**Life Course Research In Perspective**

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**Deze samenvatting is afkomstig uit het collegejaar 2017-2018. Het kan zijn dat sommige onderdelen iets verschillen van de huidige tentamenstof. Ook zijn de artikelen niet bij deze samenvatting inbegrepen. Let hier op!**

# Lecture 1: introduction A

Elder et al, 2003: **A perspective** is not theory, it is a theoretical orientation. It does not consist of a law, a general statement, a general hypothesis or an axiom (grondregel). A perspective is an overarching approach = a way to look at societies, sociological issues and knowledge you already possess.

This course is a sum of parts of educational trajectories, employment careers, family life, societal change, panel data and interviewing.

**‘Life course’** refers to the age-dependent, socially prescribed sequence of transitions that connect the various phases in the lives of individuals. It is a holistic concept (dealing with or treating the whole of something or someone and not just a part). The life course perspective deals with the causes and consequences of phases and transitions in people’s lives. life course also includes various domains, phases and transitions. Examples of life course events/transitions: Leaving the family home, obtaining an educational degree, losing or acquiring employment, cohabiting or getting married, becoming a parent, divorce, retirement, migration, and so on.

There are a lot of different explanations for life course transitions, a few are: psychological traits, social background, social norms, previous transitions, cohort and age-related explanations.

Elder and his colleagues (2003) came up with some **key principles** concerning the life course events:

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| Key principle | Concept | Method |
| Path dependency:  Life-span development | * Human development is a continuous and lifelong process * Fundamental changes may occur: biological (physically maturing), psychological (mentally maturing), sociological (transitions in social life) * These changes take place across all life domains and might be a result of a person’s formative years | Longitudinal or retrospective life history data AND/OR qualitative interviewing |
| Path dependency:  Timing | * The age and order in which events occur * This can influence the effect the transition has * Timing and order typically depends on resources, cultural norms, etc. | To see the influence of timing and order of events calls for a longer observation window |
| Context dependency:  Linked lives | * Lives are not lived independent. They are strongly connected. Each human is part of a collective, a context of other lives * Significant others can include partners, parents, children, relatives, colleagues, peers, etc. They all influence each other | Survey multiple household members (multi-actor or dyadic data) AND/OR qualitative interviewing |
| Context dependency:  Time and place | * An individual’s life course is formed by spatiotemporal (both space and time) contexts * Cohort, period and geographical effects | Multilevel: individuals are nested in a higher unit 🡪 families, schools, firms, regions, countries, etc |
| Context dependency:  Agency | * People construct their own life course within constrained situations * Individuals may react differently to opportunities and constraints: historical and social circumstances, cultural frames, institutional conditions | Multilevel analysis including cross-level interaction AND/OR case study or qualitative interviewing |

Examples of the key principles:

* Life-span development: job values change significantly over the life course (Johnson, 2011)
* Timing: month of birth seems to be associated with birth weight, pubertal timing, adult body size and educational attainment (Day et al., 2015)
* Linked lives: status attainment model (Blau & Duncan, 1967)
* Time and place: experiences during world war II negatively affect educational and occupational attainment of people in the Netherlands (Van Houten et al., 2011)
* Agency: lower levels of material deprivation and income poverty among disadvantaged individuals in generous welfare states (Saltkjel & Malmber-Heimonen, 2016)

# Lecture 2: introduction B

The life course perspective has two main questions: 1) Who experiences which transitions (or life events) when? 2) What are the causes and consequences of those transitions (or life events)?

History of the life course perspective

There have been certain changes in history: world wars, women’s movement, secularization, economic recessions, technological changes, globalization. Next to these changes there have been changes in the social demographic: educational expansion, migration, aging, urbanization. All these changes are challenging the sociological inquiry (‘investigations’).

The overall scientific inquiry also changed. More attention was paid to the link between context and life course, and the role of agency. New ways to analyse the life course data: event history analysis, structural equation models, multilevel analysis, growth curve analysis, etc.

All of these changes lead to a response of sociology. Time became a central focus point: **APC**, life span, life history and life cycle. There also came a focus on **trajectories**. A trajectory is a collection of transitions with duration between the transitions. Mayer (2004) came up with ‘differential’ life course sociology: ‘descriptions of how patterns of life course varied between more and more delimited historical periods and between societies.’

Life-span development and timing acknowledge the connectedness of different phases in life. Linked lives, time and place, and agency acknowledge the diversity or variability in trajectories.

Changes in life course trajectories

When key principles are looked at in empirical reality the next question is important**: Individualization or destandardization of the life course**: does it take place? Individualization is a driving force or independent variable at the macro (societal) level as well as an outcome or dependent variable at the micro (individual) level. This is de ambivalent (contradictory ideas about something) definition of **Melinda Mills** (2007). She came up with three types of individualization that could have made changes in social pathways.

1. **Destandardized (strategic)** individualization.
   1. Basic: Traditional culture dissolves leading to more autonomy
   2. Giddens: Less role for fate and destiny: opportunity to create your own life and biography
   3. Simmel: Increased autonomy and the creation of authenticity leads to self-actualization. Resources, power and agency are becoming more important.
   4. THUS: The increased number of possibilities to shape one’s life (macro level) is made use of in pluralized way (micro level)
      1. Problems: Are singles the most individualizes group within a society?
      2. Findings: quantitative studies do not find this type of individualization; for women, these changes might have occurred; qualitative studies show more pluralizes strategies in making choices
2. **Default (conformist)** individualization
   1. Basic: Persistence of a standardized life course
   2. Durkheim: Group pressure (religion, class, etc) remains effective via a collective conscience and corrective system
   3. Veblen: Mass culture creates easy defaults
   4. THUS: The changing society (macro level) leads to new default or standard pathways that differ from the pathways that are dominant among previous generations (micro level)
      1. Problem: Non-conformist behaviour might become new conformist behaviour
      2. Findings: Quantitative studies show changing but similar life courses (confirmation); Qualitative studies show pluralized strategies in making choices (contradiction)
3. **Fragile (anomic)** individualization
   1. Basic: Norms not only changes, they also weaken (due to less social control)
   2. Durkheim: A vacuum of norms leads to more individual choice and unpredictable behaviour of fragile individuals (e.g. suicide)
   3. Beck: People become responsible for the what and when (increasing risks)
   4. THUS: The increasing number of possibilities because of weakening norms (macro level) leads to the life course transitions postponement and choosing less binding pathway (micro level)
      1. Findings: Quantitative studies show that transitions are being made later (confirmation); Increasing problems with the meaning of life and fulfilment

Evidence for the three ways of individualization is found in the following. Qualitative studies show more diversity in strategies (1). But quantitative studies show new main patterns (2). These new patterns include some postponement (3). Both qualitative and quantitative research shows gender and class differences in social pathways (1, 2, 3). But, there seems to be a divide between qualitative and quantitative findings.

According to Widmer and Ritschard there is a **gendered destandardization/individualization**. Younger cohorts experience for both cohabitation and occupation a greater diversity. This is more pronounced for women. Women have to negotiate between paid work and family life and go back and forth between part-time and family work. This research has been done in Switzerland, so to what extent are the findings generalizable to other countries?

Possible exam questions:

* How are the key principles of Elder et al. (2003) related to the destandardization or individualization of the life course?
* To what extent are the principles causes?
* To what extent are the principles consequences?
* To what extent are the principles inherent to destandardization/individualization?

Methods

You need data on different phases in life to see life-span development. This is possible by using panel or retrospective data. When you want to see the sequence and order of transitions for the principle of timing, duration data is needed for an event history analysis. For research to the principle of linked lives intergenerational data and/or multi actor data is needed for a multilevel analysis or network analysis. Time and place research requires data from different years and places. Pooled data and multilevel analysis can be used for the principle of time and place. Interaction effects and cross-level interaction effects are required for research to agency.

A transition is change in one of the domains of life. Firstly, the order in which these life events occur is important. This can be analysed by using panel or retrospective data. Secondly, the duration is important. How long did it take for the transition to take place? And how long is the period between two transitions? These questions can be answered by using even history analysis.

**Panel data** is when the same respondent is asked the same questions multiple times (waves). This has a few advantages. This differences within a case can be analysed in addition to the differences between cases. You are able to really test the sequence of X and Y, the causal order. Lastly, the duration is measured in a more reliable way than retrospective data. There are also some disadvantages. Panel attrition (‘afslijting’) is one of the disadvantages. Next to that the costs are also very high. It takes a long time to interview all these people and time is money.

**Retrospective data** is when the respondent is asked to ‘go back in time’ and report on attitudes and behaviour at a certain age or moment. It has the same advantages as panel data, except for the measurement of duration. It is also more time- and cost-effective. The disadvantages are the limitations of the human memory.

**Pooled cross-sectional data** is data on the here and now measured in different years for different respondents, and the surveys are being stacked (pooled) into one file. This way birth cohorts can be followed over time. It is also relatively cheap and easy to collect. In these data-sets there is a high correlation between age and cohort, which is a disadvantage. Also, individuals cannot be followed over time and there are causality issues.

**Sequence analysis** is originally developed in biology to map sequences of DNA. But it can also bring the life course trajectory easy to see in one figure. This is less useful for explanatory research. **Event history analysis** is the analysis of duration of non-occurrence. In the ‘formule’ Y is the risk of occurrence of an event. The simplest type is logistic regression analysis (Y=1/0). **Multilevel analysis** acknowledges that what we observe at the lowest level is influenced by their belonging to higher levels. Micro-level effects can depend on macro-level characteristics.

APC problem

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| What | Definition | Influences |
| Age | Time since birth | Aging-related development within cases |
| Period | Calendar time | Changes in society and events experienced by all people at that moment |
| Cohort | Moment of birth | Socialization and formative differences between cases |

The problem is that: C=P-A, P=C+A and A=P-C. It is fully **multicollinear** and, hence, cannot be estimated simultaneously in a analysis model. A, P and C cannot be distinguished empirically. There are some possible solutions to the APC problem. 1) The assumption of no-effect: one of the three effects is assumed to equal zero. This is a very strong assumption and how do you know this? 2) Dummy variable method: you manipulate the model so that the data is not multicollinear. But the results depend very strongly on how you manipulate the data. 3) lastly, the Age-Period-Cohort-Characteristic method: adding variables that may indicated A, P or C. One that has a really high correlation with one of the three. This is a powerful method for testing theories.

# Lecture 3: education

Education can be an outcome. It can be linked to parental education and occupation as well as family life (divorce, number of siblings, re-marriage). It may also differ between different social groups because of different choices (agency). And it depends on the educational system. Education can also be a predictor. It is (one of) the most used (control) variable in sociology. It is used as a predictor of attitudes, lifestyles and socio-economic positions.

There have been some major reforms in the Dutch educational system. These reforms might be linked to some key principles:

* ‘Mammoetwet’ in 1963: this policy introduced 4 tracks in secondary education (vbo, mavo, havo and vwo). Students will be tracked at age 12 according to their abilities. This is strongly influenced by standardized test scores and teachers’ recommendation.
* As of 1998 havo and vwo have to phases. The first three years consist of general education. After that the student can choose a ‘profile’ for the second phase.
* In 1999 vbo and mavo were merged into a single track that consists of four levels that vary in their level of theory and practice.
* Also in 1999, the Bologna declaration was signed. This introduced the European bachelor/master system as well as the ECTS credits system.

Sociological research on educational trajectories is particularly interested in the causes and consequences of those events and transitions. A few themes are relevant: social stratification (inequality of outcomes), social mobility (inequality of opportunities), vertical and horizontal differences, inequality between groups. Education is two-faced: it is equalizing (achievement) yet also compensatory strategy (ascription).

The **Matthew effect** (1968) is the effect of the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. This is also called a cumulative (dis)advantage.

Social origin, usually measured by parental education, occupation or social class, directly and indirectly, through children’s education, effects social destination, usually measured by children’s occupation or social class. This is the **status attainment model (**SAM). The influence from the parents can be through financial, cultural or social resources; early cognitive ability; educational decision making; and aspirations. How could the 5 life course principles be linked to this model? Education is an equalizer in the Netherlands. Because the relation between social origin and education and occupational status has decreased. But education is also a channel for inequality. The relationship between education and occupational status has not increased and the two relationship that show education as an equalizer are beginning to increase again.

In research to the SAM educational attainment is measured by the highest obtained educational degree. These researches are ignoring time: what happens before the degree is obtained? What do the educational trajectories look like? There is a lack of life course studies that look into full educational histories, so from the moment children enter the educational system until the moment they leave daytime education.

# Lecture 4: work

The **employment trajectory** is the labour market positions over the life course of an individual. It starts with the transition from school to work, the first job after leaving daytime education. During the employment trajectory, there can be **internal mobility** and **external mobility**. Internal mobility is when you change jobs within an organization. This can be a promotion/demotion, changing departments or an in- or decrease in working hours. External mobility is changing jobs between organizations. Also getting fired or becoming permanently sick of (partly) disabled are transitions in the trajectory. All of these changes can be either voluntary of involuntary.

When talking about the change from daytime education to the work field the **human capital theory** is important. This theory predicts that labour market entrants who have higher educational degrees are considered to be more productive by employers and therefore more likely to get a (better) job. This human capital represents experience, motivation, skills, trainability, etc.

**Globalization** is the growing of the worldwide interconnectedness in the economic, cultural and political domain. This globalization and the flexibilization of the labour market relations increase the employment uncertainties. This would particularly be true for the already disadvantaged groups, thus increasing social inequality. Again, the term cumulative disadvantage is important.

The employment trajectories of young adults, men, women and older people

The employment biographies of particularly younger cohorts of labour market entrants are characterized by more frequent episodes of precarious work, such as temporary jobs, part-time work and jobs that pay a lower wage. These young adults seem to be the ‘**losers of globalization’** despite their higher educational qualifications, compared to older birth cohorts. Studies have found that education is becoming increasingly more important as a key factor to become established in the labour market. There is also an increasing labour market uncertainty that leads to changes in family formation processes such like cohabiting, buying a house and having children.

In older generations men mostly followed a standardizes career path. They would obtain an educational degree, they would get a fulltime job, then upward mobility would take place and mostly in the same company, and finally they would retire (early). This is changing due to globalization. At the moment, well-qualified male employees are protected and those who are lower educated are disadvantaged.

Older cohorts of women were mostly housewives and inactive in the labour market, especially after marriage and/or childbirth. But female labour market participation has been rising sharply since the 1960s. But still, working women are structurally disadvantaged (i.e. horizontal and vertical gender segregation). Especially child birth negatively affects women’s career outcomes. This is called the ‘motherhood penalty’. But men and women are not isolated individuals. They are often in a relationship or married and thus forming a household. Many women in the Netherlands work part-time, and this has consequences for the economic independency of women. Especially in the event of a divorce involving young children for example. The division of paid and unpaid work between partners remains rather unequal.

Older (male) workers are get along well in the labour market. They mostly have secure and stable employment. This is partly because of strict employment legislation protecting older workers. But rapidly changing technologies are a threat and the older workers are expensive for employers, due to seniority wages. A popular strategy were the early retirement schemes. Nowadays, Western governments are interested in active aging strategies. But these active aging strategies have a few downsides: long-term unemployment for older worker; risk of disability; tension between productivity and earnings; age discrimination.

Earlier life experiences are systematically linked to outcomes in later life, which may cause growing inequality if disadvantages accumulate over the life course. People accumulate resources already at a young age, and perhaps even before they are born as their parents accumulate resources as well. A few examples are: higher or lower educated (grand)parents; attaining a higher of lower educational degree; becoming employed or unemployed; having a ‘good’ or a ‘bad’ job; and earning more or less money.

Lower educated parents 🡪 lower educated 🡪 bad job 🡪 lower wage 🡪 lower educated partner 🡪 unhealthy lifestyle 🡪 shorter life expectancy

Higher educated parents 🡪 higher educated 🡪 good job 🡪 higher wage 🡪 higher educated partner 🡪 healthy lifestyle 🡪 longer life expectancy

# Lecture 5: family

The family formation phase is usually strongly intertwined with people’s employment carreer. Interesting are the macro- and micro-level causes and consequences of life course events and transitions in the family domain. A few transitions in the family domain are leaving the parental home, forming a relationship, cohabitation, childlessness, etc. New current topics are also single-parent families and same-sex couples.

There are a few explanations for the decrease in marriage and fertility, and the increase in divorce.

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|  | Cultural explanations | Structural explanations |
| Mechanism | Own preferences and that of others | Costs, benefits and alternatives |
| Factors | Norms, values, ideas | Occupation, income and education |
| View of humanity | Socializes human | Rational human |

Family trajectories: then and now

Policies strongly reinforced the traditional male breadwinner model for the major part of the 20th century. There was limited public child care provision and there was a tax penalty for dual-earners. Also, the societal norm disapproved of working mothers and to a lesser extent even of working women. Women were in charge of the household, performing domestic tasks and taking care of the children. But economically they were dependent on their husbands. Due to secularization, women’s emancipation and the expansion of the service sector, education and the labour force participation of women has increased. This caused the shift towards dual-earner households. But Dutch households are often said to be ‘one-and-a-half-earner’. This shift also caused postponement of marriage and parenthood: the order/sequence and the timing of family life events changed. The family trajectories have increasingly become less standardized. Combining work and care is nowadays facilitated by maternity leave and child care services, but compared to Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands is still fairly conservative (particularly with regard to the rights of fathers).

The table below is an overview of different theories and constricts concerning the divide of work. Why is the man the breadwinner or why are they both working? The resources are education (earnings potential) and income.

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| Individual-level theories | House-hold theories | Constraints |
| Human capital theory: absolute resources | Specialization: relative resources | Low income of the sole earner |
| Homogamy: ‘birds of a feather flock together’ | Resource-bargaining: relative resources | Marco-economic adversity |
|  | ‘Doing gender’: gender role attitudes | Divorce |

Lots of studies have examined the impact of childbirth on the division of paid and unpaid work between partners. The empirical findings are quite clear: couples have a more traditional division of labour after childbirth than before childbirth (Nitsche & Gronow, 2016).