

Class Inequality in Parental Activities with Children: Evidence from the 2022 German Time Use Survey

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The ways in which parents spend time with their children have changed profoundly in recent decades. Paradoxically, despite the expansion of public childcare in many countries and rising employment rates for women with children, parents now spend more time with their children than in the past. Particularly striking is the increase in time devoted to children's educational and developmental activities, a phenomenon often referred to as the "intensification of parenting" (e.g., Faircloth, 2014). Several studies underline that the time mothers and fathers spend on childcare plays a crucial role in the development and well-being of their children (e.g., Altintas, 2016; Dotti Sani & Treas, 2016). These increasing societal demands - especially from the education system and the labor market – have put more pressure on parents to invest in "quality" education and care. Parents from higher social classes are often better equipped to meet these demands, as reflected in their material expenditures on education and greater time investments in their children.

Time use studies from the U.S. and the U. K. consistently show that parents with a university degree spend more time with their children, particularly on education-related activities, than parents with less education (e.g., Doepke et al., 2019; Dotti Sani & Treas, 2016). In the German context, research also finds educational gradients in parenting, with higher educational attainment associated with more engaged parenting (Ruckdeschel, 2015). Schulz and Engelhardt (2017) observe an increase in the educational gradient for time spent on reading activities, but find no significant changes for other child-related activities. These trends have the potential to exacerbate social inequalities in parenting behavior.

While most studies in this area – both internationally and in Germany – rely on educational attainment or income as an indicator of social inequality, this study instead uses measures of *social class based on occupations*. Income and education have been shown to be important determinants of the intensification of parenthood (e.g., Doepke et al., 2019; Sayer et al., 2004). While income serves as a key indicator of an individual's or household's economic standing – depending on whether individual or household income is considered – it primarily reflects the current financial situation and offers limited insight into the household's long-term employment and economic risks. In contrast, social class is a well-established indicator of economic vulnerability, firmly rooted in sociological theory and derived from detailed occupational classifications (Goldthorpe, 2007; Grusky & Sørensen, 1998). Compared to education, which often captures only broad distinctions, social class provides greater variation and serves as a more immediate variable reflecting labor market opportunities. This study uses newly available occupational data from the German Time Use Survey 2022 to explore

these dynamics. We provide novel evidence on how social class affects parental time investments and how patterns are moderated by parental gender.

Data and Methods

The German Time Use Survey 2022 provides nationally representative diary data from more than 5,000 households. Each respondent aged ten or older completed three time diaries (two weekdays and one weekend day), reporting activities in 10-minute intervals. Our analytic sample is restricted to men and women aged 20–60 living in cohabiting different-sex couples with at least one child under age 18. After excluding cases with missing information, the final samples comprise 1,702 mothers and 1,744 fathers on weekdays, and 1,304 mothers and 1,310 fathers on weekends.

We distinguish between two dimensions of childcare: **routine activities** (e.g., feeding, supervision, transport) and **interactional activities** (e.g., talking, reading, playing, helping with homework). Only primary activities are considered. The key explanatory variable is social class, based on Oesch’s occupational framework, categorized into six groups: higher-grade service class, lower-grade service class, small business owners, skilled workers, unskilled workers, and the non-employed (including unemployed, homemakers, and students). Control variables include respondent age, number and age of children, region (East/West), and migration background. Additional models incorporate both partners’ working hours and partner’s social class. OLS regressions with clustered standard errors account for repeated diary days.

Findings

Descriptive results show persistent gender gaps: mothers spend much more time on both routine and interactional childcare than fathers. Across both parents, interactional time is generally higher among those in higher service-class positions, though gradients are modest compared to U.S. and U.K. evidence. Differences by class are more visible on weekdays than weekends.

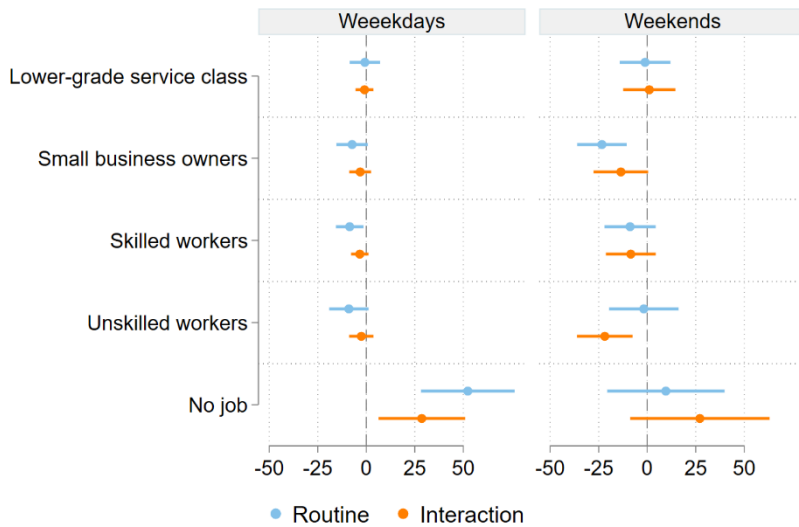
Multivariate analyses provide a more nuanced picture. For mothers, class differences are most evident in interactional care (see Figure 1). On weekdays, unskilled workers and small business owners devote *more* time to interactive childcare than mothers in the higher-grade service class. On weekends, however, the same groups spend *less* time on interactive childcare compared to higher-grade service-class mothers. Non-employed mothers invest more time in both routine and interactional care during weekdays but not on weekends. For fathers, weekday class gradients are minimal (see Figure 2). Yet on weekends, small business owners and unskilled workers devote *less* time to interactional childcare than higher-grade service-class fathers. Non-employed fathers also spend more time on childcare during weekdays, though not on weekends. Compared to education-based gradients found in other contexts, occupational class differences in Germany appear modest.

Figure 1: Coefficient Plot for **mothers'** time spent with children



Source: ZVE 2022, own weighted estimations. Note: Reference category: Higher-grade service class. The models control for age of respondent, number + age of the youngest child, region, and migration background.

Figure 2: Coefficient Plot for **fathers'** time spent with children



Source: ZVE 2022, own weighted estimations. Note: Reference category: Higher-grade service class. The models control for age of respondent, number + age of the youngest child, region, and migration background.

Conclusion

This study contributes new evidence on class inequalities in parental childcare using an occupation-based class measure in the German context. While class differences exist – particularly in interactional activities – they are not as pronounced as suggested by research from the U.S. or U.K. Instead, gender remains the dominant axis of differentiation. These findings highlight that while social inequalities in parenting persist, they may manifest differently across national contexts and according to the measure of stratification applied.

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