

CHAPTER 3.

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OCCUPATIONAL-CAREER INTERRUPTIONS: PATTERNS AND CONSEQUENCES

An occupational career is defined as a sequence of jobs and positions in firms during an individual's life (Spilerman 1977; Super 1957). In the social and behavioral sciences, occupational careers are usually assumed to be continuous in time. For example, in the status-attainment literature careers are often depicted as status trajectories that begin at the entry into the labor force, continue to the date of the study, or end with retirement. Although occupational careers are assumed to be continuous, they are actually characterized by periods of interruptions, especially in the case of women (Groot, Schippers, and Siegers 1990; Light and Ureta 1995; Rindfuss, Swicegood, and Rosenfeld 1987).

In this chapter, I address how occupational-career interruptions impact different segments of the population, distinguished according to gender, age, and education. Occupational-career interruptions include events such as unemployment, illness and disability, parental leave, household time, providing care for others, schooling, early retirement, military service, and incarceration. I examine *patterns* of interruptions—more specifically, the frequency of occurrence and the duration with which people experience particular career interruptions. Previous research suggests that women are more likely to be removed from the labor force than men (Gronau 1988; Groot, Schippers, and Siegers 1990; Ketsche and Branscomb 2003). Other segments of society, distinguished on the basis of age and educational attainment, also experience career interruptions differently with respect to the frequency of occurrence and duration. I examine these group differences in some detail.

In addition, I look at the *consequences* that occupational-career interruptions have for occupational-prestige scores that cover the whole span of careers. In particular, I focus on the extent to which career interruptions have *long-term consequences* for groups that occupy different positions in the stratification system.

Theoretical Background

In labor economics, human capital theory is usually used to explain why occupational-career interruptions create wage- and status-attainment penalties. This theory posits that workers build “capital” in the form of job experience, education, on-the-job training, and occupational skills. Accordingly, workers who experience an occupational-career interruption receive less pay and lower their status attainment in comparison with workers with no interruption because their human capital diminishes due to lost on-the-job experience and overall human capital investment (Ben-Porath 1967; Corcoran, Duncan, and Ponza 1983; Duncan and Hoffman 1979; Mincer and Ofek 1982; Mincer and Polachek 1974).

However, it has been found that human capital theory only partially explains the depressed wages and prestige attainment caused by occupational-career interruptions. For example, there is evidence that even after controlling for all relevant variables, women suffer additional penalties for certain career interruptions in comparison with men (Gronau 1988). If all human capital variables are controlled, this result pertaining to gender differences contradicts the theory.

The macro-level explanation for the impact of career interruptions on wages and prestige attainment is based upon the amount of social protection and regulation provided by the state. Hence, in states where the government provides generous social welfare, workers suffer smaller penalties for most career interruptions compared with states where there is little to no social protection (Stier, Lewin-Epstein, and Braun 2001). The case of Poland is interesting in that it moves away from high levels of protection for career interruptions.

However, besides welfare state protections, other macrostructural features should also be taken into account. For example, in the case of unemployment, Poland has continued to suffer from high rates of unemployment, which has adversely impacted women’s labor force participation. With a scarcity of jobs, men were given preference as employees (Reszke 1995). High levels of unemployment also created a pattern of early retirement in Poland. With

reduced ability to find employment, workers were pushed into early retirement as many state-owned factories closed and the positions of older workers needed to be vacated and younger workers replaced them (Góra and Rutkowski 2002). Since some of these workers were later able to return to the labor force, early retirement constituted career interruption.

Effects of Gender, Age, and Education: Research Expectations

The degree to which an interruption impacts workers' wages depends upon the type of interruption and membership in certain social groups. Three major types of social divisions will be examined in this chapter: women and men, age groups, and educational categories. These divisions differently situate respective groups in the stratification system. Do we observe specific patterns of interruptions for men versus women, the younger versus the older, the more educated versus the less educated? Are the more advantaged groups expected to have lower occupational prestige penalties for the interruptions than the less advantaged groups?

Gender. Most literature on the topic of career interruptions has focused on gender differences, pointing out women's greater propensity to have longer leaves of absences from employment, mostly due to child care and household duties (Gronau 1988; Groot, Schippers, and Siegers 1990; Ketsche and Branscomb 2003). Additionally, this literature examines gender differences in the determinants of "female" interruptions (Gronau 1988) and attempts to explain the impact of certain interruptions, in particular parental leave, on wages (Albrecht et al. 1999; Budig and England 2001; Taniguchi 1999; van Velson and O'Rand 1984; Waldfogel 1997).

Generally, I expect that for occupational-career interruptions women are at a greater disadvantage in the labor market than men. The reason is that in addition to some interruptions common to both genders (such as illness/disability and unemployment), women also have interruptions specific to their gender (such as parental leave, caring for others, and household time). Specifically, I expect the results to support the previous findings—women are more likely to have interruptions and be removed from the labor force for longer periods of time. With regard to occupational prestige, I predict that both women who have had an interruption and women who had no interruption will have lower occupational prestige than men. Additionally, women with interruptions are likely to have lower prestige than women without career interruptions.

Age. Generally, the probability of exiting the labor force decreases as tenure increases—at least to the point of the retirement age (Gronau 1988). However, as individuals age their likelihood of having an illness increases;

this is not necessarily the case for unemployment because younger workers have a greater likelihood of becoming unemployed (Arulampalam and Stewart 1995). Thus, I expect to find that younger workers are more likely to experience most types of interruptions more frequently and for longer periods of time than older workers, except early retirement and illness/disability.

Regarding the outcomes, career interruptions occurring earlier in a worker's life have been found to impact wages more severely than those occurring later (Taniguchi 1999; van Velson and O'Rand 1984). Referring to these results, I expect younger workers to experience a greater degree of disadvantage than older workers.¹

Education. People with higher levels of education are expected to experience career interruptions at a frequency and duration similar to those experienced by the less educated. However, jobs that require higher levels of education are more likely to contain employer-provided benefits and protections than are jobs that require lower levels of education (Smith, Downs, and O'Connell 2001). Taniguchi (1999) found that education mediated the negative impact of childbearing on women's wages. Although individuals with lower levels of education possess jobs that are more likely to rely on governmental protection, this does not compensate for the loss of income due to experiencing the greatest number of career interruptions. Thus, those with higher levels of education are expected to have lower penalties for interruptions than the less educated.

Typology of Reasons for Occupational Interruptions

Unemployment

The most widely discussed career disruption is unemployment, especially within the economic literature. Unemployment is usually defined broadly—as any removal from the labor force for any period of time due to lack of a job (Groot, Schippers, and Siegers 1990). Sometimes it refers to a withdrawal from the labor force for not more than one year, when the worker is actively seeking full-time employment and has worked at least two weeks during the past five years (Peracchi and Welch 1994). In terms of consequences, unemployment is associated with substantial wage losses (Baffoe-Bonnie 2003; Jacobson, LaLonde, and Sullivan 1993; Ruhm 1993; Topel 1993).

¹ Additionally, it should be noted that there are obvious interactions of gender, education, and age (i.e. older women vs. younger women, younger unemployed men vs. older unemployed men); however, for brevity these interactions are not included.

Illness/Disability

An illness/disability career interruption is defined as removal from the labor force due to one's own ill health. An illness/disability alters wages and occupational trajectories because individuals with poor health reduce the number of hours worked and/or modify their occupational activities to accommodate their health condition (Chirikos 1993; Pelkowski and Berger 2003). Chirikos best summarizes the impact of health problems on wages.

Chronic health conditions may lower earnings potential, and thus, lower the value of the time spent by individuals with impaired health in market work. They may also raise the value of nonmarket time to the impaired individual, perhaps imposing self-care requirements that reduce the amount of usable time available for either market or nonmarket pursuits. Furthermore, by affecting life expectancy, impaired health may also influence the time horizon over which economic decisions are made and/or the rate of time preference (discount rate) that is applied to the calculation of the individual's assets. (Chirikos 1993: 297)

Mincer and Ofek (1982) report that interruptions due to ill health incur substantive wage penalties. The exact penalty for an illness varies drastically depending on occupation, type of health condition, the type of health indices used, and demographic characteristics (Chirikos 1993).

Parental Leave and Household Time

A parental leave career interruption is defined as any removal from the labor force due to child care responsibilities. Albrecht and colleagues (1999) define "household time" as any time out of the labor force to care for children or others that is not covered by parental leave. Just as with other types of labor-force interruptions, parental leave and "household time" negatively impact women's wages (Budig and England 2001; Taniguchi 1999; Waite 1980; Waldfogel 1997).

Return to Schooling

The normative life cycle assumes that schooling is experienced early in one's life when opportunity costs are low; after schooling is completed, employment ensues. However, in reality, a sizable proportion of workers return to school after first employment (Light 1995). A return to schooling is presumed to be voluntary, rational, and motivated by improving occupational

status on the labor market. Human capital theory states that education increases one's capital, which in turn increases one's occupational rewards (Felmlee 1988).

Early Retirement

Retirement, a removal from the labor force after an extensive number of years of paid work (Hayward and Hardy 1994), is often construed as the end of one's work career and the beginning of their leisure life. However, there is no set model for late-life work—some individuals retire early, some return to work either full-time or part-time, and some discontinue paid employment altogether. Retirement is more accurately construed as an extended process of moving in and out of the labor force, instead of a single event.

The number of retirees greatly increased during the period of initial transformation in Poland—1989 to 1992. After the fall of communism, a considerable proportion of workers were forced to retire because many previously state-owned factories were closed. Since pensions were lower than wages, some workers attempted to return to the labor force. Unemployment also created a milieu that encouraged older workers to retire early in order to vacate positions for younger workers (Góra and Rutkowski 2002).

Military Service

Poland's military consists of both conscripts and professional soldiers. In Poland, eligibility for service applies to people (predominantly men) aged eighteen years or older (Herspring 2000).

In the United States, Teachman and Call (1996) found that military service offers little advantage to enlistees in terms of occupational and income attainment. They found that *educational* attainment increased more for veterans than for nonveterans, but veterans did not have increased occupational and income attainment for their service. The impact of military service on wages in Poland has not been adequately studied.

Incarceration

In the United States, Western (2001) and Western, Kling, and Weiman (2001) found that the loss of earnings associated with incarceration ranges from 10 percent to 30 percent. As has been noted (Holzer 1996; Western 2001), imprisonment reduces human and social capital partially because of the stigma associated with incarceration.

One could expect that, in general, the effects of incarceration in Poland are similar to those in other countries. However, the kinds of reasons for incarceration may be of particular interest, and future studies should address whether incarceration for political offenses affects careers differently than incarceration for criminal offenses.

Sample and Measurement

In these analyses, the sample consists of those who responded to all four waves of POLPAN, 1988, 1993, 1998, and 2003 ($n = 1,241$). In using this panel, it should be noted that it consists of more older people than do usual samples of the adult population. This is because respondents would have had to be at least twenty-one years old in 1988. In the sample, the minimum age is thirty-seven and the maximum age is eighty-one, with a mean age of 55.63, and standard deviation of 11.35.

An occupational-career interruption is defined as any removal from the labor force for three or more months. The 2003 POLPAN questionnaire contains questions about career interruptions for all reasons included in the typology: unemployment, illness and disability, parental leave, household time, providing care for others, schooling, early retirement, military service, and incarceration. The respondents were asked to answer (1) whether they had experienced each type of interruption, (2) the starting year of the interruption, and (3) the ending year of the interruption. The interruption data are retrospective and interruptions during any period of time are included in the analysis.²

The sample for studying the impact of interruptions on occupational prestige over the span of a career consists of all those who responded to the 2003 wave ($n = 1,699$). The outcome variable, occupational prestige, is based on a Poland-specific coding scheme, included in the Social Occupational Classification (Pohoski, Slomczynski, and Wesolowski 1976; Slomczynski and Kacprowicz 1979).

For each segment of the population (gender, age, and education), those who had career interruptions are compared with those who had no reported interruption. For every six-month interval, the mean value of prestige was calculated for all individuals, starting with the beginning of the career (age fourteen being the earliest). These values were then plotted over time for

² An unemployment interruption could only occur from 1989 to 2003 because unemployment was officially nonexistent in Poland during communism.

those with any types of interruptions and those without interruptions, up to approximate retirement age (usually sixty for women, sixty-five for men).

Results

More than 40 percent (42.3 percent) of all people have experienced at least one career interruption over their recorded lifetimes. The most common interruption is unemployment (18.3 percent), which is not surprising given Poland’s restructuring of the economy during the post-communist transition. However, unemployment is the shortest career interruption (9.6 months), much shorter than “household time” and early retirement (59.1 and 57.1 months, respectively). Note, however, that both “household time” and early retirement are relatively rare career interruptions (1.4 percent and 3.9 percent, respectively). The least frequent career interruption is incarceration (0.03 percent). All tables present figures regarding frequency and duration of incarceration in parentheses because the data in this respect do not seem reliable.

Table 3.1. Frequency and Duration of Specific Occupational-Career Interruptions for Total Population

Types of occupational-career interruptions	% of those who experienced the event	Duration (months) for those who experienced the event
Unemployment	18.3	9.6
Illness/disability	12.4	22.6
Parental leave	11.0	37.2
Household time	1.4	59.1
Caring for others	1.9	40.1
Schooling	0.2	39.5
Early retirement	3.9	57.1
Military service	7.5	23.1
Incarceration	(0.0)	(20.5)
All interruptions	42.3	35.3

Table 3.2 provides information on the gendered nature of career interruptions in terms of their frequency and duration. Although, generally, men and women interrupt their careers with similar frequency (42.0 percent for men and 43.3 percent for women), the frequency of types of interruptions allows one to identify “gender-neutral,” “female-specific,” and “male-specific”

career interruptions. Women and men experience unemployment, illness/disability, retirement, and schooling with similar frequencies. “Female-specific” career interruptions include parental leave, household time, and caring for others. The only “male-specific” interruption is military service.

Table 3.2. Frequency and Duration of Specific Occupational-Career Interruptions for Women and Men

Types of occupational-career interruptions	Women		Men	
	% of those who experienced the event	Duration (months) for those who experienced the event	% of those who experienced the event	Duration (months) for those who experienced the event
Unemployment	16.0	9.3	20.7	9.1
Illness/disability	11.8	22.6	13.1	22.6
Parental leave	21.2	35.1	0.3	45.0
Household time	2.7	59.1	—	—
Caring for others	3.6	41.7	0.2	3.0
Schooling	0.3	28.7	—	—
Early retirement	3.6	77.7	4.3	36.5
Military service	—	—	15.4	23.1
Incarceration	—	—	(0.03)	(20.5)
All interruptions	43.3	42.0	41.3	24.91

In terms of length of career interruptions the gender differences are large. For women all career interruptions together lasted 42 months; for men the analogous figure is 24.9 months. The most striking difference is in the case of early retirement: for women this type of interruption is, on average, 41.1 months longer than for men. A similar difference in length appears in the case of caring for others (38.7 months). In some cases, however, the differences are negligible, no longer than 1–3 months (unemployment and illness/disability).

Only 15.4 percent of men reported military service as a career interruption. Indeed, in Poland most men are called for military duty before they enter the labor force. Those in the military served, on average, about two years. This is slightly longer than the average time spent in prison.

Tables 3.3 and 3.4 provide information regarding patterns of career interruptions for age groups and educational categories. Generally, the overarching pattern of interruptions indicates that interruptions are also age specific. For example, parental leave, military service, and unemployment

occur earlier in the career, while early retirement and illness/disability occur later. Younger people experience interruptions more frequently for all interruptions (48.3 percent) than older people (38.6 percent), but the duration for all interruptions is similar for both groups—for the younger age category, 33.6 months, and for older people, 36.7 months. Correspondingly, educational categories are also similar: 34.0 months for more than high school, 35.4 months for high school, and 35.8 months for less than high school.

However, the similarity of overall mean duration of career interruptions among age groups and educational categories does not mean that the duration of specific types of removal from the labor force is close to constant. In the case of “household time” the difference between the younger and older cohorts is about 30 months, with the older cohort’s duration for this type of interruption close to 5 years, 7 months. A similar difference with respect to the duration of “household time” occurs in the case of the highest educational category (the shortest duration), and those in the middle (the longest duration). Looking at early retirement, we note a similar between-group difference but with the opposite sign: the highest educational category has, on average, the longest duration (86.0 months), and those in the middle, the shortest duration (37.7 months).

Effects of Occupational-Career Interruptions on Occupational Prestige

Figure 3.1 illustrates the negative impact of career interruptions on occupational prestige over time. For the least educated, the gap between those with career interruptions and those without interruptions is consistent and large; the gap increases over the career span.

A similar pattern can be detected for those with more than high-school education, shown in Figure 2. Among those with high-school education those with and those without career interruptions have similar levels of prestige until later in the career, when the gap greatly increases. Thus, in general terms, the negative impact of career interruptions on occupational career seems obvious. Introducing other variables, gender and age included, does not change this impact.

Table 3.3. Frequency and Duration of Specific Occupational-Career Interruptions for Age Groups

Types of occupational-career interruptions	Ages 37-50		Age 51+	
	% of those who experienced the event	Duration (months) for those who experienced the event	% of those who experienced the event	Duration (months) for those who experienced the event
Unemployment	24.3	10.1	14.6	7.7
Illness/disability	9.9	12.9	14.0	27.3
Parental leave	15.2	38.4	8.5	35.9
Household time	1.1	38.6	1.6	68.4
Caring for others	1.5	45.6	2.2	37.8
Schooling	—	—	0.3	39.5
Early retirement	—	—	5.5	57.1
Military service	9.1	22.6	6.5	23.6
Incarceration	(0.03)	(20.50)	—	—
All interruptions	48.3	33.6	38.6	36.7

Table 3.4. Frequency and Duration of Specific Occupational-Career Interruptions for Educational Groups

Types of occupational-career interruptions	More than high school		High school		Less than high school	
	% of those who experienced the event	Duration (months) for those who experienced the event	% of those who experienced the event	Duration (months) for those who experienced the event	% of those who experienced the event	Duration (months) for those who experienced the event
Unemployment	18.4	6.5	20.6	9.8	17.4	9.7
Illness/disability	11.7	11.7	12.5	21.2	12.6	26.5
Parental leave	14.1	30.3	15.4	38.7	8.3	40.9
Household time	1.2	35.7	0.7	86.5	1.7	60.4
Caring for others	0.8	62.2	4.4	37.7	1.4	34.2
Schooling	0.4	42.0	0.4	37.0	—	—
Early retirement	2.3	86.0	3.7	37.7	4.6	43.0
Military service	3.5	19.9	8.5	23.9	8.6	23.3
Incarceration	(0.02)	(21.00)	—	—	(0.01)	(19.0)
All interruptions	41.0	34.0	49.6	35.4	40.0	35.8

Figure 3.1. Mean Occupational Prestige Score for Women and Men: With and Without Interruptions

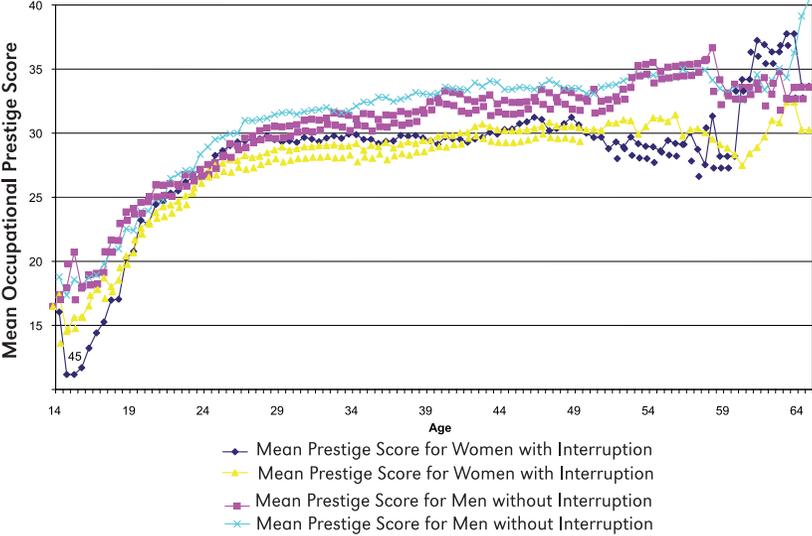
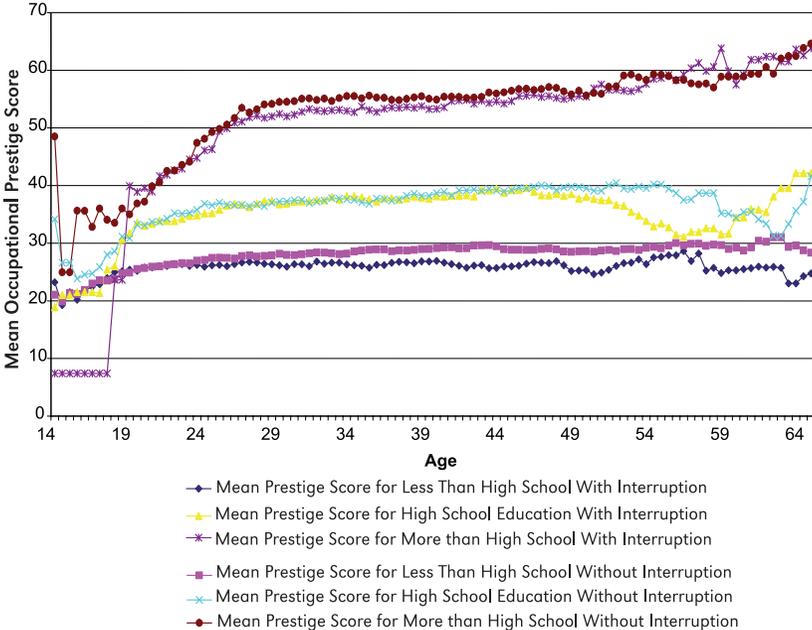


Figure 3.2. Mean Occupational Prestige Score for Educational Groups: With and Without Interruptions



Conclusion

Occupational careers are usually modeled as continuous. However, most careers are not continuous, but, in fact, are characterized by periods of disruptions. Thus, contrary to research practice, interruptions should be integrated into models of status attainment. To achieve such a goal, this chapter examines patterns—frequencies and durations—for a range of occupational-career interruptions and their consequences for occupational prestige.

Taking into account the frequency of occurrence and the duration of career interruptions, three types of specific interruptions have been distinguished: “gender-neutral,” “female-specific,” and “male-specific.” Women and men experience unemployment, illness/disability, retirement, and schooling with similar frequencies. “Female-specific” career interruptions include parental leave, household time, and caring for others. The only “male-specific” interruption is military service. Regarding age categories, younger workers are more likely to experience interruptions than older workers, at least for most interruptions. As with gender, several interruptions are age specific, such as unemployment and parental leave for younger workers and retirement and illness/disability for older workers. The most educated people have higher incidences of parental leave and lower incidences of military service than do less educated people. Temporary removal from the labor force has a negative effect on occupational prestige measured across the entire career for all educational groups, even if gender and age are controlled.