evidence from both the British Household Panel study (BHPS), and the ISSP (International Social Survey Programme) Family modules. The discussion focuses on one particular attitude statement: 'A pre-school child suffers if his or her mother goes out to work'.

The interview material suggested that professional and managerial mothers were more likely to be working through 'choice' (or self-fulfilment) than women in the other class categories. The BHPS data demonstrated that professional and managerial women are less likely to think that preschool childcare is damaging – a reflection of the fact that proportionately more of such women are in employment. However, there are no class differences at all in attitudes as to the effects of preschool childcare between mothers who do not work. These findings suggest that, much as professional and managerial women are likely to choose to continue in employment, a minority are exercising a choice not to take up paid employment, in part because of their attitudes to the impact of non-maternal care. That is, as far as maternal employment is concerned, the (family) choices that are made are constrained by class, both positively and negatively.

Men in all countries are more gender traditional than women, and this is also reflected in their attitudes to the care of preschool children. In Britain, this is particularly marked within the professional and managerial grouping, where there is a near 20% gender difference in attitude. As professional and managerial families have a greater capacity to exercise choice as to whether the mothers of young children remain in employment or not (the latter option facilitated by the man's likely higher earnings), it may be suggested that, within this class grouping, the distinctions between dual and single earner families might be particularly acute and likely to be reflected in other arenas beyond the family.

However, can these British findings and interpretations be generalised? For example, France is characterised by more generous dual earner family supports than Britain, and non-maternal childcare for preschoolers might be more widely acceptable amongst all classes. Limited empirical comparisons (via ISSP) are available. This comparison suggests that on the same ('pre-school child suffers') attitude statement, the patterns revealed by French case are very similar to the British. In conclusion, therefore, it is suggested that 'domestic' variation (ie, the distinction between single and dual earner families) within the professional and managerial class is likely to contribute to within-class division as it is more likely to be the outcome of 'choice' and personal beliefs (the pattern of maternal employment in other classes

being more constrained by circumstances). At the same time, if we can be guided by attitudinal evidence, gender divisions within this class are wider than in other classes – contributing, perhaps, to further fragmentation within the managerial and professional grouping.