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# The Emergence of Dual-Earner Couples

*A Longitudinal Study of the Netherlands*

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**abstract:** In this article, the authors address the extent to which full-time working couples in the Netherlands have gone through compositional changes with respect to young children and educational level. Using a stacked data set of 13 large-scale labour force surveys collected by Statistics Netherlands ranging from 1977 to 2002 (N = 461,003 Dutch households), the authors first studied whether the increase of full-time working couples is a result of cohort and/or period effects. It is concluded that the steady growth of full-time working households is mainly accounted for by cohort succession: in couples from younger birth cohorts, both partners increasingly prefer to work full-time. Second, the study investigated the composition of those full-time working couples. As a starting point, it is clear that full-time working couples are mostly found among those with a higher educational level and without any children. For this composition, the authors' analyses show that over time and cohorts the educational level of full-time working couples increases more than that of male single-earners or combination households. Most important is that the negative effect of having young children for full-time working couples became more negative over cohorts, indicating that combining children and full-time work as a couple has become less attractive in recent cohorts.

**keywords:** cohort analysis ♦ compositional change ♦ couples ♦ demographic and social change ♦ full-time employment

## Introduction

In the Netherlands until the 1970s, a traditional family configuration with a male breadwinner was the most widespread: more than 70 per cent of all Dutch couples consisted of a full-time working male and a non-working housewife. In the 1980s and 1990s, a considerable change

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in this state of affairs took place. Educational expansion, economic welfare growth, female emancipation and expanding childcare facilities all stimulated women's labour participation. Obviously, this resulted in an increase of dual-working couples. In this respect, two more specific developments are to be distinguished. First, a sizeable growth of so-called combination couples occurred. These are couples in which both partners work in paid labour, but at least one of them works part-time (Van der Lippe, 2001). Second, a substantial expansion of full-time working couples, in which both partners are employed more than 35 hours per week, was established. In a 20-year period in the Netherlands, the number of full-time working couples almost doubled – from 8 percent in 1977 to 15 percent in 1998 (Statistics Netherlands data).

At the couple level, the Dutch labour market is known these days for its 'one-and-a-half'-earner type with a full-time working husband and a part-time working wife. The contrast between the working hours of Dutch female spouses and those in surrounding European countries is striking. If we compare all dual-earner couples across nations, the Netherlands displays a mere 38 percent of all dual-earner couples working full-time, whereas in the UK and France more than 50 percent of dual-earners are employed full-time. If we account for having children as a structural constraint, the difference becomes even larger. When couples have children only 10 percent of all dual-earner couples in the Netherlands work full-time, compared to at least 30–40 percent of such couples in surrounding countries (Eurostat, 2004). It thus seems that, compared to the international context, full-time work by both spouses is not preferred by Dutch couples. Although emancipation has stimulated both partners to work, part-time work by women is still the favoured strategy. In line with preference theory developed by Hakim (2000), one might say that Dutch society displays so many part-time workers because employee preferences are matched to a large extent. Hakim states in a conceptual framework that only a small proportion (about 20 percent) of all women favour full-time employment. This is exactly what we believe makes the Dutch labour market an interesting case for studying the emergence of full-time working couples. If the preference for full-time work is that low compared to surrounding countries, then which couples are responsible for an increase of the number of full-time working couples over time? This article investigates the demographic mechanisms behind the increase in the number of full-time working couples in the Netherlands.

We address two research questions on the increase of full-time work in the Netherlands. First, we study this trend and examine cohort succession and period effects. Studying these effects will answer whether the rising

inclination of the full-time working arrangement can be ascribed to widely shared societal changes that took place among all couples in Dutch society (period effect) or to a socialization into more modern conditions and norms solely among couples from certain birth cohorts (cohort effect). Second, this article addresses the composition of full-time working couples in the Netherlands – which couples choose to be in such an arrangement? Previous research by the Social and Cultural Planning Office provided only a brief description of full-time working couples (Hooghiemstra, 1997). International studies show that full-time workers tend to be relatively young, childless and with a higher level of education (Blossfeld and Drobnic, 2001; De Graaf and Vermeulen, 1997; Hakim, 1997). Until now, questions on compositional changes of full-time couples have not been addressed. More specifically, we study whether full-time work as a couple has become more common among all educational groups or has remained an exclusive choice made chiefly by those with a higher education. A similar question may be posed on combining children and full-time work. Has it become more or less common as a family to both work full-time and have children?

To study the increase of full-time working couples and compositional change, we pose the following two research questions: (1) 'To what extent can the increase in full-time working couples be understood as a period effect and/or cohort succession effect?', and (2) 'To what extent has the composition of full-time working couples regarding educational attainment and having children changed over time?'. In order to answer these research questions, we employ a large-scale stacked data set of 13 individual cross-sections over the years between 1977 and 2002. These data from Statistics Netherlands are a clean representation of the Dutch labour force in this time frame. It enables us to study the demographic trend towards more full-time working couples over a period of 25 years, and for birth cohorts from 1921 to 1981.

Previous research that has put working hours under close scrutiny mainly discussed female labour force participation, unequal chances in paid employment and the male–female division of labour (Blossfeld and Hakim, 1997; Hakim, 1995; Van der Lippe and Van Dijk, 2001). By and large, this research has emphasized female labour participation and examined the changing position of women solely. Although it has provided valuable knowledge on the male–female division of paid and unpaid labour, the research has left the couple as a unit of analysis under-exposed (Blossfeld and Drobnic, 2001). From this 'couple view', it follows that decisions on spousal working hours are made in conjunction by both partners in a household (Moen, 2003). In our contribution, we advocate a couple perspective and explicitly focus on the time *couples* devote to paid labour and thus refrain from examining differences between men and

women. In doing so, we stress that important employment decisions of couples are made in consultation and are not a result of an isolated act of an individual (Coltrane, 2000; Han and Moen, 1999, 2001). Indeed, in these decisions preferences and perceived restrictions of both men and women are reflected. This article thus illustrates the changing of preferences and restrictions over time.

### **Trends in the Full-Time Employment of Couples: Cohort and Period Effects**

Our first research question concerns the demographic trend displaying an increased number of full-time working couples. This trend may be explained by either cohort, period or age effects. First, the increase may be explained through cohort effects by examining the time frame in which individuals grew up and were socialized. Individuals born in the same societal circumstances undergo a common socialization, and these experiences during the formative years differ between birth cohorts (Inglehart, 1977). Moreover, the individual's experiences felt in the formative years are believed to have a lasting influence on preferences and behaviour (Alwin and Krosnick, 1991; Glenn, 1980; Mannheim, 1964). In this study, with information on birth cohorts from 1922 to 1981, it is implied that specific socialization experiences affect the decision to work full-time as a couple. Preferences and perceived restrictions for dual full-time work may differ between cohorts, and this can be the engine behind a modernization process since older generations retire and younger generations enter the labour force.

Second, a period effect can also be held responsible for the increase in the number of full-time working couples. They result from societal circumstances that affect all people in society simultaneously. The preferences and behaviours of people are then influenced by current opinions in societal debate or perceived restrictions (i.e. legislation, childcare facilities) affecting people from all social groups and all birth cohorts. In our study, this means that the decision of partners to both work full-time is influenced by the societal climate and characteristics of the Dutch context in the period between 1977 and 2002.

Third, a trend may occur as a result of the influence of age. However, there are serious reasons why age has little predictive value for explaining an *increase* of full-time working couples in the Netherlands. The reason for this lies in the fact that full-time work by both spouses is most attractive among young couples. Most individuals leaving daytime education, around the age of 20, will prefer to work full-time (Grimm and Bonneuil, 2001). The transition from daytime education to paid labour

often coincides with the start of a stable relationship, and this results in a full-time working couple. Still, to explain an increase in the number of full-time working couples by means of an age effect implies that over time the group of youngsters in the labour market must have grown substantially in size. Demographic reports show that the group of 20- to 30-year-olds has shrunk over recent decades (Eurostat, 2004), therefore age cannot provide an explanation for the observed increase in the number of full-time working couples in the Netherlands from 1977 to 2002. Note that our research question focuses on either cohort succession or period effects as explanations for the rising number of full-time working couples. What the question thus reads is, which process is more important?

### **Cohort Effect: Socialization within a Certain Time Frame**

To elaborate on a cohort explanation of the trend towards more full-time working couples, it is important to examine features of the time frame in which a couple grew up and was socialized. Here we make a distinction between structural and cultural societal characteristics. Structural features predominantly reflect restrictions in the institutional and legislative state of affairs, whereas cultural aspects indicate the attitudinal climate in society (Buchmann, 1989; Liefbroer and Dykstra, 2000).

What are the characteristics of Dutch society over the past century (1921–81) that enable us to expect an increase in the number of full-time working couples as a result of cohort succession? As far as structural characteristics of Dutch society are concerned, it is clear that younger birth cohorts were raised when female employment became more common. First, government legislation stimulated female labour participation, especially during the economic recession of the 1980s. Second, the growing availability of childcare facilities has improved the possibilities of women taking on paid labour (Van der Lippe, 2001). Third, contraception improved and facilitated the delay of a first childbirth. These three structural conditions advanced the participation of women in the labour market. As a result, more people were socialized in times when female work was more widespread.

Next to structural characteristics of Dutch society, some cultural features have been subject to change as well. First of all, in the Netherlands a general trend towards individualization may be observed, just as in most other western societies. In this process of individualization, traditional beliefs erode and values that emphasize personal responsibilities, self-created chances and autonomy become self-evident (Kuijsten, 1996). Individuals increasingly strive for a self-directed life course, and increasingly invest in their occupational career (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Cherlin, 2004). Second, the emancipation of women is an apparent characteristic of western societies over the last decades. Previous international

research clearly underscores the rising approval of non-traditional sex roles for women (Alwin et al., 1992). More specifically, it has become increasingly accepted for women to be active in paid labour and to continue to work after childbirth. These cultural conditions too contributed to a socialization of birth cohorts where working women are more common.

Both structural and cultural developments of recent decades contributed to increase female labour market participation. A direct consequence of this development is that over birth cohorts more young adults experience the full-time employment of women in a couple as a realistic opportunity. Our expectation based upon cohort succession then reads: From both structural and cultural developments in Dutch society it may be expected that couples from the younger birth cohorts prefer full-time employment to a larger extent than couples from the older cohorts (*hypothesis 1a*).

### **Period Effect: A General Trend**

A second explanation for the rise of full-time working couples in Dutch society may stem from period effects. Again, we try to deal with such effects in terms of structural and cultural developments that took place in recent decades. This study for the Netherlands examines the period between 1977 and 2002. With respect to some structural conditions in that period, it is clear that educational expansion is a key development, as increasingly more highly educated workers entered the labour market. At the same time, demand for the more highly educated rose considerably, mainly due to substantial economic growth in the 1990s. From a labour market perspective, this can be labelled as a pull factor, especially for women to remain employed full-time. Availability of childcare facilities improved considerably in the 1990s, enabling women to work outside the home for longer hours (Turksema, 2000). In this period, it seems clear that modernization and individualization were ongoing processes in terms of developments in the cultural domain. Attitudes anchored in traditional beliefs have lost importance over the last three decades. This loosening up of traditional bonds may have expectedly affected decisions of all couples in society, and not only those from specific birth cohorts. Our expectation based upon a period effect then reads: In both structural and cultural terms, we expect that couples in 2002 will prefer full-time employment to a larger extent than couples in 1977 (*hypothesis 1b*).

## **A Transformation in the Composition of Full-Time Working Couples**

Our second research question deals with the composition of full-time working couples with respect to having children and educational attainment, and possible changes in that composition over birth cohorts and time periods.

### **Full-Time Working Couples and Young Children**

The amount of time that couples spend on paid labour is likely subject to change as they move from one life stage to another. A major transition in a couple's life course is the birth of a child. It generates additional family obligations like caring, rearing and educating. Research on the transition to parenthood provides information that having young children is interlinked with (latent) preferences on the reduction of working hours, i.e. working in part-time jobs (Barber et al., 2002; Even, 1987; Hakim, 2002; McRae, 2003). The actual transition is believed to alter a person's preferences on the combination of work and care (Clarckberg and Moen, 2001; Lee et al., 2005). As a consequence, people with young children appreciate their family life more and refrain from dual full-time work. A reduction, then, is most likely in families with young children and less likely in families with older children or no children at all (Drobnic et al., 1999). To what extent couples scale down working hours may be affected by the time period in which they live, but also by the period in which they are socialized. Over birth cohorts, opinions on the combination of work and care have modernized and restrictions relaxed (Alwin et al., 1992). In couples with children from the younger birth cohorts, spouses will more likely work full-time compared to couples from older birth cohorts (*hypothesis 2a*). The same argument holds for an expected compositional change over time periods. Between 1977 and 2002, the sex-role attitudes of the Dutch population on working women loosened up and a substantial growth in the number of childcare facilities took place. By and large, it may be expected that for couples these developments made it easier to combine work and care, which encourages full-time employment by both spouses. Therefore, we presume that a couple with children is more likely to work full-time in 2002, compared to 1977 (*hypothesis 2b*).

### **Full-Time Working Couples and Educational Attainment**

Full-time working couples have a relatively higher educational level (Blossfeld and Drobnic, 2001; Henz and Sundström, 2001; Jacobs and Gornick, 2002). Educational investments demand realization of the acquired capital on the labour market (Becker, 1964), therefore it is clear that those with a higher education will participate more in full-time paid labour than those with a lower level of education. Research has also shown that higher levels of schooling go along with progressive values on combining work and care, the use of childcare facilities, work commitment and acknowledgement of the job-reward potential of women (Desai and Waite, 1991; Drobnic et al., 1999; Gornick and Meyers, 2003). Furthermore, women with a higher educational attainment are far more likely to return to the labour market after childbirth than women with a lower educational level (Klerman and Leibowitz, 1999). People's preference for a full-time



working couple where husbands and wives work equal hours is largely reflected by their educational level (Hakim, 2003: 94).

Again, the educational composition of full-time working couples may be expected to change over birth cohorts and time periods. If over time the preferences of the more highly educated on combining work and care became more widespread, it is likely to occur among all educational groups in society, implying an emancipation of the less educated. A consequence would be a weakening of the positive effect of education on the full-time employment of couples between 1977 and 2002. We thus expect the average educational level of full-time working couples to be lower in 2002 than in 1977 (*hypothesis 3a*).

A contrasting hypothesis states that the above-average full-time employment of couples with a higher educational attainment only functions as an appealing example for couples with comparably higher educational levels in Dutch society. Over time, this would only have encouraged full-time employment by other higher educational attainment couples. If this is the case over birth cohorts and between 1977 and 2002, the positive effect of education on the full-time employment of couples has become even more outstanding. Hence we expect the average educational level of full-time working couples to be higher in the younger birth cohorts compared to the older birth cohorts, and higher in 2002 compared to 1977 (*hypothesis 3b*).

## **Data and Measurements**

To answer our research questions, we stacked 13 cross-sectional data files with couple information on labour force participation originating from Statistics Netherlands. Specifically, the Labour Force Surveys (in Dutch, *Arbeidskrachtentelling* or AKT) from 1977, 1981, 1983 and 1985 and the Labour Force Surveys (*Enquête beroepsbevolking* or EBB) from 1990, 1992, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2001 and 2002 have been analysed. The AKT surveys are conducted among the non-institutionalized Dutch population aged 15 years and older. The EBB is a standardized survey conducted yearly with a comparable sample frame.

From these data we selected all male–female couples, between 21 and 55 years of age, either married or cohabiting. Respondents subject to military service were removed from the data set. The age selection was applied because we intended to examine the work arrangement decisions of couples who were in the active labour force. Many individuals under 21 years of age are still enrolled in daytime education and tend not to constitute a stable relationship. Individuals over 55 years of age were left out of the analyses, since labour participation in this group is relatively low. Early retirement or disability are the main reasons to end a working career

before the compulsory age of 65. Hence, for this age group the decision not to work full-time as a couple has little to do with preferences, but rather with institutional arrangements in the Netherlands. After this selection, our data set consisted of 461,003 Dutch couples born between 1921 and 1980, and surveyed over the 1977–2002 period.

To categorize couples according to working hours, we apply the standard definition of Statistics Netherlands (Reemers, 2003). People who work fewer than 12 hours are categorized as unemployed, individuals who work 12–35 hours a week are part-time workers, and individuals working 35 hours or more a week are considered full-time workers. Applying this categorization to couples leads to: (1) full-time working couples where both partners work over 35 hours a week; (2) single-earner male households with a man working either part-time or full-time and a non-working wife; (3) combination couples where both partners work, at least one of them part-time; (4) non-employed couples where both partners either do not work or work fewer than 12 hours a week; and (5) single-earner females.

Individual educational attainment in the Netherlands is measured in five levels: primary school; lower vocational and lower secondary education (lbo/mavo); intermediate vocational, general secondary and pre-college education (mbo/havo/vwo); higher vocational education (hbo); and university (wo). The measure for couples pertains to the average educational attainment of both spouses. The actual presence of children in a household is measured by: no children in the household, youngest child below the age of four and youngest child older than four. Survey years 1981, 1983 and 1985 do not contain a measure for children. In these years, the measure for children is set to zero and a dummy indicating missing values for the presence of children in those cases is included in the model. Birth cohort and time period are interval variables in our analysis; birth cohort reflects the average year in which a couple is born, time period is equal to measurement year. See Table 1 for the range, mean and standard deviations for all used instruments.

## Results

In order to test our hypotheses, we estimate the chance of being in a full-time working couple as compared to being in a single-earner male household and being in a combination couple. As this dependent variable consists of different non-metric categories, we use multinomial logistic regression. This technique strongly resembles logistic regression, but allows more categories in the dependent variable (Long, 1997). When utilizing a large data set to test hypotheses, the substance of regression coefficients is more important than their significance, therefore we focus on the magnitude of the coefficients. In our multinomial logit model, the parameters (log odds) in the text will be interpreted in terms of odds ratios.

**Table 1** Descriptives of All Measurements Used in the Analysis

	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Household working arrangement	1.00	5.00	2.12	1.37
Birth cohort (1950 = 0)	-28.00	31.00	0.13	10.70
Time period (1977 = 0)	0.00	25.00	10.88	8.53
Children				
No children	0.00	1.00	0.61	0.49
Youngest child under age 4	0.00	1.00	0.16	0.36
Youngest child older than 4	0.00	1.00	0.23	0.42
Educational level	0.00	4.00	1.56	0.87

This means that with every unit increase in a given  $x$ , the odds are expected to change by a factor of  $\exp(b)$ , holding all other variables constant. The tables do display the effect on the logit, enabling us to calculate the effect size of the interaction parameters. For reasons of presentation, we estimate the odds on full-time employment of a couple in contrast to the other arrangements. Full-time couples are always coded one (1), and single-earner male households or combination households are coded zero (0). Although non-employed couples and single-earner females are included in the multinomial design, we do not present results of this comparison.

### **The Trend Described**

First, bivariate results are presented that reflect the changes that took place in the Netherlands over the last few decades. What kind of developments took place with respect to couples' employment? This is illustrated in Table 2. In column 1, we observe a large decline of the single-earner male household, plummeting from 72 percent in 1977 to 32 percent in 2002. This trend is accompanied by a 36 percent increase in the number of combination couples where both spouses work and at least one works part-time (column 2). The share of full-time working couples is presented in column 3. Here we observe a substantial growth from 8 percent in 1977 to about 15 percent in the 1990s. In the last three years, this upward trend levels off.

Figures 1 and 2 describe the compositional change in the average educational level of spouses and the presence of children for the three most relevant household arrangements. In Figure 1a, the average educational level across birth cohorts is drawn for the three households under study. As expected, over birth cohorts the average educational level is rising. Among all couples an increase is evident, but the rise among full-time working couples is higher than among other couples. It thus seems that over birth cohorts the educational level expanded more rapidly among full-time workers, which would imply that full-time working couples are increasingly found among people with a higher educational level. Figure 1b displays the

**Table 2** Trends in Household Types Based on Labour Market Participation 1977–2002, Couples Aged 21–55 (unweighted)<sup>a</sup>

	Single-earner male	Combination households	Full-time working couples	Non-employed	Single-earner female	Sample size (couples)
	1	2	3			
1977	71.9	11.8	8.1	6.8	1.4	56220
1981	66.4	14.2	9.0	7.7	2.7	88073
1983	63.7	14.9	8.9	9.2	3.4	53766
1985	63.8	16.0	8.7	8.4	3.1	51546
1990	49.4	24.7	12.7	9.6	3.6	29370
1992	48.7	28.9	14.3	5.3	2.8	22745
1995	44.6	32.8	13.9	5.5	3.2	25462
1996	43.8	34.1	13.9	4.9	3.3	23487
1997	41.8	36.0	14.8	4.2	3.1	23308
1998	39.5	39.2	15.3	3.5	2.5	21222
2000	36.9	41.2	13.4	5.2	3.3	22601
2001	34.6	43.9	14.4	3.9	3.3	21762
2002	32.2	48.0	13.6	3.2	3.0	21441

<sup>a</sup> Fewer than 12 hours = not employed; 12–35 hours = part-time; 35 hours or more = full-time.  
 Source: Labour Force Surveys (1977, 1981, 1983, 1985, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2002).

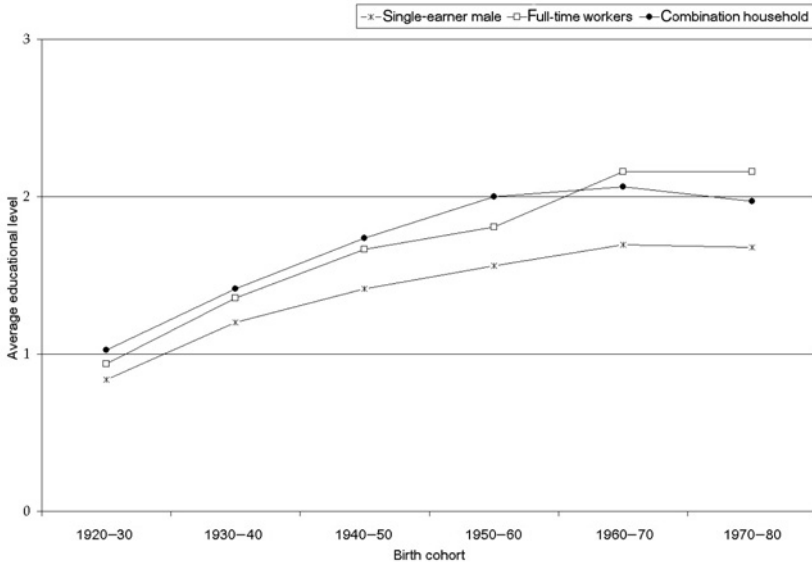


Figure 1a Average Educational Level of Couples Born between 1920 and 1980

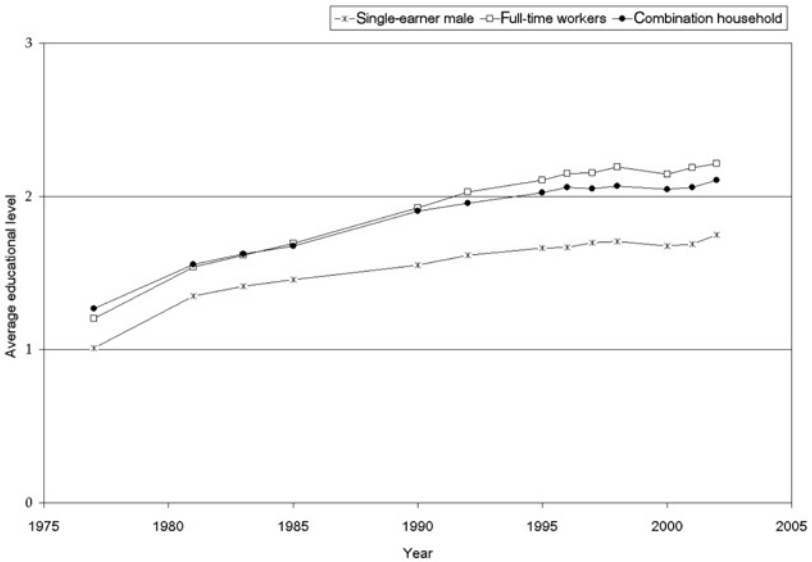


Figure 1b Average Educational Level of Couples, 1977-2002

educational composition over a period. Full-time working couples have the highest educational level here – the line even seems to move away from the others over time. Figure 2a displays the percentage of couples with children for subsequent birth cohorts. The dip around the 1940–50 cohort is due to the fact that the years 1981, 1983 and 1985 lack information on children. As can be seen in Figure 2b, over the years (1977–2002) the percentage of couples with children diminishes for all arrangements. On average, 90 percent of single-earners have children, whereas this number is as low as 40 percent among full-time workers. These numbers decline over time, while they seem to increase for the combination couples, especially in the 1990s. This indicates that children and full-time work are combined less often over the years. This would speak against our arguments expressed in hypothesis 2a, which expected an increase of children among full-time working couples. Multinomial logistic regression analysis should reveal whether these compositional changes can be observed while controlling for other relevant characteristics.

### ***Multinomial Regression: Which Couples are Working Full-Time and When***

Table 3 displays the comparison between full-time working couples and other households. First, in Model 1 the effects of birth cohort and time period are considered. The odds on being employed full-time as a couple are clearly higher when spouses are born in the younger birth cohorts. Each birth year beyond 1950 increases the odds on full-time employment by a factor of 1.09 ( $\exp(0.089)$ ) as opposed to a single-earner male household and a factor of 1.07 as compared to a combination couple. Over time (1977–2002) we observe a decline of the odds on being in a full-time working couple. Every year the odds on dual full-time employment get smaller, with 2.2 percent in favour of a single-earner male household ( $1/\exp(-0.022)$ ) and 9.9 percent in favour of a combination couple ( $1/\exp(-0.094)$ ). As a result, we may conclude that the rise in full-time working couples in recent decades clearly seems to be determined by a cohort succession effect. Both members of couples that were socialized when the employment of women became more widely accepted decide more often to work full-time than couples born in earlier cohorts. This is in accordance with our expectations formulated in hypothesis 1a.

To enlighten the difference in effects between time period and birth year, Figures 3a and 3b provide predicted probabilities for choosing a single-earner male household, a combination household or a full-time working household. These probabilities are calculated holding the other parameter (either period or cohort) at its mean value. Figure 3a clearly shows that the developments that took place from 1977 to 2002 certainly did not contribute to a rise in the number of full-time working couples in Dutch society. The popularity of full-time working couples dropped during this

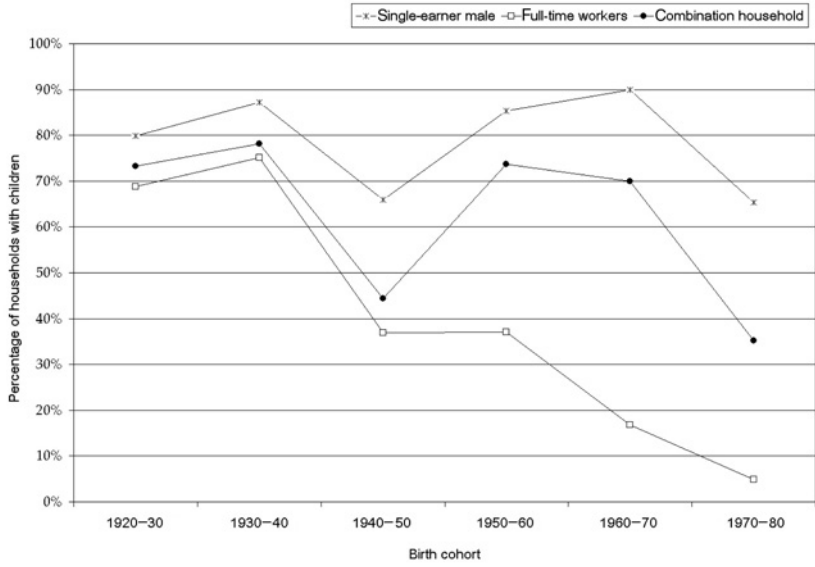


Figure 2a Percentage of Couples with Children Born between 1920 and 1980

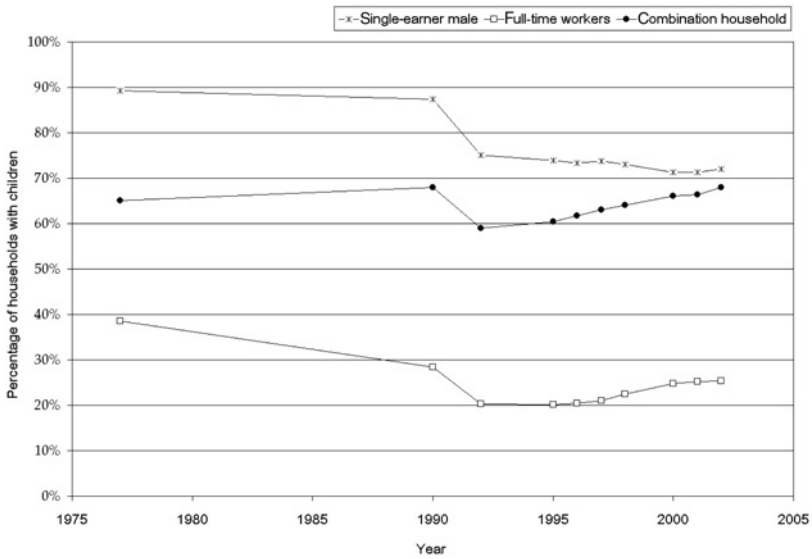


Figure 2b Percentage of Couples with Children, 1977-2002

**Table 3** Multinomial Logistic Regression: Log Odds for a Full-Time Working Couple vs. a Single-Earner Male and a Combination Household Regressed on Cohort, Period, Children and Educational Level (standard errors between brackets)<sup>a</sup>

	Single-earner male (0)						Combination households (0)					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
Full-time working couples (1) vs												
Intercept	-1.519**	-0.652**	-0.927**	-0.512**	-0.651**	-0.243**	0.182**	0.878**	0.617**	0.438*	0.891**	1.105**
Cohort (1950 = 0)	0.089**	0.089**	0.097**	0.089**	0.058**	0.090**	0.071**	0.061**	0.066**	0.062**	0.044**	0.060**
Period (1977 = 0)	-0.022**	-0.045**	-0.032**	-0.054**	-0.045**	-0.084**	-0.094**	-0.090**	-0.077**	-0.067**	-0.089**	-0.112**
Children 0-4	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)
Children > 4	-3.121**	-2.877**	-2.877**	-3.621**	-3.146**	-3.155**	-2.148**	-2.148**	-1.650**	-1.117*	-2.132**	-2.150**
	(0.022)	(0.038)	(0.038)	(0.056)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.041)	(0.063)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Educational level	-1.778**	-1.778**	-1.656**	-1.704	-1.762**	-1.798**	-1.267**	-1.267**	-1.130**	-0.656**	-1.249**	-1.269**
	(0.018)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.035)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.019)	(0.039)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Cohort *	0.465**	0.459**	0.459**	0.468**	0.432**	0.179**	0.026**	0.026**	0.014*	0.028**	-0.008	-0.137**
child 0-4	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.011)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.013)
Cohort *	-0.022**	-0.022**	-0.022**	-0.022**	-0.022**	-0.022**	-0.040**	-0.040**	-0.040**	-0.040**	-0.040**	-0.040**
child > 4	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Period *	-0.061**	-0.061**	-0.061**	-0.061**	-0.061**	-0.061**	-0.047**	-0.047**	-0.047**	-0.047**	-0.047**	-0.047**
child 0-4	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Period *	0.032**	0.032**	0.032**	0.032**	0.032**	0.032**	-0.053**	-0.053**	-0.053**	-0.053**	-0.053**	-0.053**
child > 4	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Cohort *	-0.006**	-0.006**	-0.006**	-0.006**	-0.006**	-0.006**	-0.035**	-0.035**	-0.035**	-0.035**	-0.035**	-0.035**
education	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Period *	0.010**	0.010**	0.010**	0.010**	0.010**	0.010**	0.009**	0.009**	0.009**	0.009**	0.009**	0.009**
education	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	14.6	26.0	26.4	26.5	26.3	26.3	14.6	26.0	26.4	26.5	26.3	26.3
N	461,003	461,003	461,003	461,003	461,003	461,003	461,003	461,003	461,003	461,003	461,003	461,003

<sup>a</sup> Model controlled for missing values for children in years 1981, 1983, 1985 (parameter not displayed). Significance: \*  $p < (.05)$ ; \*\*  $p < (.01)$ . Source: Labour Force Surveys (1977, 1981, 1983, 1985, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2002).



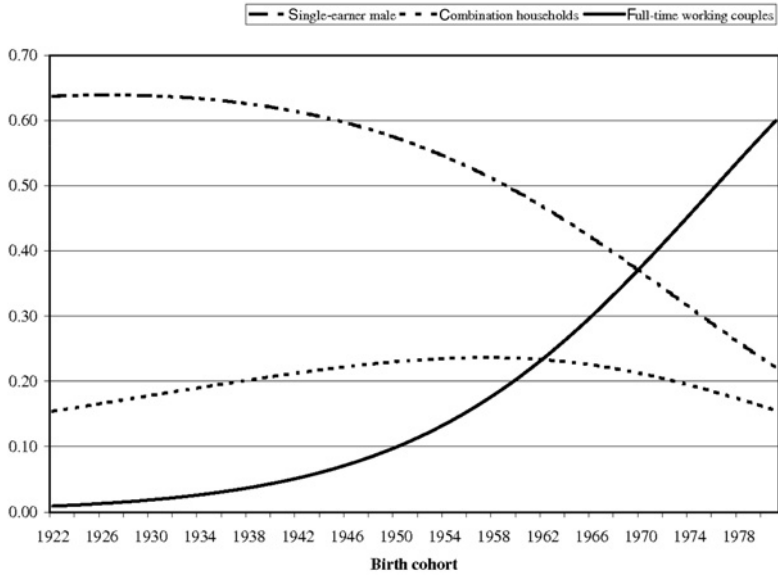


Figure 3a Predicted Probability over Time Period for Different Household Types

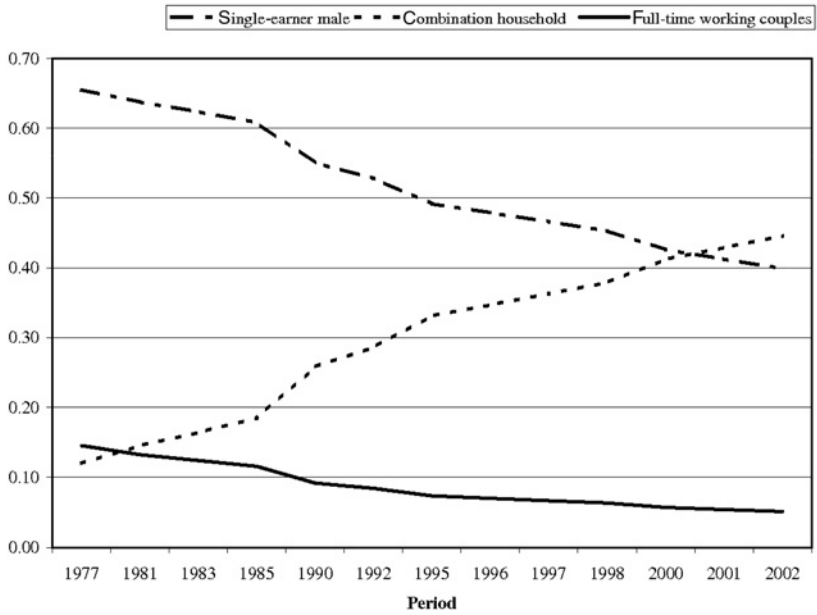


Figure 3b Predicted Probability over Birth Cohorts for Different Household Types

period, while chances for a one-and-a-half-earner construction increased substantially. Figure 3b provides evidence that those born in the younger cohorts favour a full-time working couple. These younger couples, socialized at a time when female labour expanded, had a 10 percent probability in 1950 rising to a 60 percent chance in the 1980s.

Model 2 in Table 3 introduces the main effects for having children (family cycle) and educational level. In comparison to both single-earner male households and combination households, the presence of children significantly decreases the odds on being in full-time employment as a couple. As expected, a high educational level increases the likelihood of a couple's full-time employment as compared to being in a household with only a working male. It is interesting to note that in comparison with combination couples, educational level matters significantly less.

In Models 3 and 4 we study to what extent compositional transformations can be observed among full-time working couples. Changes over time in the effect of having a young child are put to closer scrutiny. The results show that over birth cohorts the negative effect of having young children on the odds of being in a full-time working couple increased. More specifically, for couples born between 1955 and 1965 the odds on dual full-time work while having a young child declined from 0.987 in 1955 ( $\exp(.097 + 5^* -.022)$ ) to 0.792 in 1965 ( $\exp(.097 + 15^* -.022)$ ), a drop in the odds of 24.9 percent. As a result, couples socialized in younger cohorts seem to combine full-time work and the care of young children to a relatively less extent than couples from older cohorts. Evaluating the period from 1977 to 2002, the odds on combining full-time employment with young children weakens as well, but only in comparison to the combination couples. Here it becomes evident that working and caring is done more often if spouses share the workload. However, in comparison to a male single-earner household, the presence of young children among full-time workers increases. We expected an increase in the number of full-time working couples with young children, given that the combination of work and care over cohorts and time became more accepted and legislation provided more structural facilities. This seems to be the case for the choice between a single-earner male household and a full-time working couple from 1977 to 2002. It is clearly not the case for the comparison with combination couples, so we find mixed support for hypothesis 2b and no support for hypothesis 2a.

In Models 5 and 6, we test whether full-time working couples became increasingly prevalent among those with a higher or those with a lower educational level as compared to the other arrangements. The positive interaction between educational level and birth cohort points at an increasing educational level of couples in full-time employment compared to other couples. In contrast to a combination couple, the odds on

full-time work increased from 0.932 in 1980 ( $\exp(-.112 + 3* .014)$ ) to 1.268 in 2002 ( $\exp(-.112 + 25* .014)$ ). Hence for couples with a higher educational level, full-time work became even more likely. This effect increased in magnitude over birth cohorts and over time, justifying our presumptions in hypothesis 3b about the rising educational level of full-time working couples.

## **Conclusion**

In this article, we have shown that full-time employment by both spouses in the Netherlands is a decision made mainly by the younger birth cohorts – couples that grew up in times of rising female labour participation, rising childcare facilities and improved contraception. Macro-societal circumstances present in society during adolescence might thus matter for future preferences regarding employment decisions and caring for children. Surprisingly, a full-time working arrangement has not increased in popularity over the last 25 years as a result of a period effect; over the years, couples more often prefer a single-earner male arrangement or a combination of working hours. This strongly indicates that younger birth cohorts are the driving force behind the increase in the number of full-time workers in Dutch society, and that modern arrangements on the labour market are predominantly incorporated by new entries and not by existing labour market members. It must be investigated whether in other countries such cohort effects are equally important for the increase of the number of full-time working couples. It may well be that in other countries with a different legislation or cultural climate, period effects play a more important role.

These results do not imply that the societal characteristics described here are the main ingredients for the mechanisms behind an increasing number of full-time working couples. Our contribution has focused on a description of a demographic development in the working preferences of couples, and suggested mechanisms that might be of influence. In order to test whether these mechanisms – i.e. improved contraception, childcare facilities – display a genuine causal relation with full-time work by both partners, a larger study is required including more countries that differ in these respects. Only then, when there is variation in government legislation and cultural conditions between societies, is a solid test of mechanisms possible.

A major issue in our article deals with compositional transformation in full-time working couples over time. Is it a constant that people with a higher educational level and people without children are to be found more among full-time working couples? In our analyses, the presence of young children in a household indeed proved to be a major cause when it comes to a couple's decision to stop working full-time; full-time working couples have young children less often, and this effect seems to grow more negatively over the

measurement years and the cohorts. Apparently, in the Netherlands, working full-time is still not perceived as a very attractive arrangement to raise children, in contrast to Scandinavian countries. This is a meaningful conclusion, since government policy in most western countries is aimed at stimulating equal working hours by both partners, by implementing extensive childcare facilities and attractive maternal leave arrangements. When most couples prefer to cut down on working hours when children are born, a reconsideration of these government incentives directed at working full-time is reasonable. At least in Dutch society, it is clear that working couples still experience cultural and structural restrictions that keep them from combining full-time employment with the care for young children. In light of these findings, Hakim's preference theory provides a nice starting point to investigate these perceived restrictions.

We also found evidence that couples where both partners work full-time have increasingly higher educational levels. This is surprising, since it is often assumed that those with a higher educational attainment are typically the 'early adopters' of modernization in society. The idea implies that behaviours common among those with higher educational levels trickle down in society to less educated groups. In the Netherlands, this is certainly not the case when it comes to full-time employment of spouses. It seems that full-time work is a choice made by the highest educational level couples. It may be that the nature of employment for couples with a college education leads to more intrinsic motivation, which may stimulate them to work more hours. Still, as mentioned previously, couples might face considerable constraints in trying to combine full-time work and care, either culturally or structurally. A possible future line of research might focus on cultural and structural differences between European countries to explain variations in labour force participation in a multi-level design. Going abroad to find answers is not the only solution to examine full-time working couples more intensively, and study the resources, restrictions and motives that cause them to work full-time. A dynamic modelling of employment choices over the life course may be a promising line of research too. This will enable researchers to study at what time and under which conditions some couples decide to scale back in working hours, while others choose to keep on working full-time. In doing so, researchers may want to examine cultural and structural conditions at the respondent level, which might explain which couples remain employed full-time and which couples discontinue full-time work during the life course.

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