

Growing Diversity in Couples' Employment Models During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Austria

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Previous Research

COVID-19 had multiple effects: Catalyst for more traditional gender roles?
(e.g., Bujard et al. 2020; Collins et al. 2021; Cook and Grimshaw 2021; Hipp and Bünning 2020)

Mixed evidence: Larger decrease in employment hours among women or not?

+ US, Canada, UK, Israel

(US: Collins et al. 2021; Fan and Moen 2022; Canada: Fuller and Qian 2021;
UK: Hupkau and Petrongolo 2020; Israel: Kristal and Yaish 2020)

– Germany, Italy, Austria

(Germany: Knize et al. 2021; Italy: Brini et al. 2021; Austria: Steiber et al. 2022)

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Theory

Gender role theory (e.g., Collins et al. 2021; Eagly and Wood 2016; Geist and Ruppner 2018)

Resource/bargaining approaches (e.g., Agarwal 1997; Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard 2010)

Welfare state regime/context (e.g., Esping-Andersen 1990)

Only two studies on couples' perspective: decline in dual earners,
increase in female main workers (Italy: Brini et al. 2021; UK/US: Qian and Hu 2021)

Austria

PRE COVID

Conservative welfare state regime

Institutional characteristics and cultural attitudes foster part-time work

(Berghammer and Schmidt 2019, Riederer and Berghammer 2020)

Almost half of Austrian couples with children below age 15 male full-time/female part-time model (Statistics Austria 2020)

DURING THE PANDEMIC

Reduced working hours due to unemployment and short-time work

(Steiber et al. 2021; Vogtenhuber and Steiber 2021)

Flexibility and double-burden due to working from home (Berghammer 2022)

Women more frequently in critical occupations, but also in those that closed during lockdowns (Bock-Schappelwein et al. 2021; Bock-Schappelwein and Mayrhuber 2020)

Research Questions

How has the distribution of couples' employment arrangements changed?

How did employment arrangements change on a couple level during the first lockdown in spring 2020 compared to the months before?

Which couple characteristics played a role?

Data and Methods

Austrian Microcensus 2019 and 2020 (22,500 households)

Focus on heterosexual couples with co-resident children < 15

Persons in main working age (25-54)

Multinomial logistic regression models

Analytic Strategy

Actual working hours, not contracted or usually worked hours

Couple's Employment	Male partner	Female partner
Male sole worker	Full-/part-time	Not employed
Male main worker	Full-time (36+ hrs/week)	Part-time (1-35 hrs/week)
About equal	Both either full-time, part-time, or not working	
Reversed roles	Female partner more hours per week than male partner	

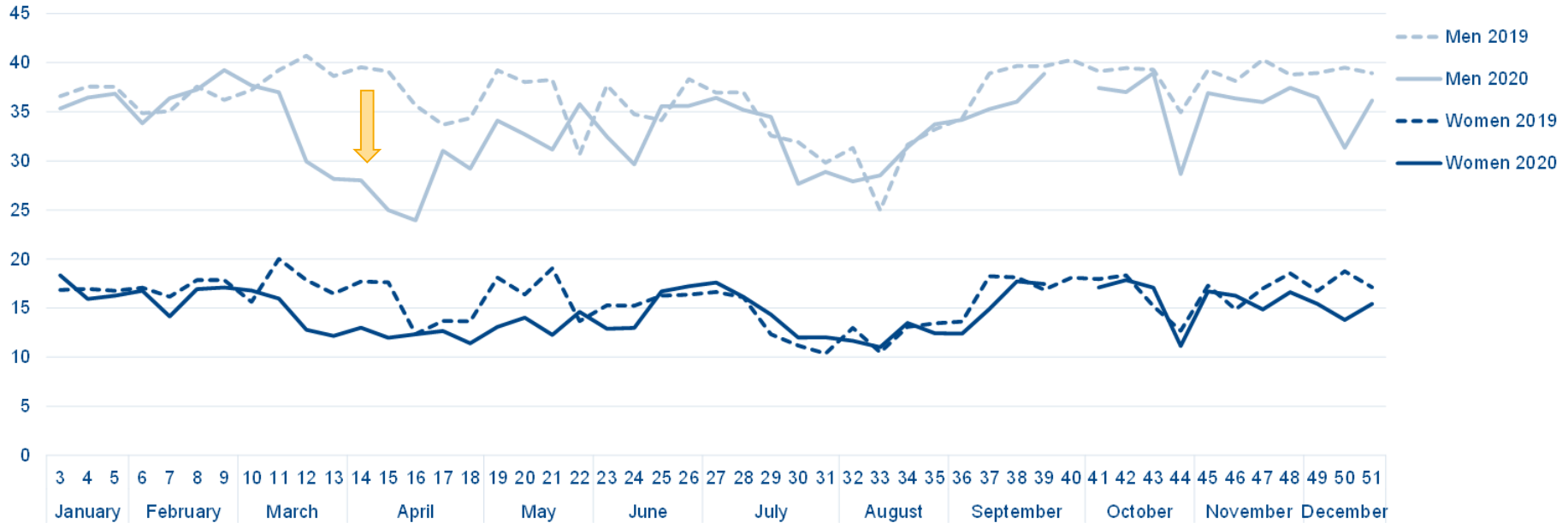
Time series: January 2019 to December 2020

Compare spring 2019 and spring 2020 (first lockdown)

Panel component: changes between the time before and during the lockdown

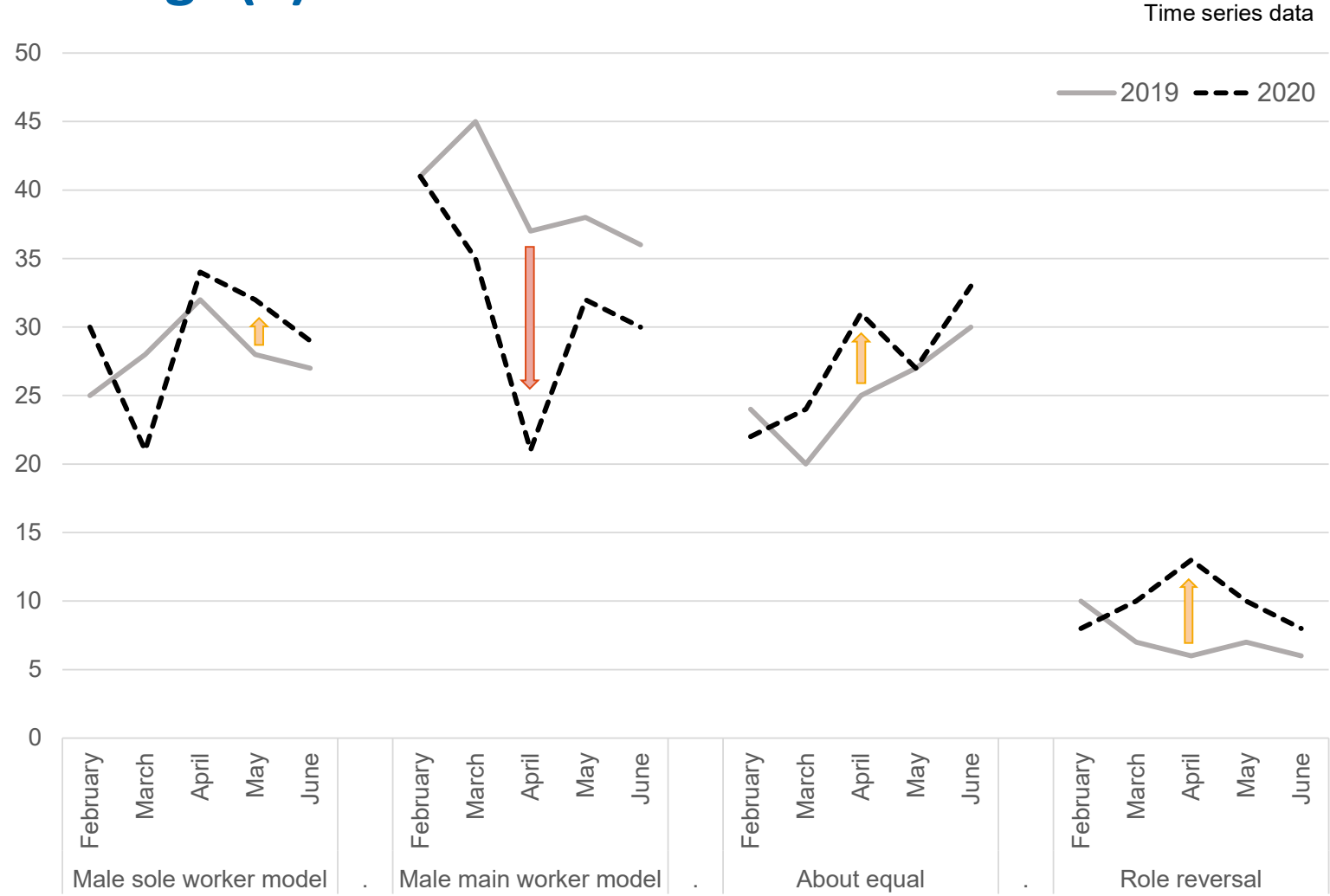
Family characteristics, educational/occupational characteristics, controls

Findings (1)



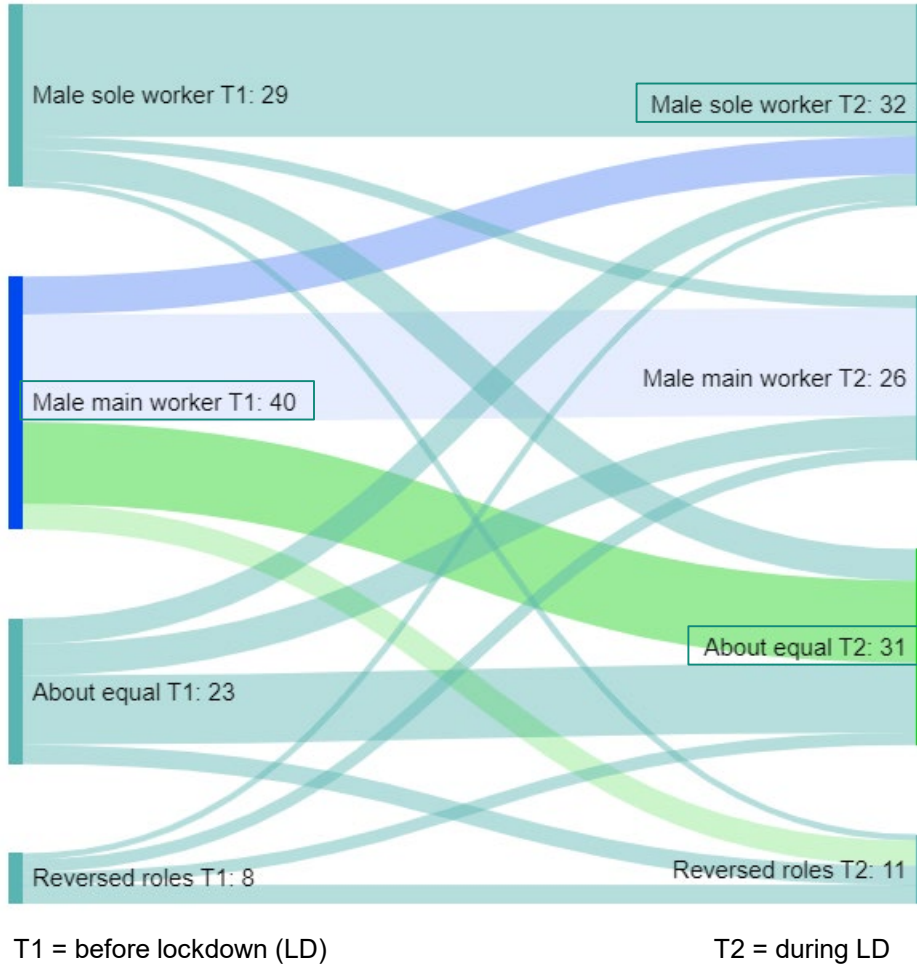
Average weekly working time among couples with children below age 15 in Austria in 2019 and 2020 by gender (both partners age 25-54)

Findings (2)



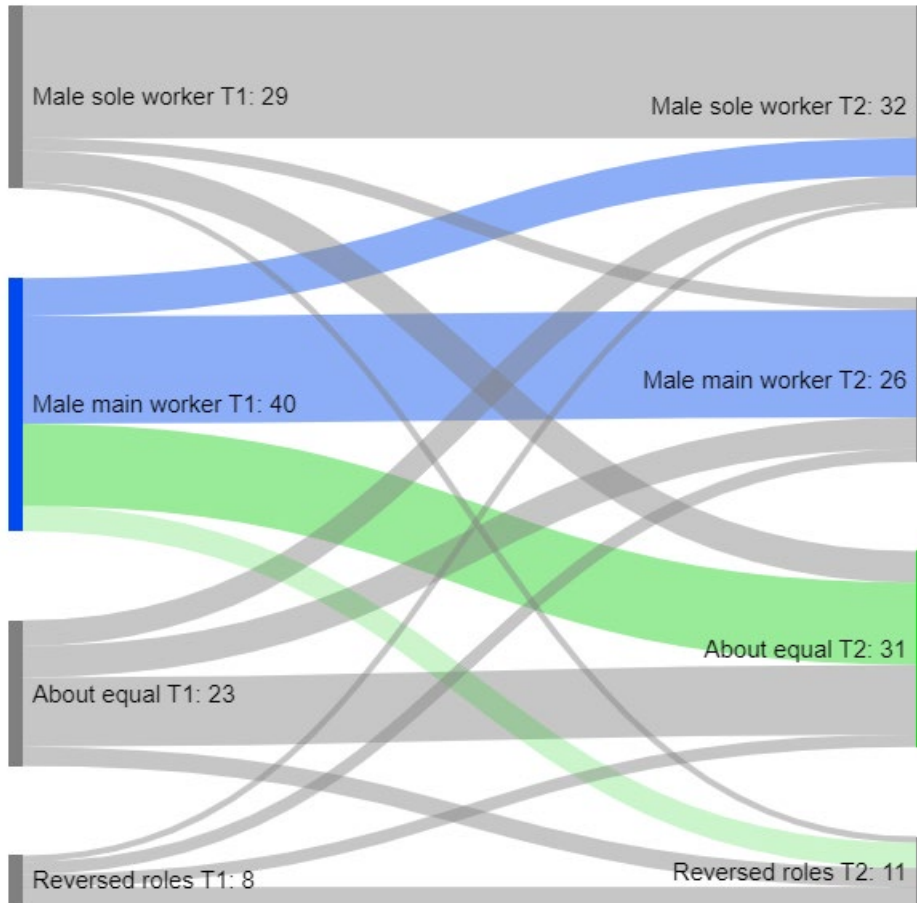
- Strong decrease of male main worker model (16 ppt.)
- About equal and role reversal increasing an; but also male sole worker model → temporary polarization

Findings (3)



Changes in the division of employment within couples with children below age 15 from before (T1) to the first lockdown (T2) in Austria (Share of employment models in %)

Findings (3)



T1 = before lockdown (LD)

T2 = during LD

- Biggest change: male main worker → about equal (32% of male main worker couples)
- But also small increase of male sole worker couples → Polarization?

Findings (4) / multinomial logistic regression

Male sole worker more likely if

- Young children
- Lower education
- His income higher than hers

+ male sole worker less likely if both partners in critical occupations and working from home

About equal more likely if

- Lower educated parents
- Other adults in the same household

Role reversal more likely if

- Older children
- Living in cities
- Higher education
- Her income higher than his
- Woman in critical occupation

Summary & Conclusion

- (1) Male main worker model dominant before lockdown
- (2) In lockdown (temporary) polarization: male sole worker & about equal
- (3) Increase in male sole worker model among parents of young children (*gender roles*), couples with lower education and male “main earner” (*bargaining/resource model*)
- (4) Change to “about equal” more likely if support by other adults and among specific occupations (office clerks, services) (*time availability*)
- (5) Role reversal if older children, living in cities, high education and high income share of the female partner (*bargaining/resource model*)
- (6) Austria as conservative welfare state:
both resources and gender roles mattered

Questions? Comments?

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FWF

Der Wissenschaftsfonds.

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