

# Coupled Careers

## Effects of Spouse's Resources on Occupational Attainment in the Netherlands

Wim Bernasco, Paul M. de Graaf, and Wout C. Ultee

Economic theory predicts a negative association between spouses' levels of occupational attainment due to gains from specialization between housework and paid work. Sociology typically stresses facilitating effects of network resources on occupational attainment. Spouses are network members who may be able and willing to provide such resources. According to this argument, a positive association between spouses' levels of attainment is expected. Confronting these two alternative hypotheses, questions on the effects of spouse's resources on occupational attainment are addressed. We analyse the *Dutch Family Survey 1992/93*, a survey that covers the complete job histories of about 700 couples. Hypotheses on positive and negative effects of a spouse's resources on employment entry and exit and on job mobility are tested in an event-history analysis. The analysis shows that a spouse's financial resources hinder occupational attainment, while a spouse's human capital has facilitating effects, and therefore both economic and sociological theories are corroborated.

### Introduction

In recent decades, industrialized societies have witnessed a considerable rise in the employment rate of women, especially married women. Men's participation has only slightly decreased, and consequently the number of dual-earner households has risen. In the Netherlands, where women's employment rates traditionally have been low, about half of all couples (including unmarried cohabiting couples) in which both partners were between 15 and 64 years old were dual-earner couples in 1991. It has been shown (Ultee, Dessens, and Jansen, 1988; Bernasco, 1994) that the occupational attainments of spouses are positively associated. Spouses' occupational levels are positively correlated, and if one spouse is unemployed then the odds of unemployment of the other spouse are relatively high. Due to the overall rise in women's labour-force participation, this positive relationship will increasingly lead to the cumulation of advantages in households. Because the cumula-

tion of advantages and disadvantages within households is becoming a central feature of contemporary stratification systems, the identification of the underlying processes is very relevant. Three separate processes can be distinguished as potential causes of the associations between the occupational attainment of spouses: assortative mating, shared restrictions, and spouse effects.

If partners select each other on the basis of characteristics which relate to occupational attainment at the individual level, or on the basis of occupational attainment itself, then the resulting association is already established at the beginning of the partnership, through *assortative mating*. Research on the relationship between spouses' characteristics shows that partner selection for marriage is highly selective. Likes tend to mate with likes with respect to age, family background, education, and religious affiliation, to mention the most salient characteristics.

For the Netherlands, it has been shown that nowadays educational homogamy is more important than other forms of homogamy, except for age homogamy (Hendrickx, 1994; Uunk, 1996). Of course, education and age are also related to occupational attainment. Individuals with relatively few educational qualifications and young people tend to achieve less than the educated and the old. An association between, for example, spouses' occupational prestige might well be caused by the fact that (1) individuals marry spouses who have similar educational qualifications, and (2) educational qualifications are resources that positively affect occupational prestige. In that case, similarity between spouses' occupational attainment can be viewed as a by-product of partner selection (Ultee, Dessens, and Jansen, 1988), and this similarity should not be attributed to a process of influence between the spouses.

The second process which might cause spouses' employment status and occupational prestige to be associated is termed *shared restrictions*. Shared restrictions refers to restrictions that spouses share. Because spouses live together, they are both subjected to the same local or regional labour-market conditions. In areas with low demand for labour and high supply, spouses are similarly handicapped in finding work and becoming upwardly mobile. In regions of high demand, both have widened opportunities. Spouses are not only geographically but also temporally jointly restricted. They suffer together from periods of economic recession and profit likewise from periods of prosperity. Also the presence of children in the household could be seen as a major restriction which spouses share. Children require investments in time and energy that apply to the couple as a unit, although empirically, of course, women undertake the major part in these investments. Like assortative mating, the diverse types of shared restrictions are likely to yield positive rather than negative associations between spouses' occupational attainments and do not reflect a process of mutual influence between spouses.

*Spouse effects* are the third type of process that generates associations between spouses' resources and occupational attainment. A spouse effect is an effect of an individual's resources on the occupational attainment of his or her spouse. Spouse effects can be either positive or negative. In this paper our

main focus is on the assertion and explanation of spouse effects. In contrast to assortative mating, spouse effects are seldom investigated although, if positive, they contribute to the cumulation of advantage in households. First, we will discuss theoretical arguments concerning spouse effects and formulate hypotheses. Next, we test these hypotheses empirically in models where the contributions of assortative mating and shared restrictions are controlled for.

## Two Hypotheses on Spouse Effects

Employment and occupational prestige are highly relevant dimensions of social stratification. The dominant view in economics with respect to couples' behaviour in the labour market centres around the notion that couples obtain maximal efficiency in pursuing their goals if they specialize: couples are best off when each spouse specializes in those activities in which he or she is relatively most skilful.

According to the theory, the way households handle such decision problems resembles the way firms do (Berk and Berk, 1983). In maximizing joint utility, households act efficiently. Efficiency is served by a division of labour, and households will allocate the time of each member to the activities in which the members are most productive (relative to the other members, and relative to other activities). Among the many activities households perform, a distinction can be made between work for pay 'in the market' (producing income as a means for obtaining market goods) and household activities (producing commodities combining time and market goods). The amount of time husbands and wives spend in paid labour is dependent upon their marginal productivity at home and in the marketplace, in comparison to the marginal productivity at home and in the market of their partner. If either at home or in the market spouses' productivities differ, there will generally exist comparative advantages; both partners are better off by a division of labour than they would have been if both had allocated equal amounts of time to labour on the market and at home. Now, as long as comparative advantage exists between spouses, they can and will produce a preferable bundle of commodities and reach a higher level of utility by further specialization, up to the point

where either one or both spouses are fully specialized. Observe that the theory does not predict a complete division of labour in all cases; couples with both spouses employed full-time or both spouses not employed are fully compatible with it, although couples with both spouses part-time employed are not.

Specialization itself induces increasing comparative advantage, because each spouse learns additional specific skills in the domain of specialization. Applications of human-capital theory (Becker, 1964) generally show that workers' productivity increases through investments in education, on-the-job training, and learning-by-doing. Also, skills will generally be subject to depreciation when there are not used. Similar arguments can be formulated for the accumulation of housework productivity.

Combining this notion of skill accumulation via learning-by-doing with the prediction of specialization leads to several hypotheses on the interdependence of spouses' careers. A partner who specializes in paid labour will accumulate human capital, while the partner who specializes in household work will suffer from human-capital depreciation. Or, if one partner works full-time and the other works part-time, the partner working full-time accumulates human capital at a higher rate than the partner who works part-time. Therefore, the full-time employed partner's market productivity (i.e. earnings capacity) rises more than the part-time employed partner's. As a result, comparative advantage becomes stronger.

Specialization can also exist in terms of effort rather than time. Then, the partner who has comparative disadvantage in market work allocates less effort (rather than less time) to market work (Becker, 1991, supplement to chapter 2). An individual may then invest less effort in paid work by accepting a job that requires only part of his or her capabilities. A wife whose husband has comparative advantage in market work might accept a job below the level of skill she would be able to manage if she did not reserve energy for household work. Such an under-utilization of her human capital will typically also imply that she accumulates less human capital in her actual job than she could have done in a job that would match her level of skill. The argument about comparative advantage leading to an under-utilization of human capital of the less resourceful

spouse can readily be interpreted in terms of occupational status. In that case, the less resourceful spouse can be expected to under-utilize human capital in terms of accepting a job below the level he or she could obtain if he or she invested more effort.

These arguments lead to the formulation of the hypothesis that any change in comparative advantage, whether exogenously induced or as a consequence of previous choices of the couple, induces a corresponding change in the relative occupational attainment of the spouses. First, it is expected that the employment status of individuals is negatively related to the wage rate and employment of their spouse. And secondly, these negative effects are also expected with respect to occupational status. Evidently, these two effects cumulate in the long run, because an initial withdrawal from the labour market will generally lower the individual's earnings capacity and thereby have the effect that if the individual takes up a subsequent job, it will be of lower occupational status.

Sociologists tend to think about resources of affiliated individuals as substitutes for their own resources: being associated with resourceful others increases the individual's chances to profit from others' resources in pursuing his or her goals. Thus, the relationships with other people and the resources that these people provide are seen as social capital. Social capital can be defined as an individual's personal network and all the resources he has access to through this network, including the willingness of the network members to provide access to such resources (Coleman, 1990).

Studies of the effects of social capital on occupational attainment (Lin, Vaughn, and Ensel, 1981; Marsden and Hurlbert, 1988; De Graaf and Flap, 1988) have generally found that the size of the individual's network and the social status of network members relate positively to measures of occupational attainment such as finding work, occupational prestige, upward mobility, or income. We suggest that spouses might be among the providers of skills, knowledge, and network resources that add up to the resources an individual already has access to, much in the way that networks of friends and acquaintances have been shown to do. Like friends and acquaintances, spouses can provide information on vacancies, give help and advice on work-related matters, and form a 'bridge' to remote

social networks. We argue below that several aspects of the relationship between spouses create favourable conditions for sharing each other's skills, knowledge, and social networks.

Trust is a necessary condition for network members to be willing to support the individual with resources (Coleman, 1990). In general, trust will be facilitated when the relationship between the actors is characterized by high frequency of contact, continuity, and intimacy. Thus, in kinship and friendship relationships more trust should be expected than in more temporary and anonymous relationships. In terms of contact frequency, continuity, and intimacy, the relationship between partners will generally outperform other relationships. Therefore, individuals may be expected to be more willing to provide resources to their spouse than to others they are more distantly related to. In addition, if the resources do lead to increased occupational attainment, spouses will typically directly profit, for example because household income or the family's status rises.

Granovetter (1974) has argued that weak ties, network members with whom the relationship is characterized by lower frequency of contact and perhaps also less continuity, are structurally in a better position to provide information that is not yet known to the individual. Strong ties, such as family and close friends, are less well able to provide new information simply because what they know will usually already be known by the individual himself or herself. Thus, although network members related by strong ties might be more willing to provide resources, they might be less able to do so. We suggest, though, that this finding applies to types of resources that are relatively cheap to give, such as information on vacancies. For types of support that require more time, energy, and commitment, individuals may have to rely on strong ties.

It should be noted at this point that it is not exclusively tangible support – support that can be cast in terms of money, time, or information – that partners provide. Part of the effect of a spouse's educational qualifications on occupational attainment is probably not caused by higher educated spouses being better able to teach skills or provide more valuable labour-market information, but by attitudes more favourable to occupational attainment held by higher educated men and women.

Thus, we view attainment-conducive attitudes as part of the partner's resources. Higher-educated individuals may simply create a more stimulating climate for their partner to pursue occupational status.

In sum, these arguments derived from sociological theory suggest that occupational attainment is facilitated by having a resourceful partner. This contradicts the hypothesis derived from economic theory. The main reason why the two views lead to contradicting hypotheses is that in the economic theory, attainment is considered to be a function of human capital, and human capital is considered to be a strictly individual type of capital. The only way to receive returns from previous investments in human capital is by using them in the labour market. Spouses only share their income and some consumption goods, but not skills and information. In our interpretation of social-capital theory, however, human capital is seen as a resource that can be shared with others, and also as an indicator of attainment-conducive attitudes. Sharing of human capital between spouses seems facilitated by mutual trust that makes spouses willing to share, and by the possibility that the 'provider' will often share in the fruits of his partner's increased occupational attainment.

Rather than stating that the two theoretical arguments discussed above lead to different predictions, an integration can be proposed by trying to interpret the competing predictions as reflecting *different and simultaneous processes* rather than competing statements. After all, nothing in the economic models prevents spouses from using each other's skills and knowledge to increase their occupational attainment. The models only do not explicitly include the possibility of such transfers. Similarly, there is nothing in the notion of social capital that argues against the efficiency that couples may obtain through specialization. In order to combine the two theoretical frameworks two types of individual resources need to be distinguished, financial resources and labour market resources. Financial resources are earnings obtained through participation in paid work. We argue that the economic theory predicts a negative effect of spouse's earnings on labour supply and on occupational prestige. Labour-market resources represent non-financial resources that are related to labour-market participation: skills, knowledge, access to information, and

attainment-conducive attitudes in general. Rather than arguing that the two theoretical approaches lead to competing hypotheses, the hypotheses can be formulated more precisely in terms of financial and labour-market resources having opposite effects on spouse's occupational attainment. Accordingly, two general hypotheses are formulated:

1. Controlling for the spouse's labour-market resources and after taking into account assortative mating and shared restrictions, spouse's *financial* resources negatively affect *occupational attainment*.
2. Controlling for spouse's financial resources and after taking into account assortative mating and shared restrictions, spouse's *labour-market* resources positively affect *occupational attainment*.

The main goal of our empirical analysis is to test these two hypotheses. We employ life-history data and use event-history analysis to analyse them because this allows us to make more appropriate causal inferences.

## Data

In order to analyse spouse effects on the dynamics of occupational attainment, longitudinal data are required that map the careers of both spouses, as well as statistical techniques suited to the analysis of such data. The *Dutch Family Survey 1992-1993* (Ultee and Ganzeboom, 1993) contains appropriate data. The contents of the questionnaire allow the reconstruction of more or less complete career trajectories (including job titles, exact dates, and earnings) of respondents and their current spouses, and also provide detailed information on family background, educational careers, family formation, and birth dates of children. The data were collected between May 1992 and May 1993 from a multi-stage random sample of individuals 21-64 years of age in the Dutch population. Because the main purpose of the investigators was to collect data on spouses, single individuals were under-represented by a factor .50. The sample was drawn at random from the population registers of a stratified collection of Dutch communities and contains primary respondents between 21 and 64 years of age. The data-set

contains completed interviews with the primary respondent of exactly 1000 households and exactly 800 interviews with spouses. The response rate (43 per cent) is rather low, but not atypical for current response patterns in the Netherlands, especially if it is taken into account that response required both partners of the couple to be willing and available to be interviewed. A comparison with a more representative labour-force survey (collected by the Central Bureau of Statistics) shows that, although the marginal levels of male and female employment match fairly well, our data contain relatively few dual-earner couples and relatively few couples in which neither partner is employed (Bernasco, 1994: 120). The consequence of this selectivity may be that the effect of one partner's employment status on the other's employment status is somewhat underestimated. This implies that our estimates in this respect should be considered as conservative: they are probably more pronounced in the population than in our sample.

We converted this retrospective data-set into a couple-period file. For each couple we constructed a data record for every month starting one year before the couple's marriage or cohabitation. While the cross-sectional analyses referred to in the introduction used two dependent variables (employment versus non-employment, and occupational prestige), our focus on life-history data makes us distinguish four dependent variables in the present analysis. *Employment entry* is the transition from a state of (voluntary or involuntary) non-employment into (re-)employment and can be seen as an upward move. *Employment exit* is the opposite transition from employment into a non-employed state. In terms of occupational attainment, exit will be regarded as a downward move, although this does not hold for early retirement. At entry into employment individuals may be more or less successful in terms of the status level of the occupation entered into; therefore *occupational status at employment entry* is the third dependent variable analysed; and evidently higher status indicates greater occupational attainment. The fourth and last dependent variable is *occupational status after change of job (between firms or within the firm)*. Because all analyses include the status of the origin job as an independent variable, this variable effectively measures the direction and magnitude of the change in occupational status.

The following independent variables are used in the analysis:

**BIRTH COHORT:** measured in years, between 1915 and 1971, coded as 15 and 71 respectively.

**AGE:** measured in years, between 21 and 64.

**LEVEL OF EDUCATION:** according to a standard classification scheme (CBS, 1978), ranges from primary education (2) through academic education (6).

**PRESENCE OF CHILDREN YOUNGER THAN 5 YEARS:** a dummy variable indicating the presence of a child younger than 5 years old.

**PREGNANCY:** a dummy variable coded unity during the nine months before childbirth.

**ENGAGEMENT:** a dummy variable coded unity during a period of one year before the start of (married or unmarried) cohabitation. We assume that partners knew each other and possibly anticipated cohabitation or marriage. 'Engagement' is only shorthand notation for this period, and does not imply any of the formal or informal arrangements that are usually associated with engagement. The decision to include a one-year pre-marriage or pre-cohabitation 'engagement' period was based on the finding that a rather large number of events take place during this period, probably indicating anticipation of cohabitation or marriage.

**EMPLOYMENT STATUS:** a dummy variable indicating whether an individual was employed or not.

**OCCUPATIONAL PRESTIGE:** occupational prestige of the current job according to the Prestige Scale (Sixma and Ultee, 1983). The prestige scale was constructed using a population survey and by having laymen rank sets of occupations according to their prestige. The minimum on this scale is 13 and its maximum is 87.

**CAREER RESOURCES:** we implemented a model for human-capital accumulation developed by Blossfeld and Huinink (1991). Human capital is modelled as an increasing function of previous work experience, in which both the duration and the prestige of jobs are taken into account. Career interruptions are modelled as having the effect of gradually decreasing career resources over time. Here, we used all pre-marriage or pre-cohabitation information. We modified Blossfeld's and Huinink's procedure by accounting for the lower

accumulation of human capital in periods of part-time employment; two years' half-time employment are counted as one year full-time employment. The minimum is zero, and the maximum is about 9.5.

**EARNINGS:** for all jobs, respondents were asked to report their earnings at the start and at the end of the job (or current earnings). A linear interpolation was used to estimate earnings levels in between. To correct for increasing welfare and inflation, earnings were corrected using external indices for the development of average (full time equivalent) salaries between 1900 and 1993. Data on earnings were only recorded for about half the number of jobs recorded, apparently either because people did not want to tell or did not know. In the analyses we could only use husband's earnings, because the number of wives reporting their earnings was too small. Earnings are indexed to 1992 mean gross earnings and expressed in Dfl. 1000. The range is from 0.72 to 16.8; the average is 3.6.

All independent variables (except birth cohort) are time-varying, which means that the estimation of their effect on the dependent variable takes into account that the values of the independent variables change over time.

## Methods

Longitudinal or better temporal data represent waiting times for events to occur. If we are interested in analysing the occurrence of events, we model non-occurrence waiting times. For example, to test the hypothesis that educational qualifications increase the chance of non-employed individuals finding work, we compare the non-employment durations of individuals with different levels of education, and expect that such durations are shorter for the higher educated. Likewise, using another example, if we conjecture that spouse's earnings increase an individual's probability of leaving the labour market, we can test the hypothesis by comparing the durations until employment exit of individuals whose spouses have different earnings levels.

Event-history analysis is a set of related statistical methods designed to analyse duration data. Within

event-history methods, a distinction is made between discrete-time models and continuous-time models. Discrete-time models assume that the event of interest occurs only at discrete time points. In continuous-time models, events can occur at any point in time. Although the events analysed in this study can occur at any point in time, we will use discrete-time models throughout. Discrete-time models are easy to handle and can serve as a reasonable approximation of continuous-time models if the conditional probabilities of having the event at discrete time points are reasonably small, say below .10 (Yamaguchi, 1991: 16–17). This means that for some sample of  $N$  subjects who are at risk of experiencing an event, no more than  $N/10$  subjects should experience that event during the same time interval. Of course, then, conditional probabilities depend on the time interval chosen in relation to average durations. If the time interval is small relative to average durations, discrete-time models approximate continuous-time models closely. Dates in the *Dutch Family Survey* are all measured in months, so that we use the time-unit of one month throughout. Because the events analysed typically have waiting times of several years, conditional probabilities of having the event are small enough to approximate a continuous time model.

In every discrete-time event-history analysis the dependent variable is (a transformation of) the conditional probability, or hazard, of having the event of interest at time  $t$ , given that the event did not occur prior to time  $t$ :

$$p_t = \text{Prob}(t = t | T \geq t)$$

where  $p_t$  is the conditional probability of experiencing the event at time  $t$ , and  $T$  is a discrete random variable that indicates the uncensored time of an event occurrence. The logit model specification models the logit of  $p$  as a function of covariates:

$$\frac{p_t}{1 - p_t} = \alpha * \beta_1^{X_1} * \beta_2^{X_2} * \dots * \beta_n^{X_n}$$

where  $X_i$  is value of the  $i$ -th independent variable, the  $\beta_i$ 's are the associated parameters that are allowed to depend on  $t$ , and  $\alpha$  is a constant.

Formally, this model is equivalent to the logistic regression model estimated in cross-sectional data. In the latter, however, the odds of the probability of being in a particular state are modelled, while in the

former case we model the odds of the probability of experiencing an event at time  $t$ . Thus, while the conventional analysis uses one observation for each sample subject, the discrete-time logistic model uses one observation per month per subject. Event-history analysis allows independent variables to be time-varying. Time-varying covariates are independent variables that can vary not only between individuals, but also for one individual between the time he starts to be at risk of experiencing an event and the time of the event or the time of censoring. If we hypothesize, for example, that pregnancy increases an individual's hazard of leaving employment, we have a variable PREGNANCY that changes over time while the individual continues to be at risk of leaving employment.

The  $\beta$  parameters represent the change in the odds of the conditional probability of experiencing an event, caused by a one-unit increase in the associated covariate. Due to the fine-grained time-unit of one month all hazards analysed below are very small, about .01. For such low hazards the probability ( $p$ ) and the odds of the probability ( $p/(1-p)$ ) have nearly the same value. Thus, if a unit increase in a covariate has an effect  $b$  on the odds of employment exit, this roughly implies that the hazard of employment exit is also enlarged (or reduced if  $b$  is between 0 and 1) by a factor  $b$ . Therefore the effects of covariates on odds of hazards will be interpreted as effects on hazards. We will, for example, say that pregnant women are nine times more likely to exit employment than women who are not pregnant, rather than saying that the odds of exit for pregnant women is nine times the odds for non-pregnant women. We thus implicitly assume that the reader is aware that 'more likely' refers to the odds of conditional probabilities of exit for employed women.

## Results

Below we report on the dynamic analysis of transitions between employment and non-employment, and on transitions between jobs for both husbands and wives. We assessed spouse effects by adding indicators of the spouse's resources to a 'baseline model' that includes individual and household variables only. Doing this, assortative mating and shared restrictions are controlled for. In interpreting the

results we focus mainly on the direction and magnitude of the spouse effects. More extensive discussions of the analyses can be found in Bernasco (1994).

In the analyses reported below we do not estimate models with all variables on spouse's resources entered simultaneously into the regression equation, because these variables are strongly associated. We estimate three regression equations for each of the dependent variables on spouse's labour-market-resources (one for spouse's employment status, one for spouse's career resources and one for spouse's educational attainment), and one regression equation for each dependent variable on both spouse's labour-market resources (educational attainment) and spouse's financial resources. The reason for including spouse's LEVEL OF EDUCATION and not CAREER RESOURCES, in this last equation is that educational attainment turns out to be the best indicator of labour-market resources, and its effects are easier to interpret. As explained above, the available data do not allow us to estimate the effects of a wife's financial resources on her husband's labour-market transitions.

We first model the hazard of women's employment exit. All four models presented in Table 1 include the wife's LEVEL OF EDUCATION, her CAREER RESOURCES, AGE (including a quadratic term), BIRTH COHORT membership, ENGAGEMENT, and PREGNANCY. We found that PREGNANCY, indicating the anticipation of childbirth, was a much better predictor of employment exit than the actual presence of a young child, so that PREGNANCY rather than the PRESENCE OF CHILDREN YOUNGER THAN 5 YEARS was included in these models. Further, we found the existence of interaction effects between BIRTH COHORT membership and PREGNANCY and between BIRTH COHORT and ENGAGEMENT: younger cohorts of women tend to leave the labour market at entry into motherhood, while women born in older cohorts tended to leave the labour market at entry into marriage (in the Netherlands until the 1960s, many organizations had a rule that female employees were automatically dismissed when they married). Because inclusion of these interaction terms does not in any substantive way change the results obtained for the other variables, and in order not to distract the reader from the main line of argument, we refer to Bernasco (1994) for these more elaborate models.

In Table 1 variables that are indicators of the husband's resources are entered separately in subsequent models: husband's EMPLOYMENT STATUS, husband's CAREER RESOURCES, husband's LEVEL OF EDUCATION, and husband's EARNINGS.

Model 1 shows that husband's EMPLOYMENT STATUS is not significantly related to the wife's hazards of leaving employment. Because husband's employment indicates both financial resources (employed husbands will generally have higher incomes than non-employed husbands) and labour-market resources (employed husbands are in positions where they are more able to support their wife's career) the absence of an effect is not particularly informative. It may be that underlying effects cancel out but it may also be that they do not affect the wife's exit chances at all. In contrast to our expectations, models 2 and 3 show that husband's CAREER RESOURCES and husband's EDUCATION both have positive effects on the wife's hazard of leaving employment. As discussed in the previous sections, an adequate test of the hypothesis that negative effects (on employment exit) of labour-market resources counteract positive effects of financial resources requires the inclusion of a direct measure of financial resources. The inclusion of husband's EARNINGS should make the effect of husband's education and husband's CAREER RESOURCES negative.

In model 4 we test this argument by including husband's earnings in model 3. Unfortunately, information on earnings is only available for about half of the husband's in the sample, and no information about income from unemployment or disability benefit schemes is available. Therefore, model 4 applies to a much smaller set of cases. The results of model 4 only support one of our hypotheses. As expected, husband's EARNINGS increase the wife's hazard of leaving employment, but the effect of education is still, as in model 3, positive. Thus, both husband's financial and labour-market resources appear to facilitate his wife's hazard of employment exit. A comparison of the magnitude of these two effects shows that the effect of husband's LEVEL OF EDUCATION is in fact more substantial: each higher level of husband's education on the scale ranging from 2 to 5 make his wife 1.17 times as likely to exit employment. According to the estimated coefficients, for the same increase a rise in husband's



**Table 1.** Logistic regression models of the effects of a husband's resources on his wife's employment exit, controlled for wife's own resources: multiplicative effects (*t* – values in brackets)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Education	0.90** (–2.22)	0.89** (–2.40)	0.86** (–3.05)	0.86** (–2.21)
Career resources	1.00 (0.08)	0.99 (–0.22)	0.997 (–0.09)	0.96 (–0.79)
Age/10	0.61** (–7.32)	0.60** (–7.51)	0.61** (–7.33)	0.52** (–5.77)
(Age/10) squared	1.24** (4.60)	1.25** (4.72)	1.24** (4.69)	1.09 (0.97)
Cohort	0.76** (–5.84)	0.76** (–5.82)	0.76** (–5.97)	0.72** (–4.85)
Engagement	2.04** (5.94)	2.04** (5.96)	2.03** (5.90)	1.67** (3.01)
Pregnancy	8.75** (23.89)	8.77** (23.92)	8.82** (23.98)	10.33** (19.01)
Husband employed	1.14 (0.88)			
Husband's career resources		1.04* (1.70)		
Husband's education			1.12** (2.84)	1.17** (2.84)
Husband's income				1.06** (2.00)
Number at risk	64344	64344	64344	30062
Number of events	629	629	629	333
Log likelihood	–3132.7	–3131.3	–3128.7	–1584.9

\*Significant,  $0.05 < p < 0.10$ . \*\*Significant,  $p < 0.05$ .

monthly (indexed) earnings of about Fl. 2700 – would be needed ( $1.06^{2.7} = 1.17$ ).

We conclude that wives' hazard of employment exit is indeed affected by their husband's resources, but that no support can be found for the hypothesized opposite effects of husband's earnings and education.

We continue by discussing models for the effects of a wife's resources on her husband's employment exit. Evidently, the reasons why men leave employment are generally different from those of women. Men typically leave employment because of dismissal, disability, and retirement, while most of women's exits are related to their responsibility for child-care and household tasks. Furthermore, husbands' employment exits at an early age may be of a different nature – for example, unemployment – from those at later ages, for example disablement or early retirement. In our analysis, all exits from employment of both husbands and wives are analysed as indicators of lack of occupational attainment. This is consistent with the notion that attainment is an objective rather than a subjective measure of the rewards an individual controls. Thus, whether employment exit is due to unemployment, disability, or early retirement, in all cases it means that the individual ceases to have control over his major source of income (although of course rights to social security were seen as stable in the

1970s and 1980s). To what extent employment exits are voluntary or involuntary is relatively unimportant in this respect.

The models presented in Table 2 are similar to those in Table 1 with two exceptions. First, the variables PREGNANCY and ENGAGEMENT are not included in Table 2 because they do not have effects on labour-market transitions for men and thus do not alter the results in important ways. Second, the absence of adequate measures of wife's earnings makes it impossible to test for the effects of a wife's financial and labour-market resources simultaneously.

In models 1, 2 and 3 the effects of wife's EMPLOYMENT STATUS, wife's CAREER RESOURCES, and wife's LEVEL OF EDUCATION are evaluated, each covariate entered separately. Just as in the analysis of wife's employment exit, the partner's employment status does not have a significant effect, but both the wife's education and her career resources significantly decrease her husband's hazard of leaving employment. In fact, the size of the effect of wife's CAREER RESOURCES (0.80) is larger than the effect of the husband's own CAREER RESOURCES (0.92). Apparently, the husband's hazard of leaving employment is diminished less by his own career resources than by those of his wife. It is unfortunate that we cannot disentangle the effect of the wife's financial and labour-market resources in this analysis. It seems

**Table 2.** Logistic regression models of the effects of a wife's resources on her husband's employment exit, controlled for husband's own resources: multiplicative effects (*t* – values in brackets)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Education	1.14** (2.12)	1.14** (2.15)	1.21** (2.95)
Career resources	0.88** (–3.85)	0.92** (–2.33)	0.91** (–2.85)
Age/10	0.76** (–8.28)	0.72** (–9.04)	0.74** (–8.82)
(Age/10) squared	1.004** (9.56)	1.005** (11.13)	1.004** (10.98)
Cohort	1.23** (2.21)	1.30** (2.76)	1.32** (2.94)
Wife employed	0.97 (–0.24)		
Wife's career resources		0.80** (–4.04)	
Wife's education			0.77** (–3.32)
Number at risk	147607	147607	147607
Number of events	217	217	217
Log likelihood	–1568.4	–1559.5	–1562.8

\*Significant,  $0.05 < p < 0.10$ . \*\*Significant,  $p < 0.05$ .

quite unlikely, however, that the inclusion of the wife's financial resources would make the effects of the wife's labour-market resources positive, for two reasons. First, a large proportion of wives have no earnings. Second, it seems unlikely that during the last decades many wives have had earnings levels that enabled their husbands to leave employment completely, although it may have affected other aspects of their career decisions, e.g. career aspirations.

The analysis reveals a rather surprising positive effect of a husband's own LEVEL OF EDUCATION on the hazard of employment exit. To the extent that exits represent unemployment or disability, this finding is not in line with the results of studies on unemployment and disability. In general, higher education is found to decrease the risk of unemployment and of being disabled. Alternatively, employment exits represent early retirement as well and the hazard of early retirement is positively related to education. In general, the unforeseen positive effect of educational attainment on employment exit might point to the fact that higher educated men have shorter careers.

Relationships between the labour-market positions of spouses are apparently driven by partner effects on employment exit. Now we turn to partner effects on employment (re-)entry.

In Table 3 we present models of women's employment (re-)entry. Instead of PREGNANCY we include here a dummy variable representing the presence of

children 0 to 4 years of age in the couple's household. Contrary to employment exit, which appears to a considerable extent to be an event that is triggered by an immediate prospect of becoming a mother, employment entry is more diffusely affected by the presence of young children. Quite different from childbirth, there is no abrupt change in housework and child-care responsibilities as children grow older and enter school. Furthermore, for employment exit to occur it suffices that the woman herself is willing to leave, while for (re-)entering employment she must not only be willing, but she must also receive a job offer. Therefore, employment entry is associated with time spent searching for job opportunities and therefore is unlikely to be immediately triggered by changes in household tasks.

In Models 1, 2, and 3 in Table 3 the effects of three indicators of husband's resources on wife's employment entry are estimated, again each indicator added separately. Neither of these variables has a significant effect when entered separately. The absence of significant effects implies that we cannot conclude that there are net effects of a husband's EMPLOYMENT STATUS, LEVEL OF EDUCATION, and CAREER RESOURCES. However, the last two variables are positively related to husband's earnings and in order to test whether husband's earnings affect the hazard of his wife's employment exit positively, and disturb the effects of his labour-market resources, models were estimated in which husband's EARNINGS were

**Table 3.** Logistic regression models of the effects of a husband's resources on his wife's employment re-entry, controlled for wife's own resources: multiplicative effects (*t*-values in brackets)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Education	1.54** (8.58)	1.53** (8.49)	1.49** (6.73)	1.51** (4.08)
Career resources	1.12** (2.57)	1.13 (2.82)	0.13** (2.81)	1.01 (0.20)
Age/10	0.62** (-5.90)	0.63** (-5.58)	0.63** (-5.83)	0.57** (-3.98)
(Age/10) squared	0.96 (-0.60)	0.95 (-0.82)	0.95 (-0.76)	0.96 (-0.36)
Cohort	1.45** (5.49)	1.45** (5.46)	1.50** (5.51)	1.33** (2.75)
Child younger than 4	0.37** (-8.09)	0.37** (-8.03)	0.37** (-8.02)	0.26** (-6.43)
Husband employed	1.22 (1.06)			
Husband's career resources		0.99 (-0.24)		
Husband's education			1.04 (0.89)	1.21** (2.28)
Husband's income				87** (-2.44)
Number at risk	100950	100950	100950	47173
Number of events	372	372	372	148
Log likelihood	-2296.5	-2297.1	-2296.7	-920.5

\*Significant,  $0.05 < p < 0.10$ . \*\*Significant,  $p < 0.05$ .

included in addition to husband's LEVEL OF EDUCATION.

In Model 4 of Table 3 we present a model that includes both husband's earnings and his level of education. In order to exclude potential bias from the few women who experienced several employment (re-)entries women were selected who had not made a previous employment (re-)entry during their current marriage or cohabitation. The results of model 4 show that, while all the individual effects remain more or less at the values they had in the previous models, it now becomes clear that the small and insignificant effect of level of education on wife's employment entry from Model 3 is in fact the net result of two opposing effects. In line with the economic theory, husband's earnings do negatively affect the hazard of women entering employment, while in line with the notion of social capital husband's education positively affects wives' employment entry.

The opposing effects of a husband's earnings and level of education on his wife's employment (re-)entry clearly support our two hypotheses on the effects of a spouse's financial and labour-market resources. They suggest that the financial resources of husbands hinder wives' occupational attainment, probably by creating fewer incentives for wives to put effort into their search for paid labour, while husbands' labour-market resources (as indicated by

his educational attainment) favours wives' occupational careers. In other words, after controlling for the *incentives* wives have to search for employment, their *opportunities* to find employment seem to be facilitated by their husbands education.

Next we proceed to the analysis of husband's employment entry in Table 4. Evidently, none of the included effects of wife's resources is significant or comes close to significance. According to these models, husband's employment entry is dominated by his own characteristics. We cannot investigate whether the insignificant net effect of wives' labour-market resources is the result of a negative effect of wives' financial resources and a positive effect of wives' labour-market resources. However, we tend to expect that in this case this disaggregation will not take place, because too few women have substantive earnings. We tentatively conclude that, in contrast to the case of employment exit, where the hazard is decreased by the wife's LEVEL OF EDUCATION and CAREER RESOURCES, a wife's resources neither facilitate nor hinder the entry into employment of her husband.

A question related to those addressed in the previous two sections is whether, in addition to spouse effects on the hazard of employment entry, spouse effects exist as well at the level of entry in terms of OCCUPATIONAL PRESTIGE. After all, given that individuals find work after a period of non-

**Table 4.** Logistic regression models of the effects of a wife's resources on her husband's employment re-entry, controlled for husband's own resources: multiplicative effects (*t*-values in brackets)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Education	1.20** (3.34)	1.20** (3.27)	1.22** (3.08)
Career resources	1.26** (6.72)	1.26** (6.71)	1.26** (6.75)
Age/10	1.11 (1.59)	1.10 (1.45)	1.11 (1.58)
(Age/10) squared	0.997** (-2.97)	0.997** (-2.97)	0.997** (-2.97)
Cohort	1.20** (1.97)	1.20** (2.06)	1.22** (2.11)
Wife employed	1.11 (0.73)		
Wife's career resources		1.04 (0.82)	
Wife's education			0.97 (-0.40)
Number at risk	17687	17687	17687
Number of events	215	215	215
Log likelihood	1027.0	-1027.0	-1027.2

\*Significant,  $0.05 < p < 0.10$ . \*\*Significant,  $p < 0.05$ .

employment, the more successful job-finders are those who manage to find the more rewarding jobs. To be successful means not only being able to find employment more quickly than others, but also to find employment that is more rewarding than the employment others find. Accordingly, wives' prestige at employment entry is taken as an indicator of occupational attainment. If it is true that a spouse's resources affect occupational attainment, these resources may be expected to affect OCCUPATIONAL PRESTIGE at employment entry as much as the hazard of employment entry itself.

In Table 5, we present four models using the same variables as in the models of wife's employment entry in Table 3. Note that in contrast to Table 3 these are linear OLS regression models and not logistic regression models, so that values between 0 and 1 also indicate positive effects here.

In Models 1, 2, and 3 husband's EMPLOYMENT STATUS, CAREER RESOURCES, and LEVEL OF EDUCATION respectively are included. Model 1 shows that a husband's employment status is unrelated to his wife's OCCUPATIONAL PRESTIGE at re-entry. However, as expected a husband's LEVEL OF EDUCATION and his CAREER RESOURCES both do have positive effects on job level. Each higher level of husband's educational attainment increases his wife's prestige at employment entry by about 1.7 points. This effect is obviously much smaller than the effect of the wife's own LEVEL OF EDUCATION (6.3 prestige points for each higher level of education), but it is substantial and significant at the 5 per cent level.

In Model 4, we assess whether a wife's OCCUPATIONAL PRESTIGE at labour-market (re-)entry is affected by her husband's EARNINGS. Although we lack statistical power (due to the lack of information on earnings there are only 182 cases here), this is obviously not the case.

In Table 6 we present the analogue of Table 5 for husbands. As in the analysis of husbands' employment entry, no effects of a wife's resources are found in models 1 to 3. This is a further indication that, for a non-employed husband, his wife's resources do not have an effect on his occupational attainment. They do not affect his hazard of entering employment, and if he enters employment they do not affect the prestige level of his new job. Again, as in the models of Table 4, no support is found for the hypothesis that a wife's resources do affect her husband's occupational attainment.

Although the concept of a 'career' includes the connotation of an upward movement and although probably most individuals who change jobs do so in the expectation that it entails an improvement, job mobility does not necessarily imply that individuals experience upward mobility in any objective sense. Job change itself is not an indicator of occupational attainment; the relevant aspect of job change for our concerns is whether the job change involves a change in prestige, and if so, in what direction and of what size. In determining the effect of a spouse's resources on occupational attainment the proper test is to be found in the effects on the prestige of the destination occupation relative to the occupation

**Table 5.** *Linear regression models of the effects of a husband's resources on his wife's occupational prestige at employment re-entry, controlled for wife's own resources (t-values in brackets)*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Education	7.31** (10.55)	7.01** (10.35)	6.27** (7.96)	5.60** (4.92)
Career resources	3.55** (5.36)	3.10** (4.66)	3.52** (5.38)	4.28** (4.84)
Age/10	-2.58** (-2.13)	-2.87** (-2.40)	-2.59** (-2.15)	-2.08 (-1.13)
(Age/10) squared	1.18 (1.07)	1.40 (1.29)	0.98 (0.90)	-0.27 (-0.16)
Cohort	16 (0.16)	0.68 (0.67)	0.06 (0.06)	0.88 (0.58)
Child younger than 4	-1.48 (-0.82)	-1.81 (-1.02)	-1.41 (-0.79)	-5.35** (-2.19)
Husband employed	1.62 (0.63)			
Husband's career resources		1.19** (3.40)		
Husband's education			1.66** (2.44)	1.65 (1.64)
Husband's income				0.60 (0.77)
Intercept	14.31** (2.02)	13.19** (2.02)	13.49** (2.04)	10.31 (1.05)
R <sup>2</sup> <sub>adjusted</sub>	0.38	0.40	0.39	0.43
Number of re-entries	358	358	358	182

\*Significant, 0.05 < p < 0.10. \*\*Significant, p < 0.05.

**Table 6.** *Linear regression models of the effects of a wife's resources on her husband's occupational prestige at employment re-entry, controlled for husband's own resources (t-values in brackets)*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Education	10.43** (12.48)	10.41** (12.39)	10.17** (10.38)
Career resources	1.36** (2.17)	1.41** (2.24)	1.42** (2.24)
Age/10	2.91** (2.94)	3.02** (3.03)	2.92** (2.94)
(Age/10) squared	-0.04** (-3.18)	-0.05** (-3.25)	-0.04** (-3.15)
Cohort	-1.46 (-1.10)	-1.50 (-1.12)	-1.59 (-1.17)
Wife employed	-1.45 (-0.66)		
Wife's career resources		-0.34 (-0.43)	
Wife's education			0.40 (0.35)
Intercept	-35.87** (-2.01)	-37.71** (-2.12)	-37.07** (-2.09)
R <sup>2</sup> <sub>adjusted</sub>	47	47	47
Number of re-entries	209	209	209

\*Significant, 0.05 < p < 0.10. \*\*Significant, p < 0.05.

of origin. In order to assess these spouse effects we control for the prestige level of the origin occupation.

In Table 7 we assess whether a husband's resources add to his wife's OCCUPATIONAL PRESTIGE after a job change. Again there is no significant effect of a husband's EMPLOYMENT STATUS, but his CAREER RESOURCES and LEVEL OF EDUCATION do add to

the wife's OCCUPATIONAL PRESTIGE; their effects are positive at the 10 and 5 per cent level respectively. Thus, wives who change jobs profit from their husbands' educational and career resources in terms of their prestige level in the destination job. In model 4 husband's EARNINGS is included together with husband's LEVEL OF EDUCATION. In this model, which applies to considerably smaller number of cases and

**Table 7.** *Linear regression models of the effects of a husband's resources on his wife's occupational prestige after job change, controlled for wife's own resources (t-values in brackets)*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Occupational prestige of origin job	0.62** (15.50)	0.61** (15.12)	0.62** (15.34)	0.63** (10.64)
Education	2.77** (4.67)	2.66** (4.53)	2.38** (3.77)	2.39** (3.64)
Age/10	2.68** (3.08)	2.20** (2.48)	2.75** (3.17)	5.02** (3.40)
(Age/10) squared	0.79 (1.13)	0.89 (1.29)	0.82 (1.18)	2.06* (1.72)
Cohort	95 (1.41)	88 (1.32)	98 (1.46)	92 (0.95)
Child younger than 4	1.87 (1.11)	1.37 (0.82)	1.62 (0.97)	1.68 (0.73)
Husband employed	0.41 (0.26)			
Husband's career resources		58** (2.30)		
Husband's education			82* (1.67)	0.94 (1.32)
Husband's income				15 (0.35)
Intercept	-4.13 (-0.88)	-2.95 (-0.68)	-5.45 (-1.21)	-13.17* (-1.84)
R <sup>2</sup> <sub>adjusted</sub>	0.55	0.55	0.55	0.56
Number of job changes	438	438	438	237

\*Significant, 0.05 < p < 0.10. \*\*Significant, p < 0.05.

**Table 8.** *Linear regression models of the effects of a wife's resources on her husband's occupational prestige after job change, controlled for husband's own resources (t-values in brackets)*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Occupational prestige of origin job	0.70** (26.92)	0.69** (26.61)	0.69** (26.49)
Education	2.66** (6.27)	2.54** (5.88)	2.32** (5.03)
Age/10	0.83** (2.02)	0.66 (1.61)	0.71* (1.74)
(Age/10) squared	-0.01* (-1.72)	-0.01 (-1.33)	-0.01 (-1.47)
Cohort	0.21 (0.39)	0.19 (0.36)	-0.01 (-0.01)
Wife employed	1.12 (1.25)		
Wife's career resources		0.57* (1.68)	
Wife's education			0.99** (2.04)
Intercept	-9.98 (-1.39)	-6.63 (-0.94)	-8.27 (-1.18)
R <sup>2</sup> <sub>adjusted</sub>	0.61	0.61	0.61
Number of job changes	947	947	947

\*Significant, 0.05 < p < 0.10. \*\*Significant, p < 0.05.

thus covers much smaller number of job changes, neither effect is significant. Even if statistical significance were to be ignored on the basis of the lower statistical power of the last model, the sign of the estimated parameter of husband's income is against our prediction, as it was expected that husband's earnings would decrease the wife's prestige level.

The last question to be answered is whether a wife's resources have an effect on the OCCUPATIONAL PRESTIGE of her husband after a job change. The

models that provide an answer to this question are presented in Table 8. From these models it can be concluded that both a wife's LEVEL OF EDUCATION and her CAREER RESOURCES do add to her husband's level of OCCUPATIONAL PRESTIGE at job change. This finding is in contrast to the results presented in Tables 4 and 6, where none of the effects of a wife's resources is significant. Of course, for husbands a job shift is a more common experience than re-entry after non-employment, so that the models of

Table 8 apply to more than four times as many events as those in Table 6 and therefore have much more statistical power. The last two models in Table 8 do provide evidence that a wife's labour-market resources do substantially support her husband's occupational attainment, just as a husband's resources add to his wife's attainment.

## Summary and Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to contribute to the theoretical and empirical developments in the sociology of stratification, by assessing to what extent an individual's occupational attainment is affected by the resources of his or her spouse (spouse effects). It was argued that two other types of processes underlie the relationship between spouses' resources and occupational attainment: assortative mating (partner selection) and shared restrictions, and that these two processes should be controlled for in assessing the existence and magnitude of spouse effects.

Neo-classical economics predicts that, due to the existence of comparative advantage, spouses will have strong incentives to create a division of labour between the market and the domestic sector. This specialization itself leads to increasing investments of spouses in their separate spheres, with one partner accumulating market-related skills and the other accumulating domestic skills. It was concluded that neo-classical economics favours the hypothesis that a spouse's financial resources have a negative, diminishing, effect upon occupational attainment. Sociological notions regarding social capital and its effect on occupational attainment were introduced in order to support the opposite hypothesis: namely, that the transfer of resources that takes place between parents and children and in networks of friends and acquaintances may be expected to take place between spouses as well, and that therefore a spouse's resources should be expected to foster occupational attainment. We further argued that the economic argument applies to a spouse's financial resources, while the sociological argument applies to a spouse's labour-market resources. Therefore, negative effects of spouse's financial resources are likely to be mixed up with positive effects of spouse's labour-market resources.

In this article a data-set containing longitudinal data on spouse's occupational careers was analysed. The effects of a spouse's resources on the hazard of employment entry, employment exit, and job change, and the effects of a spouse's resources on occupational prestige after employment entry and after job change were estimated. Although the evidence is much stronger for the effects of a husband's resources on his wife's attainment than vice versa, the results showed that spouses' resources do affect occupational attainment. A husband's labour-market resources clearly do facilitate his wife's occupational attainment. The larger the amount of a husband's labour-market resources, the higher is the probability of his wife's labour market (re-)entry into the labour market, and the higher are her occupational prestige scores after (re-)entry and after job change. Negative effects of husband's financial resources were only found for a wife's labour-market entry. The evidence supporting the hypothesis that a wife's labour-market resources affect her husband's occupational attainment is less convincing. As expected, though, we found negative effects of a wife's labour-market resources on her husband's employment exit and positive effects on his occupational prestige score after a job change.

In the introduction we argued that the existence of positive spouse effects leads to a cumulation of advantage in households, over and above the effects of assortative mating. We have established that both positive and negative spouse effects are present, but that the positive effects dominate. Spouse effects do indeed foster a cumulation of advantage within households. On average, husbands have more resources than their wives and because the effects of a husband's resources on his wife's attainment are stronger than the other way around, husbands apparently are more able to facilitate their wife's career than wives are able to facilitate their husband's career. Thus, while spouse effects increase inequality between households, they decrease inequality between husbands and wives.

Although our results show that cohort membership affects several indicators of status attainment, we did not address the question whether the strength of spouse effects themselves have changed over time. The events analysed took place during a period spanning about 40 years, but the size of our data does not allow the estimation of the appropriate

models in which the effects of a spouse's resources on occupational attainment depend on historical time. We expect that these effects will have decreased over time, but must wait for larger data-sets to enable this analysis.

In our study we have used theoretical arguments to derive hypotheses on the effects of spouses' labour-market resources on occupational attainment, but admittedly no direct indicators are presented of what individuals actually do to influence their spouse's occupational attainment. Is it mainly transfer of information between them; do they really exchange advice or help each other master skills? Or should the effect rather be attributed to career-conducive attitudes that are more common among individuals who themselves belong to high-status groups? It might even be that some effects are related to the fact that the wives of self-employed men are often co-workers in their husband's firm or the family firm (as is the custom in farming). Even in the absence of direct indicators some insight into this question may be gained by testing whether the existence or strength of spouse effects depends on partners being employed in similar sectors of industry. While effects due to information exchange should be expected to be more pronounced if spouses are in similar industry sectors, effects occurring via less tangible normative support should be expected to be general. We keep this issue for future study on this topic.

Looking to the future, two trends are expected to influence the facilitating effect of spouse's resources on occupational attainment. First, recent trends in the Netherlands suggest that there will be a movement towards more individualization of economic rights and obligations. In general, this individualization implies that these economic rights and obligations become independent of the individual's marital status and living arrangements. The proposed individualization of old-age pensions is an example. The proposal implies that individuals are not bound to their deceased partner's old-age pension, and creates more incentives for individuals to build up their own individual pension rights through labour-force participation. Such a change would, if effectuated, imply that individuals can rely less on their partner's financial resources than previously. Therefore, the negative effects of a spouse's finan-

cial resources would decrease. Because it is difficult to see how policy trends towards individualization might change the opportunities of individuals to facilitate their partner's career, the overall effect of such measures seems to be that positive spouse effects will become even stronger. It should be noted, though, that many such regulations, e.g. unemployment and disability benefit regulations, have already been individualized.

A second trend that would appear to influence spouse effects is the increasing instability of households. The continuing rise of divorce rates leads us to expect that individuals will increasingly take into account the risk and potential consequences of the breakdown of their relationship. When an intimate relationship is no longer guaranteed to be a long-term commitment, (economic) dependence on a spouse involves a risk that individuals will not be prepared to take easily. In particular the willingness of women to specialize in housework and child-care and thereby reduce their future career prospects will decline. While the assumption of complete consensus between spouses with respect to an optimal allocation between paid work and housework is not very realistic to begin with, it is decreasingly realistic with current divorce rates of about 40 per cent (probably higher if the break-up consensual unions is included). In general, uncertainty about the continuation of the relationship will make individuals less eager to rely on the income of their partner, an effect similar to the effect of externally induced individualization of economic rights and obligations. Therefore, increasing instability of marriages and consensual unions will reduce the negative effects of a spouse's financial resources, implying that the joint effect of a spouse's financial and labour-market resources will increase.

On the other hand, however, reduced certainty about the continuity of relationships might also mean that spouses have less incentive to facilitate each other's careers by providing resources. If it is relatively uncertain whether they will themselves profit from investing in their spouse's career, the willingness to do so will probably decrease. This suggests that there will also be reason to expect that positive spouse effects will decrease. Certainly more research is needed to answer questions on the consequences of policy measures and divorce rates on couples' labour-market strategies.



## Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the valuable comments by the anonymous reviewers of *ESR*.

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## Authors' Addresses

- Wim Bernasco, Department of Sociology, University of Utrecht, Heidelberglaan 1, 3684 CS Utrecht, The Netherlands.
- Paul M. De Graaf, Department of Sociology, University of Nijmegen, P. O. Box 9104, 6500 Nijmegen, The Netherlands.
- Wout C. Ultee, Department of Sociology, University of Nijmegen, P. O. Box 9104, 6500 Nijmegen, The Netherlands.

Manuscript received: February 1996.

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*European Sociological Review*, Vol. 14, No. 1. (Mar., 1998), pp. 15-31.

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Hans-Peter Blossfeld; Johannes Huinink

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