

# What to expect when it's unexpected? Unplanned Parenthood and Precarious Career Trajectories in Germany.

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## Abstract

Research suggests motherhood's impact on women's careers varies by parity and timing as earlier first births and career interruptions impose greater career penalties. Existing studies have primarily focused on isolated outcomes, such as wages, neglecting broader consequences on overall career trajectories. Moreover, there is a research gap regarding the role of fertility intentions and of *planning parenthood* in mitigating adverse effects.

This study introduces a novel approach to analyse career trajectories after parenthood, comparing individuals who planned for parenthood with those who did not. Those who did not plan for parenthood often face simultaneous challenges, such as negotiating work-family reconciliation, childcare, and housing situations. Additionally, unplanned parenthood may be linked to unfavorable career timing. I investigate whether unplanned parenthood functions as an economic shock, associated with more episodes of precarious employment statuses, including unemployment, marginal employment, and (prolonged) parental leave, thereby resulting in diminished lifetime earnings and human capital accumulation.

Using *pairfam* data and sequence analysis, I consider intentions preceding pregnancy and categorise parenthood status as either planned or unplanned, based on whether individuals expressed a desire for children. I address two questions: First, what factors are associated with (un)planned parenthood? Second, does unplanned parenthood contribute to increased precarity in career trajectories?

Preliminary findings indicate unplanned parenthood in 15.8% of first births, 10.1% of second births, and 45.3% of third births, associated with lower age-at-parenthood and more precarious career trajectories. Gender differences emerge, as unplanned parenthood has minimal impact on men but significant effects on women.

**Keywords:** unplanned parenthood, fertility intentions, sequence analysis, employment precarity, parenthood gaps

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## Background

Prior studies suggest that the adverse impact of parenthood on employment trajectories varies based on timing, as early motherhood results in greater career penalties, while postponing parenthood can lead to wage increases (Doren, 2019; Van Winkle & Fasang, 2020). Therefore, strategic timing of parenthood is crucial to minimise the associated costs. However, existing research on parenthood gaps largely overlooks the roles of *fertility intentions* and *unplanned parenthood*, i.e. unintended pregnancies carried to term. To the best of my knowledge, only one study has differentiated employment outcomes, specifically the motherhood wage penalty, based on planned and unplanned motherhood (Bearak et al., 2021).

This study examines how (un)planned parenthood affects career trajectories, considering fertility intentions and employment precarity, thereby contributing to the literature in four key aspects:

Firstly, while existing literature has primarily explored factors leading to unplanned parenthood (Brzowska & Beaujouan, 2021), this study takes a distinctive approach by examining the impact of unplanned parenthood on *subsequent* career trajectories. Individuals who did not plan for parenthood may often face simultaneous challenges, including negotiating work-family reconciliation, childcare, and housing situations. Unplanned parenthood may also be associated with unfavorable career timing. Therefore, I argue that observing career trajectories after (un)planned parenthood is crucial to understanding whether disadvantages stemming from unplanned parenthood accumulate over life.

Secondly, I argue that a focus on isolated outcomes, such as hourly wages, overlooks the enduring consequences of experiencing episodes and transitions into precarious employment statuses. Research suggests that precarious employment, including unemployment and marginal employment, increases the risk of prolonged unemployment and diminishes labor market attachment (Thern et al., 2023). Moreover, hourly wages fail to account for periods when individuals receive compensation without actively working, as during parental leave. Aggregating these periods may result in diminished lifetime earnings and reduced human capital accumulation (Dechter, 2014).

Thirdly, in contrast to previous studies (Finer & Zolna, 2016; Guzzo & Hayford, 2014), I use prospective data on fertility intentions to distinguish between planned and unplanned parenthood. While this approach may introduce some uncertainty regarding changes in fertility intentions leading up to birth, it helps alleviate retrospective biases influenced by 'rosy retrospection'.

Finally, given that prior studies on unplanned parenthood have predominantly focused on women (Finer & Zolna, 2016; Guzzo & Hayford, 2014), my goal is to broaden the existing literature by including the male perspective. This addition seeks to assess whether gender differences intensify or diminish in the context of unplanned parenthood.

Considering the challenges linked to unplanned parenthood, I hypothesise that it functions as an economic shock, leading to more precarious career trajectories with increased episodes of precarious employment.

## Data and Methods

I analyse data from the German Panel Analysis of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics (*pairfam*) wave 1 (2008/09) to 14 (2021/22), encompassing four birth cohorts: 2001-03, 1991-93, 1981-83, and 1971-73. The sample is restricted to individuals with information on fertility intentions who experienced the birth of their first, second, or third child between wave 2 to 13. The final sample comprises 1,211 births from 1,040 individuals, with women slightly over represented, accounting for 53.8% of births and individuals.

I use data on both the ideal and actual number of children from the most recent wave within the period from 2 years to 10 months before parenthood. This approach aims to mitigate potential bias arising from an already ongoing pregnancy. Parenthood is categorised as planned if the ideal number exceeds the actual number of children and as unplanned if the ideal number is equal to or smaller than the actual number of children. The analysis comprises three main components.

Firstly, I conduct a descriptive analysis to identify the characteristics of individuals within the (un)planned parenthood group, controlling for variables such as age-at-parenthood, gender, education, and pre-parenthood income.

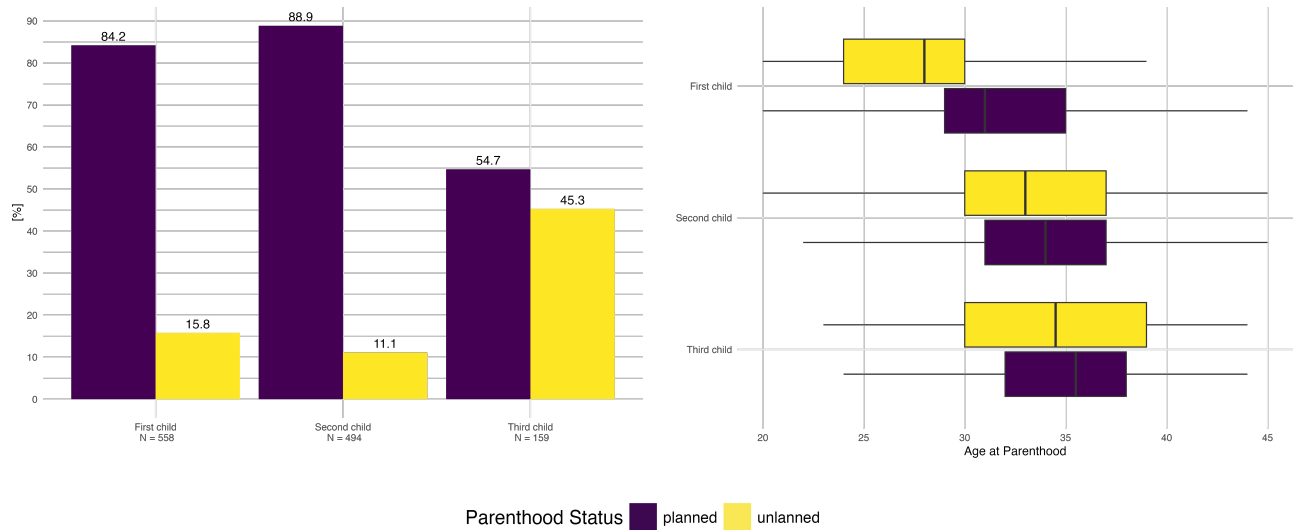
Secondly, I use sequence analysis with monthly employment status data to visualise career trajectories. Employing dynamic sequence analysis, as proposed by Pelletier (2020), I calculate cumulative employment precarity every 6 months over 72 months (12 months before parenthood and 60 months post-parenthood), resulting in 12 observations per birth, totaling 14,532 observations. Alongside parenthood status, I control for gender, age-at-parenthood, and parity.

Thirdly, I employ a two-way-fixed effects linear regression on employment precarity to examine whether employment life courses become more precarious with unplanned parenthood and, if so, to pinpoint the specific timing of such effects (not yet included in this abstract).

## Preliminary Results

Figure 1 (left) shows the distribution of parenthood status by parity, accompanied by box plots depicting age-at-parenthood by parity and parenthood status up to the time of birth (right). Unplanned parenthood, constituted 15.8% and 10.1% of first and second births, respectively. Notably 46.3 % of third births were classified as unplanned. These findings indicate a persistent preference for having two children. In terms of age-at-parenthood, individuals experiencing unplanned parenthood are, on average, younger, particularly for first child births (see Figure 1, right).

In Figure 2, I analysed 271 sequences from men (depicted on the left) and 287 sequences from women (depicted on the right), spanning from 12 months before the birth of the first child to 60 months after. Examining the sequence distribution plots for both men and women by parenthood status reveals distinct patterns. Notably, the percentage of men in education at the time of birth was higher for those with unplanned parenthood. Conversely, the proportion of men who took parental



**Figure 1:** Parenthood status by parity(left); Boxplot of age at parenthood by parity and parenthood status (right), aggregated for men and women across both plots. **Source:** *pairfam* wave 1-14.



**Figure 2:** Sequence distribution plots for career trajectories of men (left) and women (right) with planned and unplanned parenthood, spanning from 12 months before to 60 months after the first child's birth, vertical line indicates the time of parenthood, y-axis shows the number of observations. **Source:** *pairfam* wave 1-14.

leave was smaller for those with unplanned parenthood. Additionally, unemployment and not being employed were more prevalent for women with unplanned parenthood, while full-time employment and extended parental leave periods were more common for women with planned parenthood, especially after 18 months post motherhood. These findings indicate a gendered effect of unplanned parenthood, as it leads to prolonged periods outside the labor market for women but not for men, highlighting pronounced gender dynamics in the transition to parenthood.

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