

Growing diversity in couples' work patterns during the COVID-19 pandemic in Austria

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Abstract

Objective: This paper studies changes in couples' work patterns during the COVID-19 pandemic with a focus on socio-economic status and children's age.

Background: We contribute to previous research by examining flows between different work patterns using panel data and by providing evidence for a conservative welfare state.

Method: Analyses are based on the Austrian Labour Force Surveys 2019–20 and include different-sex couples with children below age 15 (n=930 to 3,053). We applied (multinomial) logistic regression models.

Results: The findings reveal a polarization into both more egalitarian (e.g., partners work equal hours) and more traditional (e.g., sole male earner) models during the first lockdown, while the moderate male full-time/female part-time model strongly declined. Among the two more egalitarian models, the "about equal hours" model was mostly fuelled by families with lower socio-economic status, conversely the "role reversal" model (woman more hours) grew predominantly among couples where the female partner was highly educated or had a high earnings share. Retraditionalisation was mainly restricted to women with weaker positions on the labour market: The male sole worker model progressed among families with younger children and when the female earnings share was low.

Conclusion: Overall, more couples transited to egalitarian than traditional work patterns. This shift was largely confined to the first lockdown and chiefly driven by men's rise in short-time work.

Key words: employment, couples, COVID-19 pandemic, inequality, lockdown, Austria



1. Introduction

The restrictions enacted to prevent the spread of COVID-19 had multiple effects on employment. Many countries only allowed essential businesses and services (e.g., grocery stores, pharmacies) to remain open during lockdowns, whereas non-essential ones (e.g., restaurants, hotels, events) were closed. Some occupations could move to working from home. This mostly applied to non-manual occupations and thus disproportionately affected the highly educated workforce. Consequently, unemployment rates rose as did short-time work, both of which – but especially unemployment – weakened households' financial bases and had negative effects on well-being (OECD, 2020; OECD, 2021b). In Austria, full-time employment usually is the standard among men: before the pandemic, in 2019, 91% of employed men worked full-time. By contrast, equal shares of employed women worked full-time (51%) and part-time (49%) (age group 25 to 54; Statistics Austria, 2021a). Austria's female part-time employment rate is the highest in Europe after the Netherlands and Switzerland (Eurostat database, 2023). Reduced working hours due to short-time work schemes during the pandemic meant that many men, for the first time, experienced part-time work. This implied greater diversity in couples' work patterns. Men increasingly combined (reduced) paid work with housework and childcare (Berghammer 2022). Generally, couples' socio-economic status (education, income, occupational status) and children's age are important determinants of employment behaviour: couples with higher socio-economic status and older children tend more towards dual (full-time) earners. For instance, in Austria, highly educated women usually work part-time when they have young children, but are the group most likely to increase to full-time as children get older (Riederer & Berghammer, 2020).

Against this background, we examine for couples with children below age 15 whether, how and for whom parents' work patterns (of paid work) changed during the COVID-19 pandemic in Austria compared to the preceding time. The study's focus is on couples' socio-economic status and children's age. This question is relevant from an inequality perspective as moving to another work pattern often meant a loss of financial resources, increasing families' economic strain (Steiber et al., 2022). At the same time, short-time work and unemployment freed time for taking over care responsibilities and might have triggered new gender roles (Hank & Steinbach, 2021; Kreyenfeld & Zinn, 2021; Steinmetz et al., 2022). We distinguish between the following four work patterns: male sole worker (him working, her not working), male main worker (him full-time, her part-time), about equal (both either full-time, part-time, or not working) and role reversal (her working more than him). The drop in working hours during the pandemic has sparked much research interest about whether men's or women's employment declined more strongly (e.g., Bujard et al., 2020; Collins et al., 2021; Cook & Grimshaw, 2021; Fan & Moen, 2022; Hipp & Bünning, 2021). One consideration was that women had a greater tendency to reduce their employment because they took on a disproportionate share of the additional care burden created by school and kindergarten closures and that, hence, the pandemic was a catalyst for more traditional gender roles. Our study adds to this research but takes a couples' perspective which, to our knowledge, has only been applied in few other studies covering Italy, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) (Brini et al., 2021; Brini et al., 2023; Qian & Hu, 2021). We focus on couples since working hours are negotiated and distributed at this level. That was especially the case during lockdowns, when contact restrictions kept families isolated, while at the same time, they faced a sudden, strong increase in childcare and home-schooling requirements.

We extended the previous couple-level studies in two ways. First, we applied a longitudinal perspective using panel data, as Brini et al. (2021) suggested for future research. Prior research was restricted to time series data and could not analyse changes within the same group of couples. Investigating the flows between different work patterns is a significant contribution to the literature as it sheds light on the dynamics between the pre-lockdown period and the lockdown. Some of the flows between work patterns cross-cut each other and disregarding them could leave the (wrong) impression of little change. Second, we provide evidence for a conservative welfare state – as recommended by Qian and Hu (2021) – in addition to the studies on liberal countries (UK, US) and a Mediterranean country (Italy). Prior studies have shown that shifts in (un)paid work during the pandemic varied between different welfare state regimes (e.g., Petts et al., 2023).

We consider that employment changes during the pandemic affected education, occupational status and income groups differently. In line with resource-based theoretical approaches, we suggest that in couples' negotiations, employment of the partner with the higher resources (e.g. income) is generally prioritised (e.g., Qian & Hu, 2021). During the pandemic, an important resource was whether work could be performed from home. In addition, drawing upon gender-based explanations, we assume that women

took on caring roles predominantly with younger children, when both care demands and gender inequality in care time are highest (Negraia et al., 2018). Moreover, we consider employment in a critical occupation as structural constraint. Critical occupations refer to jobs which were essential in keeping up the infrastructure, providing medical care and supplying vital goods. These included occupations in industries such as food production, health services, energy sector, transportation, education, or financial services (for details, see table S1).¹

Summing up, we asked the following research questions:

- (1) How has the distribution of couples' work patterns changed between 2019 and 2020? What was the role of couples' resources and children's age?
- (2) How did work patterns change on a couple level during the first lockdown in spring 2020 compared to the months before? What was the role of couples' resources and children's age?

We applied a cross-sectional perspective to the first question (comparing the years 2019 and 2020), while we used a longitudinal perspective for the second. Although we descriptively provided a longer-term view across all of 2019 and 2020, our primary focus was on the first lockdown in spring 2020, where employment changes were visibly the most profound. Our analyses relied on the Austrian Labour Force Survey, which is a high-quality, compulsory, continuous household survey where all household members are interviewed during five consecutive quarters (panel data). Throughout this study, we focused on couples with children below age 15 (for results on couples without children, see the supplementary file), since this group experienced significantly more work-life balance strain during the pandemic than their counterparts without children, particularly during periods of school and kindergarten closures.

2. Background

2.1 Theoretical background

Across western countries, mothers are primarily responsible for care work in the majority of families (e.g. Campana et al., 2022). Their attachment to the labour market tends to be lower and they are more likely to adjust their employment to family demands including urgent needs, such as caring for a sick child (Maume 2008). Resource/bargaining approaches and gender role theory are two key explanations for the unequal division of paid and unpaid work in families (Geist & Ruppanner, 2018). Based on economic theories (Becker 1973), resource/bargaining approaches assume that if families strive to maximise resources, they are expected to prioritise the employment of the partner with the higher resources (education, income, occupational status, working from home) – independently of gender – while the other partner specialises in family labour (Agarwal, 1997; Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010). Gender role theory posits that women and men act in accordance with social norms and expectations that ascribe the caring role to women and the breadwinning role to men (e.g., Eagly & Wood, 2016).

During the pandemic, lockdown measures and their consequences were external shocks to usual couple arrangements. The Austrian government heavily supported and subsidised short-time work, i.e., reductions in working hours at 80 to 90% of the previous wage. Compared to other OECD countries, the wage replacement rate was generous (OECD, 2020; figures 1 and 4). During the first lockdown, short-time work concerned around 30% of employees (Vogtenhuber & Steiber, 2021). Short-time work – and even more so unemployment – was concentrated more strongly among low-educated persons, while working from home was much more widespread among the higher-educated workforce, which was thus better shielded from employment and income reductions (Bock-Schappelwein et al., 2020; Pichler et al., 2020). Despite these external shocks, couples still had leeway to negotiate employment hours between themselves. They could formally reduce working hours, e.g., by taking holidays or other kinds of leave, or they could informally reduce or increase working hours by working less/more than contractual hours. In these negotiations, in

¹ As the Austrian state did not provide a comprehensive list of critical infrastructures or critical jobs, we based our operationalisation on the guidelines of the European Commission (2020) and prior scientific publications (e.g. Zamberlan et al., 2021). The Austrian Program for Critical Infrastructure Protection (APCIP) mentions security of supply for food, transport, telecommunications, energy, financial services, social and healthcare services (Austrian Federal Chancellery 2015).

line with resource/bargaining approaches, we expect stronger employment reductions of the partner disposing with fewer relative resources. In addition, we consider gender in that we will assess whether similar resources had the same effect on women's and men's employment. Gender likely plays a larger role in family phases with younger children when care demands are highest and fathers engage less compared to older children (Negraia et al., 2018). Higher educated women and men on average hold more gender egalitarian attitudes and divide (un)paid work in a more balanced way (e.g. Steiber & Haas, 2010).

Based on these considerations, we formulate the following hypotheses. We expect that there was less change overall in work patterns among couples with a higher socio-economic status, who were better shielded from employment changes, compared to couples with a lower socio-economic status (H1). In particular, we expect less movement to the "male sole worker" model (which is the least egalitarian and the economically weakest) among couples with higher socio-economic status than among couples with lower socio-economic status (H2). The predictions for transitions to the "about equal" model are less clear: either higher educated used it more often due to their more equal resources and egalitarian gender roles (H3a) or less often because they were less affected by short-time work (H3b). We assume that couples where the woman's socio-economic status was higher than the man's transitioned more often to the "about equal" and the "role reversal" model than to the more traditional models (male sole/main worker model) (H4a). Inversely, we expect that couples where the man's socio-economic status was higher than the woman's transitioned more often to the "male sole/main worker model" (and less to the "about equal" and "role reversal" models) (H4b). Furthermore, we hypothesise that at the same level of woman's/man's resources, due to dominant gender role expectations, women will cut back on employment hours more than men (H5). Finally, we assume that with younger children, the traditional "male sole worker model" has become more prevalent as childcare was shifted to mothers (H6).

2.2 Previous research

There has been great scholarly interest in how and why COVID-19-related employment reductions affected men and women differently (e.g., Hipp & Bünning, 2021; Jessen et al., 2021). Research from the UK (Hupkau & Petrongolo, 2020), the US (Collins et al., 2021; Fan & Moen, 2022), Canada (Fuller & Qian, 2021), and Israel (Kristal & Yaish, 2020) indeed finds a larger decrease in employment hours among women – especially mothers of young children – compared to men. By contrast, studies from Germany (Knize et al., 2022), Italy (Brini et al., 2021), and Austria (Steiber et al., 2022) report few gender differences. Notably, in Austria, previous research showed similar employment changes among women and men during the pandemic (Steiber et al., 2021). The (growth in the) unemployment rate and the prevalence of short-time work was comparable for both groups in 2020 (Vogtenhuber & Steiber, 2021). Women worked more frequently in critical occupations, but also in those that had to close during lockdowns (Bock-Schappelwein et al., 2021; Bock-Schappelwein & Mayrhuber, 2020). Similar proportions of men and women worked from home, which usually promotes more flexible working time than working on-site (see [supplementary file figure S1](#)). Couple level studies on Italy, the UK and the US revealed the following:² All three countries saw a decline in dual earners, an increase in male sole workers (except for Italy), and a decrease in male main workers (except for the US). The female main worker model grew in each country. In Italy, the strong increase in the share of non-working parents (with children below age 16) is noteworthy: The "neither worked" category rose to just above 20% in the second quarter of 2020 (Brini et al., 2021). Families were especially vulnerable to the loss of the man's job, as Italian women's activity rate is among the lowest in the EU. Brini et al. (2023) showed, in addition, that during the second quarter of 2020, women's employment increased when their partners lost their jobs, discussing that women's labour supply compensates for market risks. Qian and Hu (2021) specifically address whether human capital or gender specialisation explained changes in couples' work patterns. The authors highlight the important role of human capital, where, for instance, the better-educated partner was more likely to be the sole worker, independent of gender.

² The data are well comparable to our study: Brini et al. (2021) used the Italian Labour Force Survey. Qian and Hu used Understanding Society for the UK and the Current Population Survey (CPS) for the US; both are nationally representative household surveys comparable to national labour force surveys. The CPS is specifically used by the OECD alongside the labour force surveys to compute labour force statistics.

3. The Austrian situation

3.1 Gender roles and division of labour

We study Austria as a conservative welfare state. This type of welfare state is characterised by the primary responsibility to raise children lying with families, especially mothers, leading to traditional gender roles. Conservative welfare states usually provide long leave entitlements, limited availability of childcare services and rather generous cash benefits.³ This is different from liberal countries which are distinguished by a low public provision of family support (e.g., parental leave or childcare services), requiring families to buy services on the private market, which – due to lack of public subsidies – are often difficult to afford (Collins, 2019). The Mediterranean countries are commonly described as a distinctive welfare state type. Although the family plays a central role for care, low welfare state provisions also create a strong dependency on market income. The policy set up is reflected in mothers' employment, which tends to be higher in liberal countries: When their youngest child is below age three, 58% of mothers in the US were active on the labour market in 2019, 49% in the UK, but only 37% in Austria (mostly part-time) where families have stronger financial security and job protected parental leave until the child's second birthday; Italy was in between (44%) (OECD, 2021a). As comparative studies have suggested, work-family balance might have been easier during lockdowns in countries with lower female labour force intensity (Yerkes et al., 2022) – such as Austria – and changes in unpaid work less pronounced (Petts et al., 2023).

Low mothers' labour force participation with young children and a high part-time rate are reflective of rather traditional gender role attitudes and division of labour in families in Austria. Balancing family work with employment tends to be seen as the mother's responsibility. Their main strategy is to do so through part-time work: In 2019, three quarters (74%) of employed mothers with children below age 15 worked part-time compared to only 6% of employed fathers (Statistics Austria, 2020a). Almost half (46%) of Austrian couples with children below age 15 fit within the male full-time/female part-time model (i.e. male main worker model) in 2019, making it the most dominant model by far⁴, especially with younger children (Buber-Ennser et al., 2021; Statistics Austria, 2020b). In recent decades, fathers' time for childcare and housework has clearly increased in Austria. Still, the male breadwinner identity has remained strong. This is evident in the high full-time male employment rate, but also in the high share of men who regularly work overtime (Statistics Austria, 2021b). Normative acceptance of mothers' full-time employment, especially with young children, is one of the lowest among European countries (Berghammer & Schmidt, 2019; Steiber & Haas, 2010). The institutional context also fosters part-time employment. It is a way to manage "gaps" in the childcare infrastructure, i.e., short business hours and long holidays. Austria is one of the few countries with a right to work part-time (until the child's seventh birthday; under certain conditions). Taxation benefits lower employment hours and many families can make a living from one-and-a-half-incomes. Given this cultural and institutional context, part-time frequently remains a long-term arrangement until children reach adolescence or above (Buber-Ennser et al., 2021). While the male main worker model dominates in Austria, the housewife model – especially beyond the child's first years – is relatively uncommon.

3.2 The course of the COVID-19 pandemic

During the first COVID-19 lockdown (16 March to 30 April 2020), people in Austria could only leave their homes for specific reasons including to work in critical occupations (see [figure S2](#) for a timeline). Working from home and short-time work were promoted, and kindergartens and schools remained closed for two months (Blum & Dobrotić, 2021). In mid-May 2020, schools reopened on a split-shift schedule and upper secondary schools remained in distance learning until the end of the school year. Upon reopening, after-school activities stayed closed, while grandparents and other carers from outside the household continued

3 Germany and Austria are examples of conservative welfare states. We argue that Austria is more of an "ideal typical" case of a conservative welfare state than Germany. Both countries share key characteristics like high public spending on families (DE: 3.17% of GDP; AT: 2.62% of GDP), but only Germany reduced the parental leave period (in 2007) and shifted benefits significantly towards childcare infrastructure establishing the right to day care for all children aged 1+ years (in 2013).

4 28% of couples lived according to the male sole worker model (includes parents on parental leave, whereby 90% were assumed to be women) and the remaining quarter consisted of other arrangements (Statistics Austria, 2020b).

to be discouraged from supporting their families with care work. The number of COVID-19 case numbers decreased during the summer of 2020, resulting in looser restrictions. Although in Austria, the pandemic had little effect infection- and mortality-wise compared to other European countries in spring 2020, the number of positive cases rose steeply in November 2020. This led to the beginning of what was described as a “light lockdown” (e.g., night-time curfew, gastronomy closures, distance learning in upper secondary schools) on 3 November 2020 and continued as a second strict lockdown (closure of non-essential shops, 24-hours curfew, distance learning for all educational levels) from 17 November 2020 onward (Pollak et al., 2021). Although keeping kindergartens and schools open for parents in urgent need of childcare during the second lockdown arguably reduced parental stress, the population experienced greater psychological strain compared to the first lockdown (Resch, 2021). Restrictions were again relaxed on 7 December 2020 until the third strict lockdown began on 26 December 2020.

4. Data, measures, and methods

The analysis was based upon the Austrian Labour Force Survey (LFS) 2019 and 2020, which is a representative survey of around 20,500 households per quarter that takes place continuously and thus covers all weeks of the year. It contains detailed information on household composition as well as socio-demographic and socio-economic characteristics. The LFS does not include more subjective measures (e.g., attitudes), time used for other activities (e.g., childcare) and histories (e.g., employment histories). Information from each household member is collected (proxy interviews⁵ are allowed) during five consecutive quarters (panel data). The first interview is usually a computer assisted personal interview, while the subsequent ones are computer assisted telephone interviews, although the first interview was also conducted via telephone during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participation is compulsory, with response rates being as high as around 95% (Eurostat, 2019) and panel attrition being low. For instance, 8,861 of the 8,952 respondents who were first interviewed in the fourth quarter of 2019 participated in the fourth quarter of 2020 (almost 99%); 7,807 respondents participated in all five quarters (87%). Besides the panel structure and the high response rates, the large sample sizes are a great advantage of the Austrian LFS over other surveys, since they enable performing fine-grained analyses on different couple constellations. Our analytical sample includes different-sex couples aged 25 to 54 with children below age 15. We restricted adults’ age range to exclude younger persons more likely to be in education or training or get established on the labour market and older persons more likely to be in early retirement schemes. The children’s age threshold of below 15 years is commonly used by Eurostat and national statistical offices to denote dependent children; it is close to the definition applied in other studies (below age 16: Brini et al., 2021; Qian & Hu, 2021). It is a limitation of this research that same-sex couples could not be included. They are retained in the scientific use files but their partnership status is changed from being partners to being non-family members for reasons of anonymization (information obtained upon request from Statistics Austria); thus, same-sex couples cannot be identified.

Our study focuses on working hours rather than employment status, as this allows more detailed results especially given the high women’s part-time rate (wide range between 1 and 35 hours, see definition below) and the high prevalence of short-term work. The LFS contains several questions about working hours, and our study relies on the actual number of hours worked during the reference week (usually the week preceding the survey) (as did Brini et al., 2021): “How many hours did you effectively work in your principal activity during this week including paid and unpaid overtime? Please deduct hours of absence and lunch breaks longer than 30 minutes.” Usually worked hours per week could be used as alternative measure, but are less appropriate for our study since we are interested in people’s actual time budget. What is more, hours usually worked per week can be ambiguous: Although respondents might have referred to their pre-pandemic working hours as “usual” during the early stages of the pandemic, this became less clear as time passed.

Our chosen measure has limitations, e.g., families were coded under the male sole worker model in cases where both partners had a job, but the woman did not work during the reference week (e.g., due to illness, vacation). The actual number of hours worked is also influenced by public holidays, although women and men are not affected differently. While considering vacation time is desirable, since they were

⁵ In 2020, 82 to 84% of women’s interviews and 73 to 77% of men’s interviews were self-reports (not proxy interviews).

strategically used for childcare during the lockdowns, public holidays blur the measurement. For example, a public holiday during the work week could lead to someone who regularly works 38 hours per week being coded as “30 hours”. Because (public) holidays affected our measure, we tailored the panel interval to exclude Christmastime.

The responses to actual working hours in the LFS allowed us to construct couples’ work patterns, wherein full-time employment was coded as 36 hours and more, part-time as 1 to 35 hours,⁶ and not working as zero hours. This corresponds to the Austrian national threshold for part-time employment, as also acknowledged by the ILO and OECD (van Bastelaer et al., 1997). We distinguished between the following work patterns: “male sole worker” (him working, her not working); “male main worker” (him full-time, her part-time); “about equal” (both not working, both part-time, both full-time⁷); “role reversal” (her working more than him). The categorisation is similar to those used by Brini et al. (2021) and Qian and Hu (2021) but differs in that we did not use “neither partner worked” as a separate category due to low case numbers. Moreover, unlike Brini et al. (2021), “role reversal” contained women both being the sole workers and working more hours than men – again due to low case numbers. More detailed information that uses finer-grained definitions of the work patterns is available in the supplementary file (see tables S4 and S5).

We included the following independent variables: Couples’ education (no partner ISCED 5 or higher⁸, only female partner ISCED 5 or higher, only male partner ISCED 5 or higher, both partners ISCED 5 or higher), earnings (women’s share of couples’ total earnings, information not available for self-employed⁹), couples’ occupational status (twelve categories, based on ISCO classification)¹⁰ and age of the youngest child (0 to 2 years, 3 to 5 years, 6 to 9 years, 10 to 14 years). As control variables we used: women and men working in critical occupations (nine categories)¹¹; number of children below age 15 (one, two, three or more); additional adults in the household beyond the couple (yes, no); children 15 or older in the household (zero, one, two or more). Regarding the place of residence, we distinguished between thinly populated (rural) regions, areas with intermediate population densities (towns and suburbs), and densely populated areas (cities), following Eurostat’s “degree of urbanisation” categorisation. Finally, in all models we also controlled for the following variables (results for these variables are for reasons of brevity not shown, but are available upon request): Lockdown stage between 6 April and 14 June 2020 (Easter period, strict lockdown, light lockdown, re-opened schools and gastronomy);¹² marital status (cohabiting, married) and age difference between the partners in years. Sample sizes and descriptive statistics on the cross-sectional and longitudinal samples are provided in supplementary table S2.

The first empirical part, which is based on cross-sectional data, descriptively shows differences in work patterns between spring 2019 and spring 2020 (first lockdown). We also depicted those changes according to couples’ educational level, woman’s share of couples’ total earnings and age of the youngest child. The second empirical part, which is based on longitudinal data, compares changes between the time before and during the first lockdown at the household level. Here, our sample was restricted to couples who were interviewed both between early January and mid-March (reference week before the first lockdown) and between early April and mid-June of 2020 (i.e., during the first lockdown). We used multinomial logistic

⁶ The more detailed analyses in the supplementary file further distinguish between short part-time (1 to 20 hours) and long part-time (21 to 35 hours) (tables S4 and S5).

⁷ In effect, we first constructed the categories for male sole worker couples, male main worker couples, and role reversal couples. The “about equal” group eventually covered all small groups of couples not included in one of these categories (see table S5).

⁸ International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 5 or higher refers to post-secondary and tertiary qualifications (for the Austrian educational system and ISCED categories, see <https://www.bildungssystem.at/en/isced/international-standard-classification-of-education>).

⁹ Self-employed persons were thus disregarded in analyses including earnings (table 3, model C).

¹⁰ We collapsed the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) scheme into three groups: managers, professionals, technicians and associate professionals (ISCO 1–3); clerical support, service and sales workers (ISCO 4–5); skilled and unskilled workers, machine operators, and assemblers (ISCO 6–9).

¹¹ Critical occupations have been assessed by employing both the NACE statistical classification of economic activities and the ISCO occupational classification. First, we defined occupations in the following industries as critical: food production, food trade, production for health sector, health services, energy sector, transportation, information and communication, financial services, public administration, education, social services, and other essential services (including veterinary medicine or security services; for details, see table S1). Second, we analysed for which industries working from home was important and distinguished between non-critical occupations, critical occupations with a large share of working from home, and other critical occupations. Third, we classified couples according to both partners’ occupations.

¹² The period of the strict lockdown in Austria overlapped with the Easter holidays when many parents did not work. This affected employment in the respective weeks, as did the re-openings of schools and kindergartens.

regression models to estimate how changes in couples' employment during the first lockdown depended on the aforementioned independent variables. These variables were measured before the lockdown (weeks 2-11; lockdown from week 12 onwards), whereas the dependent variable was measured during the lockdown (weeks 15-24). We included diverse employment variables in separate models for the following reasons (table 3): First, there is a high correlation between employment variables, in particular occupational status (model A) and critical occupations/working from home (model B). Second, earnings data are not available for self-employed persons, leading to a reduced sample (model C).

Sensitivity analyses. We conducted six different kinds of sensitivity analyses. First, in order to assess whether our results were sensitive to the specific measure used, we replaced the actual working hours with the usual weekly working hours for periods with reduced working hours due to public holidays and other reasons (e.g., illness, accident). These checks affirmed the robustness of our results (see table S3). Second, for evaluating the effect of proxy interviews, we provide descriptive shares (including confidence intervals) of work patterns for our sample, for couples without women's proxy interviews, for couples without men's proxy interviews and for couples with both self-reports (see figure S5). The examinations showed only small differences between these groups. Third, while our analysis is based on monthly data, we supply more fine-grained analyses using weekly information (see figure S6). These allow delving deeper into the dynamics of work patterns during the first lockdown. Note that the different periods of the Easter holidays (2019: weeks 16/17; 2020: weeks 15/16) affect the results. Fourth, our main longitudinal analysis examines transitions from the pre-lockdown period to the lockdown in 2020. However, to delineate the effect of the pandemic from seasonal changes taking place every year it is necessary to compare the data from 2020 to the same period in 2019. Figure S7 thus depicts shares of work patterns (including confidence intervals) for the same weeks in 2019 and 2020. The results show that the initial values during weeks 2 to 11 are rather similar in both years. In 2019, however, work patterns vary much less between weeks 2 to 11 and 15 to 24 compared to 2020, indicating a marked effect of the pandemic. The fifth and the sixth sensitivity analyses refer to alternative model specifications; results are discussed in section 5.3. Changes in the relative differences in couples' employment hours was used as an alternative dependent variable and analysed using linear regression models. Compared to categorical work patterns, this measure is more nuanced. We contrasted women's share of couples' total working hours before the first lockdown with their share during the lockdown. For example, if a woman had assumed 30% of the couples' employment hours before and 50% during a lockdown, the value would be an increase of 20 percentage points (see table S6). A final sensitivity analysis estimated separate linear regression models for change in females' and males' work hours (see table S7). These estimations indicated whether a change in relative differences (shown in table S6) was due to changes in females', males', or both spouses' work hours.

5. Results

5.1 Cross-sectional results

First, we compared couples' work patterns between 2019 and 2020. Table 1 shows the respective distributions between February and June. The most conspicuous change is the strong drop in the dominant male main worker model especially in March and April 2020 (up to 15 percentage points). By contrast, both the "about equal" and the "role reversal" groups gained ground during the same period. This pattern reflects the heavy use of short-time work as well as a rise in non-employment during this time (for details on the composition of these groups, see table S4). The male sole worker model – the second most widespread model – also saw a moderate rise between 2019 and 2020. Overall, the pandemic led to the strengthening of more gender egalitarian work patterns, which are typically uncommon in Austria, and simultaneously strengthened the male sole worker model. These results may be interpreted as a polarisation, albeit temporary, since work patterns returned closer to the pre-pandemic level in May and June 2020. In addition, figure S3 sheds light on how average actual weekly working hours developed throughout 2019 and 2020 according to gender. We find that, first, the drop in average working hours was strongest during the first lockdown (motivating this paper's focus on the first lockdown), second, that fathers were more affected by declining working hours than mothers and, third, that the decline was stronger among parents compared to couples in the same age group (25 to 54 years) without children in the

household (see figure S4 and table S8). The latter result indicates that parents had a greater need to adjust their working hours downwards to free up time for childcare and home schooling.

Table 1: Distribution of work patterns among couples with children below age 15 in Austria between February and June in 2019 and in 2020 (in percent) and difference (in percentage points)

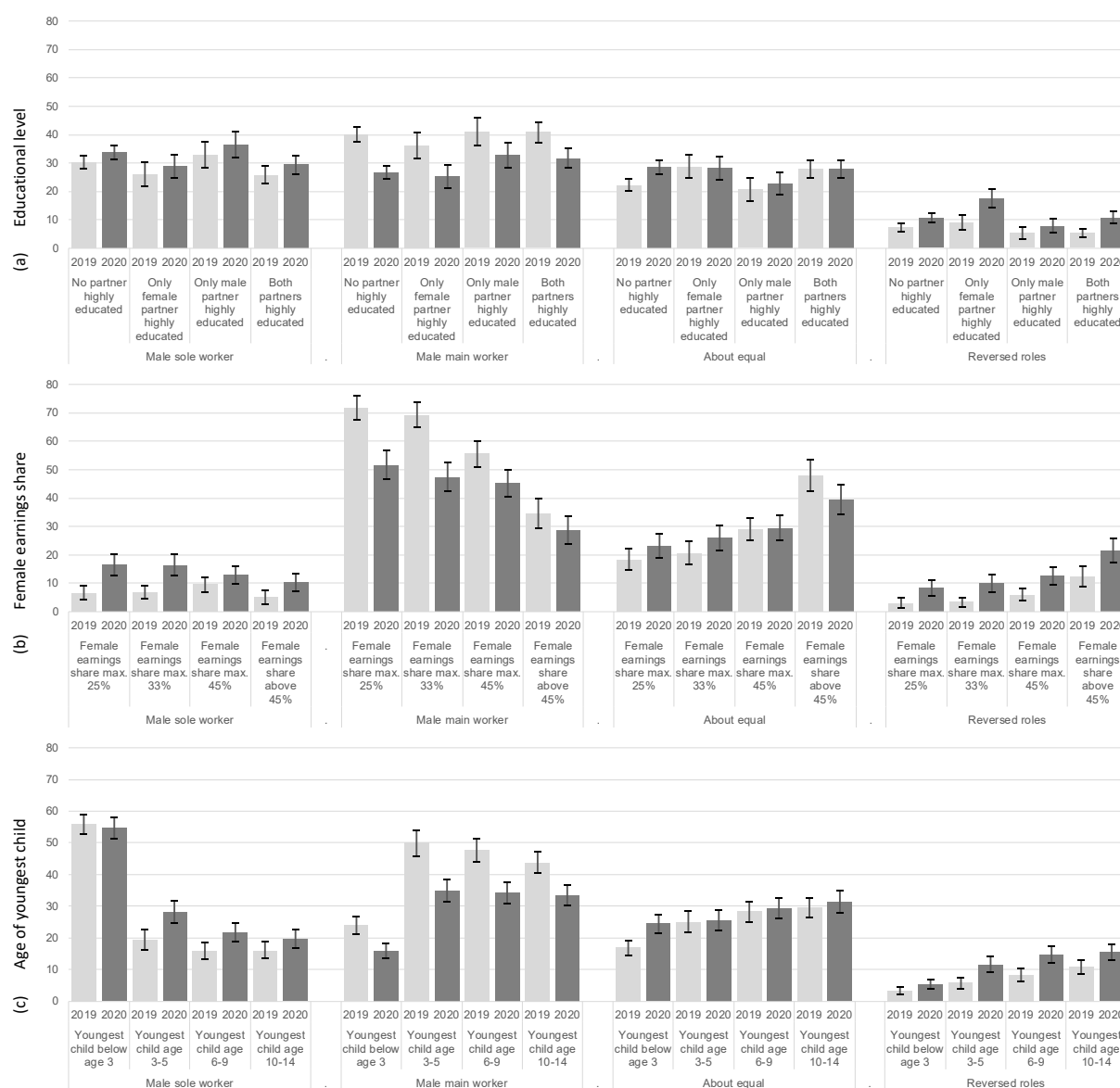
Work pattern: Description:	Male sole worker model			Male main worker model			About equal			Role reversal Woman working more (full- or part-time) than man (part-time or not working)		
	2019 (%)	2020 (%)	Diff. (ppt.)	2019 (%)	2020 (%)	Diff. (ppt.)	2019 (%)	2020 (%)	Diff. (ppt.)	2019 (%)	2020 (%)	Diff. (ppt.)
Year	2019	2020	Diff.	2019	2020	Diff.	2019	2020	Diff.	2019	2020	Diff.
Month	(%)	(%)	(ppt.)	(%)	(%)	(ppt.)	(%)	(%)	(ppt.)	(%)	(%)	(ppt.)
February	25 (1.4)	30 (1.5)	+5** (2.1)	41 (1.6)	41 (1.6)	0 (2.3)	24 (1.4)	22 (1.4)	-2 (1.9)	10 (1.0)	8 (.9)	-2* (1.3)
March	28 (1.5)	31 (1.5)	+3*(*) (2.1)	45 (1.6)	35 (1.6)	-10*** (2.3)	20 (1.3)	24 (1.4)	+4* (1.9)	7 (.8)	10 (1.0)	+3** (1.3)
April	31 (1.5)	34 (1.4)	+2 (2.0)	37 (1.5)	21 (1.2)	-15*** (2.0)	25 (1.4)	31 (1.4)	+6** (1.9)	6 (.8)	13 (1.0)	+7*** (1.3)
May	28 (1.3)	32 (1.5)	+4* (2.0)	38 (1.4)	32 (1.5)	-7*** (2.1)	27 (1.3)	27 (1.5)	0 (2.0)	7 (.8)	10 (1.0)	+3 (1.2)*
June	27 (1.5)	29 (1.5)	+2 (2.0)	36 (1.6)	30 (1.5)	-6** (2.2)	30 (1.5)	33 (1.5)	+2 (2.1)	6 (.8)	8 (.9)	+2 (1.1)(*)

Note: Standard errors are reported in brackets. (*) $p \leq .10$; * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$

Source: Austrian Labour Force Survey 2019 and 2020; own computations

Figure 1 shows the distribution of work patterns during spring 2019 and 2020 by education, earnings and age of the youngest child (bivariate analyses). The decline of the male main worker model, which saw the largest overall reduction (see table 1), was most pronounced in families with a lower socioeconomic status (no highly educated partner). These families most frequently transitioned into the “about equal” group because of being disproportionately affected by short-time work. There was also a marked decline of the male main worker model in families where only the female partner was highly educated; these families usually moved into the “role reversal” group. The decline of the male main worker model was stronger among parents with preschool-aged children (age three to five) compared to those with younger or older children. The differences by age of the youngest child were weak, except for the male sole worker model increasing in families with preschool-aged children. This model also rose among male main worker families where women earned a relatively low share (max. 25% or max. 33%), making the transition to the male sole worker model less disruptive for this group. In conclusion, the growth in the two more-egalitarian models – “about equal” and “role reversal” – was fuelled by different groups. The “about equal” model mostly rose because of families with a lower socioeconomic status (no highly educated partner), while the “role reversal” model gained ground in families where only the female partner was highly educated or both partners were highly educated. Likewise, couples where the female earnings share was above 45% before the pandemic also tended to progress toward the “role reversal” model.

Figure 1: Distribution of work patterns among couples with children below age 15 in Austria between March and May (pooled data) in 2019 and in 2020 (in percent; 95% confidence intervals), by selected characteristics



Source: Austrian Labour Force Survey 2019 and 2020; own computations

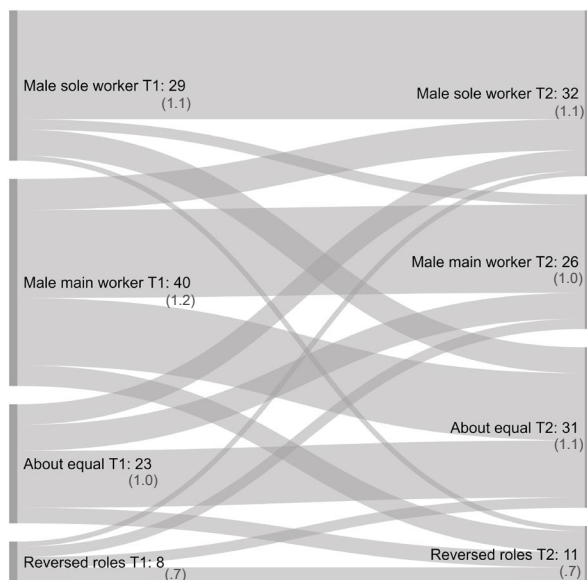
5.2 Longitudinal results

The analysis of changes at the couple level revealed how couples moved between work patterns from before to during the first lockdown. Overall, more than half of the couples in our sample showed no change, whereas 20% transitioned to a more traditional work pattern (e.g., from “male main worker” to “male sole worker”) and 28% to a more egalitarian division of labour (e.g., from “male sole worker” to “male main worker”). The strongest transition was from the male main worker model to the “about equal” model (figure 2a), which concerned almost one third of male main worker families (figure 2b) or 13% of the total sample. The second most-numerous flow from the male main worker model was to the male sole worker model. This pattern reinforces our previous interpretation of polarisation, where some parts of the male main worker model became more egalitarian, and another part more traditional. Stability was highest among male sole worker families, with three quarters remaining in this model during the lockdown. Other

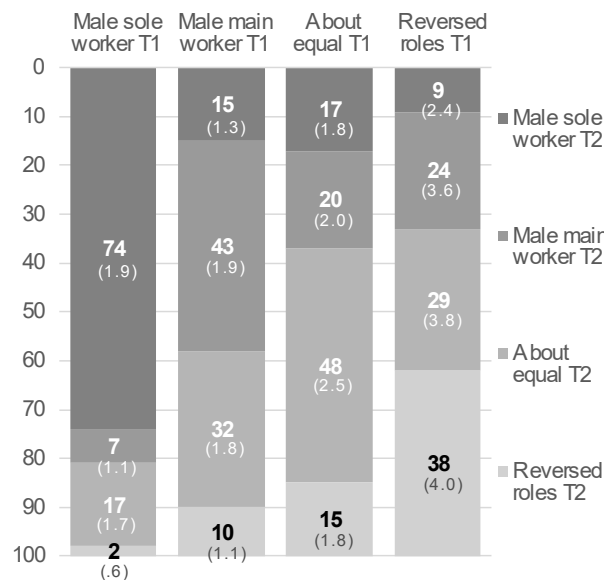
work patterns were more volatile, as only 48% (about equal), 43% (male main worker), and 38% (role reversal) remained in the same category. Changes between the extreme poles of male sole workers and role reversal were rare. Altogether, 42% of male main worker families became couples with a more equal division of professional work (about equal or role reversal). At the same time, more than one third of couples with an “about equal” division or “role reversal” switched to the male sole worker or male main worker model, demonstrating again that changes have not been unidirectional. Additional analyses revealed that if couples changed from a more traditional model (male sole worker, male main worker) to a more egalitarian model (about equal, role reversal), the working time of men decreased significantly (on average by 23.5 hours/week), while the working time of women remained almost unchanged. For instance, in couples which changed to “about equal” it was mostly men who reduced from full-time to part-time. In couples who transitioned from a more egalitarian to a more traditional model (e.g., from about equal to male main worker), men’s average working time increased while women’s slightly decreased. Figure 3 depicts that changes in work patterns were most likely with higher age of the youngest child, when neither or only the female partner was highly educated and when female earnings share was lower (max. 33%).

Figure 2: Changes in work patterns among couples with children below age 15 from before (T1) to the first lockdown (T2) in Austria

(a) Share of work patterns at T1 and T2 (in %)



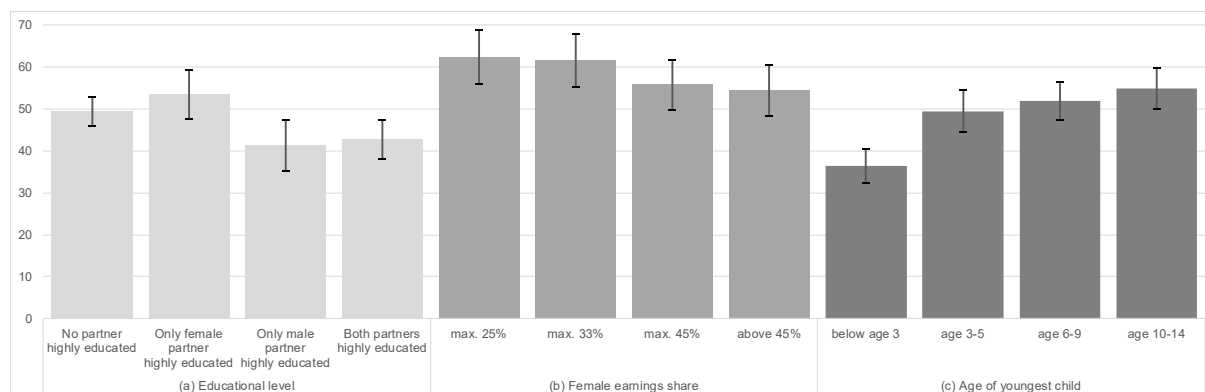
(b) Share of work patterns at T2 by work patterns at T1 (in %)



Note: Work patterns were measured at time 1 (T1) and time 2(T2). T1 refers to between early January and mid-March 2020 (i.e. before the first lockdown in Austria) and T2 refers to three months later, between early April and mid-June 2020 (i.e. during the first lockdown). Standard errors are reported in brackets

Source: Austrian Labour Force Survey 2020 (panel information); own computations

Figure 3: Share of changes in work patterns among couples with children below age 15 from before to the first lockdown in Austria by educational level, female earnings share and age of the youngest child (in percent; 95% confidence intervals)



Note: Change in work patterns between January-March 2020 (i.e. before the first lockdown in Austria) and April-June 2020 (i.e. during the first lockdown). Source: Austrian Labour Force Survey 2020 (panel information); own computations.

Finally, we estimated (multinomial) logistic regression models using (a) any change in work patterns (yes/no) and (b) detailed changes in work patterns during the first lockdown as the dependent variables, controlling for other characteristics before the lockdown (see tables 2-3). Controlling for work pattern at time 1 (in models b) ensured that coefficients for other variables referred to the variance (i.e., the change) in work patterns. The overall results for work patterns at time 1 reflect the descriptive findings above regarding stability and change in the division of professional work between spouses.

Table S9 shows that there was less change in work patterns among couples with younger children (when mothers were more often inactive) and in which either the male or both partners were highly educated (in line with H1). If both partners were lower educated or the women was highly educated, they more often faced a change in work patterns.

Table 2 displays the following results. As expected by H2, couples in which both partners are highly educated show less movement towards the male sole worker model than their lower educated counterparts. We had formulated diverging expectations regard the transition to the “about equal” model. In fact, the results show (although not statistically significant) that the “about equal” category was largely fuelled by couples with low education levels rather than – as one could expect in line with their more egalitarian attitudes and resources – with high education levels (indicative of H3b). The results depict that role reversal – but not about equal – became more frequent among couples where the female partner was highly educated, lending partial support to H4a. Conversely, changes towards the male main worker model (but not to the male sole worker model) occurred more often among couples where the male partner was highly educated, partly in line with H4b. We hypothesised that at the same level of woman’s/man’s resources, due to traditional gender roles, women will cut back on employment hours more than men (H5). There is indication for such an effect, in that when both partners were highly educated, there was a tendency towards the “male main worker” model rather than a more gender egalitarian model. From a gender role perspective (H6), the result that the “male sole worker model” became more prevalent at the expense of the “male main worker model” with children below age three is relevant. Indeed, it seems that traditional gender roles have strengthened among this group of parents. Parents with older children (youngest child age 10 to 14) were more likely to move to “role reversal”.

Table 2: Explaining changes in work patterns during the first lockdown in Austria in 2020 among couples with children below age 15 (multinomial logistic regression model)

Average Marginal Effects (AME)	Male sole worker model AME	Male main worker model AME	About equal AME	Role reversal AME
TIME 1 COVARIATES				
Couple work pattern				
Male sole worker	.53 *** (.03)	-.31 *** (.02)	-.15 *** (.03)	-.07 *** (.01)
Male main worker	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
About equal	.01 (.02)	-.18 *** (.03)	.14 *** (.03)	.03 (.02)
Role reversal	-.07 * (.03)	-.14 *** (.04)	-.03 (.04)	.24 *** (.04)
Couple education (ISCED 5-8)				
No partner highly educated	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Female partner highly educated	-.04 (.03)	.01 (.03)	-.02 (.03)	.05 * (.02)
Male partner highly educated	-.02 (.03)	.09 ** (.03)	-.05 (*) (.03)	-.02 (.02)
Both partners highly educated	-.05 * (.02)	.05 (*) (.02)	-.03 (.03)	.04 (*) (.02)
Age of youngest child				
Below age 3	.06 * (.03)	-.06 * (.03)	.01 (.03)	-.01 (.02)
Age 3-5	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Age 6-9	-.04 (.03)	.02 (.03)	.00 (.03)	.01 (.02)
Age 10-14	-.04 (.03)	.03 (.03)	-.04 (.04)	.05 * (.02)
Number of children below 15				
1 child	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
2 children	-.01 (.02)	-.01 (.02)	.02 (.02)	.00 (.02)
3 or more children	.05 (.03)	-.08 * (.03)	.03 (.04)	.00 (.03)
Other adults in household (0/1)	.01 (.05)	-.11 (.07)	.14 * (.07)	-.04 (.05)
Number of children age 15+				
No children 15+	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
1 child 15+	-.06 * (.03)	-.01 (.03)	.07 * (.03)	.00 (.02)
2 or more children 15+	-.04 (.04)	-.07 (*) (.04)	.09 (*) (.05)	.03 (.02)
Degree of urbanisation				
Thinly populated (rural areas)	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Intermediate (towns/suburbs)	.00 (.02)	-.03 (.02)	.01 (.02)	.02 (.02)
Densely populated (cities)	-.01 (.02)	-.07 ** (.03)	.04 (.03)	.04 * (.02)

Note: Standard errors are reported in brackets. (*) $p \leq .10$; * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$. $N = 1,770$; Cragg & Uhler's $R^2 = 42.9$. Models also control for lockdown phase, being married (0/1) and partners' age differential in years (results not shown). Source: Austrian Labour Force Survey 2020; own computations

Table 3: Explaining changes in work patterns during the first lockdown in Austria in 2020 among employed couples with children below age 15 (multinomial logistic regression model)

Average Marginal Effects (AME)	Male sole worker model AME	Male main worker model AME	About equal AME	Role reversal AME
TIME 1 COVARIATES				
(A) Occupational status among dual-earner couples				
Both partners ISCO 1-3	-.08 *	-.08 (*)	.10 *	.06 *
	(.03)	(.04)	(.04)	(.03)
Female partner ISCO 1-3, male partner ISCO 4-5	-.08 (*)	-.05	.01	.12 **
	(.05)	(.06)	(.06)	(.05)
Female partner ISCO 1-3, male partner ISCO 6-9	-.10 **	-.04	.08 (*)	.06 (*)
	(.04)	(.05)	(.05)	(.03)
Female partner ISCO 4-5, male partner ISCO 1-3	.02	-.10 *	.06	.02
	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.03)
Both partners ISCO 4-5	-.07 (*)	.03	.02	.02
	(.04)	(.06)	(.06)	(.04)
Female partner ISCO 4-5, male partner ISCO 6-9	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Female partner ISCO 6-9, male partner ISCO 1-3	-.10	-.03	.04	.09
	(.06)	(.08)	(.09)	(.07)
Female partner ISCO 6-9, male partner ISCO 4-5	-.07	-.07	.03	.11 (*)
	(.08)	(.09)	(.09)	(.07)
Both partners ISCO 6-9	-.04	-.09 (*)	.09 (*)	.04
	(.04)	(.05)	(.05)	(.03)
N = 1,368; Cragg & Uhler's R ² = 38.4				
(B) Employment in critical occupations (CO) among dual-earner couples				
No partner in CO	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Male partner in CO, many working from home	-.04	.11 *	-.04	-.02
	(.04)	(.05)	(.05)	(.03)
Male partner in CO, other	-.04	.10 *	-.07	.00
	(.04)	(.05)	(.05)	(.03)
Female partner in CO, many working from home	-.04	.00	.00	.05 (*)
	(.03)	(.04)	(.04)	(.03)
Both partners in CO, many working from home	-.08 *	.17 ***	-.09 *	.00
	(.03)	(.04)	(.04)	(.03)
Both partners in CO, female partner in CO with many working from home	-.08	.02	-.04	.10
	(.06)	(.08)	(.08)	(.06)
Female partner in CO, other	.02	.00	-.07 (*)	.05 (*)
	(.03)	(.03)	(.04)	(.03)
Both partners in CO, female partner in other CO	-.03	.12 *	-.11 *	.02
	(.05)	(.06)	(.05)	(.04)
Both partners in CO, other	-.04	-.03	.04	.02
	(.04)	(.05)	(.06)	(.04)
N = 1,368; Cragg & Uhler's R ² = 38.4				
(C) Female earnings share among dual-earner couples with earnings data				
Max. 25%	.02	.06	-.01	-.07 **
	(.03)	(.04)	(.04)	(.03)
Above 25% but max. 34%	-.04	.04	.01	-.01
	(.03)	(.04)	(.04)	(.03)
Above 34% but max. 45%	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Above 45%	-.08 *	-.06	.03	.10 **
	(.03)	(.04)	(.05)	(.04)
N = 930; Cragg & Uhler's R ² = 25.4				

Note: (*) p ≤ .10; * p ≤ .05; ** p ≤ .01; *** p ≤ .001. Models exclude couples with non-employed or unemployed partners at time 1 (i.e. before the first lockdown). As some employed persons, however, did not work in the reference week for various reasons (e.g. holidays, compensation time, leave), all four work patterns do exist in this subsample as well. Models in section (a) to (c) control for the variables shown in table 2 (including work pattern at time 1), lockdown phase, being married (0/1), and partners' age differential in years (results not shown). Source: Austrian Labour Force Survey 2020; own computations

Table 3 presents the results for occupational status, employment in critical occupations and female earnings share. The female share of couples' earnings affected changes in work patterns in line with our expectations: A low share (max. 25%) reduced the probability of a role reversal model, whereas an almost equal or higher share (more than 45%) decreased the likelihood of transitions to the male sole worker model and made transitions to the role reversal model more likely (similar to the "female partner highly educated" category and in line with H4a). Regarding occupational characteristics, we find that if both

partners held a managerial, professional, or technical position (ISCO 1–3), transitions to the male sole worker model were less likely (H2) and to the role reversal model, but also to the about equal model were more likely (H3). If only the woman held such a position, role reversal was more frequent (H4a). If both partners worked in agricultural, craft, or industrial occupations (ISCO 6–9), there was more movement (although not significant) to the about equal model (H3b). There was one clear pattern concerning critical occupations: When the male partner worked in a critical occupation, the transitions to the male main worker model and decreases in shares of couples with an “about equal” division were likely. In addition, the role reversal model was more frequent if the female partner worked in a critical occupation. However, this finding was only statistically significant for families where the male partner did not work in a critical occupation. Thus, the man’s position shows a stronger effect, pointing to the importance of gender roles (H5).

5.3 Sensitivity analyses

The models on change in the female share of couples’ work hours showed a stronger increase in female share among couples with school-aged children, those who had a higher-educated female partner, had a higher female share of earnings, or where the female partner held a critical occupation (see table S6). An additional model with time 2 covariates (see model 4) further showed that the female share was higher (i.e., more increasing or less decreasing) in couples where she or both partners worked from home or she (but not he) was self-employed. The female share in couples’ total working time decreased due to female short-time and increased due to male short-time work. Altogether, these findings support the conclusion that resources – in terms of education, earnings, occupational status, critical occupation, and working from home – have a strong effect on the distribution of work hours within couples. Finally, the separate models for women and men’s changes in work hours (see table S7) show that family characteristics – especially the age of the youngest child – affected women’s working hours, but not men’s, which is in line with gender role theory. Nevertheless, occupational characteristics (critical occupations, working from home) were relevant for both genders and represented the external constraints that shifted bargaining power within couples. The findings for self-employment show that self-employed male partners increased their working hours more than self-employed female partners. If both partners were self-employed, the increase in working hours was much stronger for the male partner, being indicative of prioritizing his employment.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how couples’ work patterns developed during the COVID-19 pandemic in a conservative country. The strongest decline was observed for the male main worker model, the dominant model in Austria. The changes indicate a polarizing trend into both more egalitarian and more traditional models: The largest transition from the male main worker model was to the “about equal” category (mostly both part-time because men reduced from full- to part-time) and the second largest to the male sole worker model. The “role reversal” category, usually a minority arrangement of 6 to 7% of parents with children, also rose and even doubled in April 2020. The strengthening of more egalitarian models was also reported for Italy, the UK, and the US (Brini et al., 2021; Qian & Hu, 2021), implying that fathers’ time budgets were partly freed up from paid work, allowing them to take over more childcare and housework duties (e.g. Berghammer, 2022; Steinmetz et al., 2022). Brini et al. (2021) concluded for Italy: “For a country that scores low in international comparisons because of overall female employment and gender equality, the pandemic appears to have been an opportunity to harness mothers’ potential as workers and fathers’ potential as carers” (p. 969). Corresponding to the previous studies’ results (Brini et al., 2021; Qian & Hu, 2021), we also find that the male sole worker model increased and the male main worker model decreased. The most visible difference is the higher prevalence of short-time work in Austria. We argue that in Austria as a country with extensive public policies, governmental efforts to keep employees in jobs was higher (Müller et al., 2022).

Quite remarkably, the two more egalitarian arrangements – “about equal” and “role reversal” – were fuelled by different processes. “About equal” predominantly rose among lower-educated couples. An

interpretation would be that government's short-time work schemes most strongly affected this group (Pichler et al., 2020). Lower-educated persons tend to hold more traditional gender role attitudes than their higher-educated peers, meaning these fathers would have newly experienced balancing – as mothers usually do – less employment with more childcare and housework. The “role reversal” model, on the other hand, grew particularly among more gender egalitarian couples: couples where the female partner (or both) was highly educated or the female earnings share was above 45%. At the same time, the male sole worker model also gained ground, mainly among families with the youngest child in infant and preschool age. Children this young are usually unable to entertain themselves for a long period of time and need a high amount of parental supervision and care. This model also rose more among lower-educated families and when the woman's earning share was relatively small.

There are several limitations of this research: First, the data do not allow distinguishing why the change in working hours occurred, that is, whether it was the result of couple negotiations (for instance leading one partner to “informally” reduce working hours) or whether it was determined by the employer – or a combination of both. Second, no measures of gender role attitudes are included in the survey. Our conclusions in this regard are hence mainly based on whether similar women's and men's characteristics (e.g., education, occupational status, self-employment) lead to different outcomes in terms of changes in employment hours. Another limitation is that the data do not contain any information on same-sex couples. In general, both male and female same-sex couples were shown to divide their hours of paid work more equally (van der Vleuten et al., 2021). In our study's set-up – differentiating between women's and men's employment – it would, however, be unclear how to allocate same-sex couples. In any case, the resulting bias of not including same-sex couples is supposedly very small.¹³

Which conclusions may be drawn from this study's findings? *First of all*, our results show that the significant employment changes for both men and women were only temporary. Employment hours mostly already bounced back to pre-pandemic levels after the first lockdown (see figures S3 and S4). This is in contrast to scholars who expected that we would be seeing more long-term employment effects which might be especially negative for women (Alon et al., 2020). Given the new working experiences made during the pandemic, some commentators also predicted a values shift towards a lower priority of paid work. For the group addressed in the research (families with children in Austria), we do not find any indication of this development. However, future research may target young (childless) adults, who have less consolidated positions and careers, less stable attitudes, more gender egalitarian norms and fewer financial commitments. *Second*, it has been argued that the pandemic severely set back egalitarian gender roles (World Economic Forum, 2023). Instead, we find for Austria that some part of families has actually experienced a shift towards a more egalitarian distribution of paid work (see also Brini et al., 2021; Qian & Hu, 2021). On average, men's employment hours declined more strongly than women's. In line with theoretical expectations from resource/bargaining approaches, we showed that couples in which females had higher relative resources started to prioritize women's employment over men's (while they are usually dual earners). That is, we discover potential of reversed roles in couples with high women's socio-economic status (education, occupation, earnings share). By contrast, we also find for some part of families – mostly those with younger children with more care-intensive needs – a retraditionalisation to the male sole worker model. What is more, there is indication that men's employment is retained more than women's if both share similar occupational characteristics (both highly educated, both in critical occupations, both self-employed). *Third*, our results help to understand the effect of crises on inequality. As was also shown for the Great Recession of 2008, during the pandemic, employment reductions were most strongly concentrated among employees with lower socio-economic status compared to their peers with a higher socio-economic status. They experienced more changes in their work pattern towards short-time work and unemployment, thus exposing a more vulnerable group to higher economic hardship.

¹³ Although no data on the prevalence of same-sex couples exist for Austria, estimates for Germany assume that less than one percent of families with children are headed by two women or two men (Buber-Ennser et al., 2021).

Acknowledgments

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Data availability statement

The data of the Austrian microcensus are available free of charge from the Austrian Social Science Data Archive (AUSSDA) at <https://data.aussda.at/dataverse/statistikaustria>.

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Information in German

Deutscher Titel

Wachsende Vielfalt in Erwerbsmustern von Paaren während der COVID-19 Pandemie in Österreich

Zusammenfassung

Fragestellung: Die Studie untersucht Veränderungen in den Erwerbsmustern von Paaren während der COVID-19 Pandemie in Österreich. Dabei fokussiert sie auf Unterschiede nach dem sozioökonomischen Status und dem Alter der Kinder.

Hintergrund: Wir leisten einen Beitrag zur bisherigen Forschung, indem wir anhand von Paneldaten die Veränderungen der Erwerbsmuster untersuchen und Evidenz für einen konservativen Wohlfahrtsstaat bereitstellen.

Methode: Die Analysen basieren auf den österreichischen Arbeitskräfteerhebungen (Mikrozensus) 2019–20 und umfassen verschiedengeschlechtliche Paare mit Kindern unter 15 Jahren (n=930 bis 3.053). Die Daten werden mittels (multinomiale) logistischer Regressionsmodelle ausgewertet.

Ergebnisse: Die Ergebnisse deuten eine Polarisierung an, da sowohl egalitäre Modelle (z.B. Partner*innen arbeiten etwa gleiche Stunden) als auch traditionelle Modelle (z.B. männlicher Ernährer) während des ersten Lockdowns zunahm, während das moderate Mann Vollzeit/Frau Teilzeit Modell stark abnahm. Unter den beiden egalitäreren Modellen kam das Modell „etwa gleiche Stunden“ hauptsächlich in Familien mit niedrigerem sozioökonomischem Status vor, während das Modell „Rollenumkehr“ (Frau arbeitet mehr Stunden) überwiegend bei Paaren zu beobachten war, bei denen die Partnerin eine höhere Bildung und/oder einen hohen Einkommensanteil hatte. Die Retraditionalisierung beschränkte sich hauptsächlich auf Frauen mit schwächeren Positionen auf dem Arbeitsmarkt: Zu Veränderungen hin zum männlichen Ernährermodell kam es vor allem in Familien mit jüngeren Kindern und/oder geringem weiblichen Einkommensanteil.

Schlussfolgerung: Insgesamt wechselten mehr Paare zu egalitären als zu traditionellen Erwerbsmustern. Dieser Wandel beschränkte sich größtenteils auf den ersten Lockdown und wurde hauptsächlich durch den Anstieg der Kurzarbeit bei Männern vorangetrieben.

Schlagwörter: Erwerbstätigkeit, Paare, COVID-19 Pandemie, Ungleichheit, Lockdown, Österreich

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