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Dependent on one's past? how lifetime employment shapes later life work-care reconciliation

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Abstract

This article investigates the association between older Europeans' earlier employment biographies and their probability of leaving the labour market when becoming a caregiver. Based on theoretical ideas about life course path-dependencies and gender role socialisation, we argue that accumulated durations of lifetime employment are associated with both labour market exits in general, and conditional on caregiving. We draw on six panel waves from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) and use information from retrospective interviews (SHARELIFE) to measure earlier participation in six different types of (non-)employment between ages 20 and 50. We analyse a large sample of men and women aged 50–68 years in 18 European countries (n = 35,766 respondents).

Based on fixed effects regression models, we find that employment biographies and current caregiving jointly affect labour market exits. Explanations for these linkages are gender-specific: Upon initiation of caregiving, men are more likely to extend working lives when their previous employment biographies are characterised by homemaking, pointing at neutralising deviance from non-standard male biographies. For women, we find evidence for path-dependencies: Concomitant to beginning caregiving, women are more likely to stay in the labour market the longer their previous employment was characterised by homemaking.

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