

## **Work-Life Imbalance in Extended Working Lives: Domestic Divisions of Labour and Partners' Perceptions of Job Pressures of Non-Retiring Older Workers\***

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### **Abstract**

Extending working lives prolongs existing patterns of time spent in work or with family into later life. Analysis of European Social Survey data shows a widening in inequitable domestic divisions of labour in households with post-retirement age workers. We explore partners' perceptions of older workers' job pressures when close to or beyond retirement age. Partners' concerns about job pressures are found not to be immediately associated with inequitable divisions of domestic labour but with the extent to which workers can determine the organisation of paid work and, specifically, tiredness after work. The paper argues that note should be taken of these concerns as they may be indicative of risks of intra-domestic stress.

### **Zusammenfassung: Ungleichgewicht zwischen Beruf und Privatleben im verlängerten Arbeitsleben: Arbeitsteilung im Haushalt und Wahrnehmung des Arbeitsdrucks älterer Arbeitnehmer durch deren Partner**

Die Verlängerung des Arbeitslebens verschiebt auch die bestehende Arbeitszeit- oder das Familienleben zu späteren Zeitpunkten im Leben. Die Analyse der Daten des European Social Survey zeigt, dass sich die ungleiche Arbeitsteilung in Haushalten mit Arbeitnehmern, die über das Renteneintrittsalter hinaus beschäftigt sind, ausweitet. Wir untersuchen, wie Partner den Arbeitsdruck älterer Arbeitnehmer, die kurz vor oder nach Erreichen des typischen Renteneintrittsalter stehen, wahrnehmen. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die Besorgnis der Partner älterer Beschäftigter über die Verantwortung und den Druck nicht unmittelbar mit einer ungleichen Verteilung von Hausarbeit verbunden ist, sondern mit dem Ausmaß, in dem die Arbeitenden ihren Arbeitstag selbst organisieren können und insbesondere auch mit der Müdigkeit nach der Arbeit. In dem Papier wird

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argumentiert, dass diese Bedenken zur Kenntnis genommen werden sollten, insofern sie auf ein Risiko von Stress innerhalb der Beziehung hindeuten.

JEL-Klassifizierung: J16, J26

## 1. Introduction

Retirement with the security of a guaranteed income, a pension, was one of the major achievements and stepping stones in the creation of the modern welfare state (Myles 1989). Retirement policy has since become an instrument for managing labour markets, first through the promotion, then the curtailment of early retirement. Most recently, delayed retirement and extending working lives have been encouraged and legislated in an attempt to reduce the cost to public and private pension insurance schemes of current and future generations living longer.

Whilst retiring later in life is quickly becoming the new social norm (Dingemans et al. 2017), it may not be as universally beneficial as often claimed, nor realisable and practical for all (Hinrichs 2015). Individuals' capacity to delay retirement and to extend working life is typically discussed in terms of financial need, care obligations that compete with work expectations, and the scope for flexible working and gradual retirement in an ageing European economy.

Rather than examining retirement and retirement decisions, the present study is concerned with the decision *not* to retire, which, in brief, is referred to as non-retirement. The paper explores links between non-retirement and domestic divisions of labour in coupled households and, specifically, the experience and assessment of non-retirement and its consequences for the partners of older, non-retiring workers.

We use European Social Survey (ESS) data<sup>1</sup> to explore the extent to which working beyond an effective retirement age is related to the share of housework assumed by the non-retiree, and family attitudes to continued work engagement. The study finds that, unsurprisingly, working beyond the effective retirement age is associated with a continuation of unequal, gendered domestic divisions of labour (cp. Cebulla et al. 2007). It also shows that older workers' ability to organise their daily work mediates their partners' perceptions of the strain caused by the job, and this is the case for both workers who have yet to reach the typical retirement age and those who have already passed that age.

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<sup>1</sup> An examination of alternative survey data, which included the much larger Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE), found that only the ESS contained survey questions and, hence, response data on, both, domestic divisions of labour and work-life balance (or quality of domestic relationships).

However, this effect is stronger for those working beyond retirement age, suggesting perhaps that they use this opportunity or privilege to manage their working day in a way that is more conducive to reconciling work and family life than do older workers under that age.

The research was motivated by our questioning the assertion that extended working lives are part of active ageing and, hence, inherently positive, and that any such judgement must take into account older workers' social and familial relationships. Recent evidence has challenged the assumption that work is universally accepted as desirable or even pleasurable (*Sage 2018; Bryson/MacKer-ron 2015*), and working later in life may thus not be a beneficial experience for all as is often claimed. Insofar as extended working lives might adversely affect domestic relationships, we would then also be well advised to take note of *Ruppaner et al.'s (2017)* finding that discontent and disagreement amongst couples can adversely affect relationship stability (see also *Frisco/Williams 2003*, for earlier evidence). Whereas older couples may be less likely to divorce, the intra-domestic stress that is experienced may nonetheless reduce personal physical and psycho-social wellbeing (*Randall/Bodenmann 2009, Neff/Karney 2017*). There is therefore a strong social – and some may argue: ethical – rationale for exploring how extended working lives may affect familial relationships.

We commence this paper with a brief review of the literature on retirement and domestic divisions of labour, before turning to describing our data and, then, the analysis results. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of this study's findings.

## 2. The Social Implications of Non-Retirement – a Brief Review of the Literature

Decisions as to when to retire or when not (yet) to retire, shaped by legislation but also often driven by financial need or health, are intensely *social* decisions that involve considerations of and for others, most notably live-in partners. *Humphrey et al. (2003)* and *Smeaton/McKay (2003)* showed that coupled households coordinate and consensually determine retirement, influenced by a desire for joint leisure time (*Gustman/Steinmeier 2004*). Partners aspire to retire simultaneously or, at least, map their retirement sequentially with the intention to reduce the time to a minimum when only one partner is retired. There are, of course, exceptions. Couples that share strong labour market attachment but weak relationship attachment, for instance, are less likely to care for joint retirement than couples with lesser labour market attachment (*Eismann et al. 2017*). Older women who may have a weaker attachment to the labour market than men, are more inclined to retire rather than work beyond retirement age, although this can vary markedly between countries (*Worts et al. 2016*).

## 2.1 Retirement/Non-Retirement and Wellbeing

The assertion that remaining active in later life through work is inherently desirable also does not go uncontested. *Di Gessa et al.* (2017) argue that any suggestion of health benefits of delayed retirement would be strongly premised on the absence of pre-existing medical conditions: non-retirement presents no remedy to ill health. On the contrary, *Bogaard/Henkens* (2018) find that retirement from physically or psychologically demanding jobs entails health benefits that delayed retirement would deny. Overall, research suggests that the personal health effects of retirement are typically fairly neutral and can even be positive (*Gorry et al.* 2015; *Coe/Zamarro* 2011; *Horner/Cullen* 2016). They can also be highly variable. Thus, *Clarke/Yawaz* (2009) show that the well-being benefits of retirement are typically greater for those retirees, especially early retirees, who had previously worked long – and one must assume: tiring – hours (cp. also *Welsh et al.* 2016, who found self-rated health to decline faster among older working age men and women in low quality jobs than amongst voluntary early retirees).

## 2.2 Retirement and Domestic Divisions of Labour

Whereas retirement or non-retirement typically only modestly interact with personal health, a stronger association has been evident between (non-)retirement and domestic divisions of labour, with potentially wider implications for relationships in older workers' households.

Upon retirement, the time that the retiring person spends on housework typically increases (*Stich/Hess* 2014; *Szinovacz/Harpster* 1994), although the extent of this change is influenced by their spouse's work commitment and prevailing gender roles (*Szinovacz* 2000; *Lam et al.* 2012). Analyses of German panel data have found that, upon retirement, domestic workloads are shared more evenly between couples as the retiring male breadwinners markedly increase their contribution to domestic labour, although women do not appear to reduce theirs as much as their male partners' increases (*Leopold/Skopek* 2015). Retirement sequences matter in this respect: whoever retires first tends to take on relatively more housework, regardless of gender (*Leopold/Skopek* 2016). However, this new arrangement may not last long as the authors also found that, at least among co-retiring dual earner couples in Germany, domestic divisions of labour in retirement soon return to their pre-retirement patterns. Gender stereotypes, perhaps rooted in traditional concepts of inequitable family roles, shape how domestic tasks are reallocated within couples following retirement, and for how long (e.g. *Caltabiano et al.* 2016; *Stich/Hess* 2014).

### 2.3 Domestic Divisions of Labour, Work Stress and Intra-Familial Relationships

How domestic divisions of labour are personally experienced is subject to social and cultural norms. In the first instance, the subjective experience of the distribution of domestic tasks is determined by pre-conceptions of what constitutes a 'fair' distribution of housework (Davis 2010). Societies that have achieved greater gender equality in the labour market have typically also achieved a more equal division of domestic labour (Hank/Jürges 2007).

Where domestic divisions of labour are perceived to be (excessively) unfair, this realisation has been shown to have adverse effects on personal wellbeing, experience of stress (Harryson et al. 2016) and mental health (Bird 1999; Polachek/Wallace 2015). Such stresses significantly contribute to "same-day marital conflict" (Timmons et al., 2017, p. 93) and may impact relationship stability in the longer term (Frisco/Williams 2003; Ruppanner et al. 2017). They are related to work and working conditions insofar as adverse experiences in the workplace spill over as conflicts in the home (Sanz-Vergel et al. 2015), triggered by insecure or nonstandard work (Presser 2000), an excessive workload (Robinson/Flowers/Carroll 2001), or irregular, on-call or shift work (Golden 2015).

### 2.4 Study Hypotheses

Whereas we have good generic knowledge of the connection between working conditions, (unequal) domestic divisions of labour and relationship conflict or (in)stability, this is not the case with regard to the experiences of different age cohorts and, as far as we were able to establish, especially non-retiring older workers.

This paper seeks to fill this gap and explores the triage between working beyond the retirement age, domestic divisions of labour and partners' experience of this extended working life. It examines the validity of three hypotheses:

- Couples in households extending working lives beyond the typical retirement age sustain (unequal) domestic divisions of labour also found among couples close to, but not yet retired from work (Hypothesis 1);
- In the absence of an equalisation in domestic divisions of labour typical for couples of retiring age, partners of post-ERA workers are more critical of the pressures associated with paid work than partners of pre-ERA workers (Hypothesis 2).

In this context, we are particularly interested in establishing if older workers' work arrangements may mediate partners' acceptance of working in later life. We do this in light of the continued promotion of flexible working and gradual retirement as a means for extending working lives (Hirsch 2005; Eurofound

2013, 2016), the positive role of job control in promoting job satisfaction (*Fila et al. 2013; Inanc et al. 2013*) and, crucially, evidence of post-retirement workers using flexible working opportunities more frequently than pre-retirement workers (*Cebulla et al. 2007*). The third hypothesis we thus test is that:

- Partners are more accepting of post-ERA working if non-retiring older workers are allowed more control over managing their working day (Hypothesis 3).

### 3. Data

We use the European Social Survey (ESS) to analyse associations between working beyond what is the typical retirement age and domestic division of labour and, especially, the assessments by partners or spouses of older workers' job pressures. The ESS is a cross-national, cross-sectional survey that has been conducted across Europe every two years since 2002. The survey especially focusses on collecting data on social and political attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. Interviews are conducted face-to-face. Since its inception, a total of 36 countries have participated, including Israel. In 2016, the latest round of the survey, 24 countries participated; in 2010 (round 5), the focus of this study, 28 countries participated.<sup>2</sup>

#### 3.1 ESS 2010

For this particular study, we select the ESS of 2010. Whilst some of the behaviour in and attitudes to paid and domestic work reported almost a decade ago may have changed in light of more recent political and cultural shifts, the ESS 2010 remains the most recent European survey to contain questions both about household divisions of labour and partners' perceptions of the respondents' workload, as well as the required labour market status information of respondents. The ESS is a person-based rather than household-based survey and, hence, obtains information pertaining to the household or specific individuals in the household collected from a single main respondent, who is asked to describe a view or an assessment on behalf of another person or collective of persons in the household.

Whereas the 2010 ESS did not include questions directly concerned with relationship quality or stability, it asked whether respondents felt their family or partner objected to the pressures their job entailed, which was the question most directly relevant to our exploration of relationship quality in older age

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<sup>2</sup> Section 3.2 lists the countries included in our analysis.

working households and partners' acceptance of post-retirement working.<sup>3</sup> The question asked:

“How often do you find that your partner or family gets fed up with the pressure of your job?” (Never, hardly ever, sometimes, often, always)

Our analysis, described in more detail below, sought to identify personal and work features most strongly associated with partners or families reportedly concerned about the main respondents' work pressures, where the main respondents was close to or beyond the typical retirement age (also see below).

ESS collected data about household divisions of labour by asking respondents to estimate their own and their partners' hours spent doing housework:

“About how many hours a week, in total, do you personally spend on housework?”, and

“And what about your spouse or partner? About how many hours a week does s/he spend on housework?”

Unfortunately, the ESS 2010 did not collect more detailed information about the type of domestic work undertaken by the main respondents or their partners. It was thus not possible to explore the potentially gendered nature of the type of domestic work in retired and non-retired couples.

### 3.2 Country Selection

Despite rising labour market participation rates amongst older age cohorts (OECD 2017), the number of non-retirees in work at an age when they could have retired has remained comparatively small. This renders using survey data with their typically limited sample sizes instantly challenging. To overcome the challenge of small case numbers to work with, this study combines the ESS for all but a small number of participating countries (*Table 1*).

We excluded three countries from the analysis: Austria, because the ESS data were not available at the time of the study; Ukraine, because of incomplete data on typical retirement ages in that country; and Cyprus, because we were unable to source data on male and female life expectancy to include in the analysis as one of several explanatory variables for patterns of, and satisfaction with, observed divisions of domestic labour and employment. In the end, gender differences in life expectancy were found not to be associated with our dependent variables.

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<sup>3</sup> The 2010 ESS also asked “Couples sometimes disagree about household and family issues. How often do you and your husband/wife/partner disagree about money?”. Since this question did not capture effects of, but perhaps need for, wage earning in later life, it was not used in this study.

Table 1

**Countries Included in the Study, by Approximate Geographical Location**

<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>
Finland	Bulgaria	Spain	Belgium
Denmark	Hungary	Greece	Switzerland
Estonia	Poland	Croatia	Germany
Lithuania	Russian Federation	Portugal	France
Norway	Slovakia	Slovenia	United Kingdom
Sweden	Czech Republic	Israel	Ireland
			The Netherlands

We use country dummy variables to control for inclusion of culturally, socially, economically and politically diverse countries.

### 3.3 Defining Retirement Ages

We use the effective retirement age (ERA) that applied to the year of the ESS survey, 2010, to define non-retirees that continue to work beyond the age they could have retired. The ERA is the mean age at which workers in their respective countries typically retire, rather than their respective country's statutory retirement age (i.e. the earliest that retirees may draw a state pension). This choice of ERA over the statutory pension age was grounded in the desire to base the study on actual and socially accepted retirement ages. It also yielded the additional benefit of increasing, albeit only slightly, the number of cases in the ESS available for analysis. Information about the ERA was obtained from the OECD website.<sup>4</sup>

Our analyses focus on two groups of older workers: those within five years of reaching their respective country's ERA (which can be different for men and women) and those up to five years older than the ERA. We limit the analyses to these age groups in order to focus on comparatively similarly age cohorts (which would not be the case if we included, for instance, everyone below or beyond ERA). We also limit the maximum age to within five years of ERA in order to reduce the risk of health becoming the primary reason for terminating employment or reducing working hours, and thus to maintain focus on those, in principle, capable of remaining in the workforce.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/els/emp/average-effective-age-of-retirement.htm>.

### 3.4 Caveat

Collecting information about partners' housework by proxy rather than 'at source' from the person to which the information refers means we rely on respondents having accurate information about a third person. Furthermore, collecting information about partners' perceptions of job pressures of the respondent relies on respondents being able to appropriately judge partners' impressions. We have no way of testing whether respondents truly understand their partners' perceptions of the respondent's work pressure, although it would appear safe to assume that at least those claim partners' concerns would have been confronted with them.

We were able to conduct a simple test of main respondents' propensity to estimate their partners' commitment to housework with reasonable accuracy. To do so, we calculated men's and women's own domestic labour estimates and those they made for their partners', using data from the majority of heterosexual couples. We then compared the aggregate self- and proxy-estimates by gender.

This exercise showed that working males within five years above or below the ERA estimated they spent about 8 hours on housework each week, whereas female main respondents estimated that their male partners spent around 10 hours on housework per week. Likewise, female main respondents estimated their own housework to amount to about 19 hours per week, whereas male main respondents estimated their female partners to spend about 21 hours per week doing housework. Whilst not a perfect match, males and females thus tended to broadly agree on the amount of the time that they and their heterosexual partners spent on domestic work. We take this to indicate that proxy statements are reasonably accurate and appropriate to use in this analysis.

## 4. Findings

We commence the reporting of our research findings with a brief description of older workers' work and job characteristics. For reasons of statistical robustness, this is based mostly on the larger sample of *all* pre- and post-ERA workers, irrespective of partnership status. Some 76 per cent of pre- and 72 per cent of post-ERA workers were living with partners – and differed little in their work characteristics when compared to older workers not living with a partner.

Most of the statistics reported here that compare and contrast pre-ERA and post-ERA workers are not statistically significantly different from another. We still report them for completeness, and highlight those differences that are statistically significant at the five per cent level in the tables and specifically note these few instances in the text.

#### 4.1 Descriptive Analysis: Working Beyond the ERA

##### 4.1.1 Employment Rates, Occupation, Tenure and Hours Worked

In 2010, 47 per cent of those under the ERA in the 26 ESS countries included in this analysis were in paid work, as were 16 per cent of those above the ERA, with rates for males a little higher than for females (49 % and 18 % for males compared to 45 % and 14 % for females). Unsurprisingly, the majority (75 %) of those above ERA were retired, as were a third (35 %) of those under the ERA. Again retirement rates were a little higher for men (78 % and 36 %) than women (73 % and 35 %).

Older workers were mostly working in service occupations, at low and higher skill levels, with post-ERA workers somewhat more strongly represented amongst professionals than were pre-ERA workers, whereas the opposite was the case for skilled trades (*Table 2*). The difference in the occupational distribution was statistically significant at the 10 percent level.

Both groups had, on average, spent a similar (statistically identical) number of years with their current employers (pre-ERA: 19 years; post-ERA: 18 years) and were typically working full-time, with half normally working at least 40 hours per week, including overtime.

##### 4.1.2 Job Control

Both groups of older workers enjoyed some, albeit perhaps limited, influence over their work patterns. About a quarter of all pre-ERA and post-ERA workers reported that they could decide when to start or finish work in their current jobs. At the same time almost half said that they had no control over their start and finish times. Focussing more specifically on workers *living with a partner*, the post-ERA workers appeared more likely to report some autonomy over their start and finish times than pre-ERA workers. More than a quarter (26.1 %) of post-ERA workers living with partners agreed most strongly with the statement that they “can decide when to start/finish work” (“very true”), compared with less than one fifth (19.5 %) of older workers who had yet to reach the ERA (*Table 3*). This difference however was not statistically significant.

Pre-ERA and post-ERA workers also reported similar capacity to choose or change the pace of their work, or to decide how daily work was organised: on a scale from 0 to 10, mean scores are 6.85 and 6.96 for pace of work and 7.12 and 7.69 for work organisation.

*Table 2*  
**Occupation, Time with Employer and Weekly Working Hours,  
 Employees in Employment within 5 Years Above or Below  
 the Effective Retirement Age (ERA), 2010**

	<=ERA (up to -5yrs)	>ERA (up to +5yrs)
<i>ISCO88</i>		
Professionals	20.1	27.2
Technicians and associate professionals	16.9	11.8
Service workers, shop and market sales service	13.1	15.3
Legislators, senior officials and managers	11.9	12.4
Craft and related trades workers	10.0	4.4
Elementary occupations	9.9	11.6
Clerks	8.8	8.3
Plant and machine operators, assemblers	6.4	5.1
Skilled agricultural and fishery worker	2.9	3.9
Pearson: Uncorrected $\chi^2(8) = 37.2172$ Design-based $F(7.79, 18803.85) = 1.7381$ P = 0.0865		
<i>Years with current employer</i>		
Mean	19.2	17.7
Median	17	16
<i>Weekly hours</i>		
Mean	40.2	38.7
Median	40	40
N	1,866	549

*Base:* All in employment.

*Source:* ESS 2010 (own analysis).

Table 3

**Workplace Flexibility, Employees in Employment within 5 Years Above or Below the Effective Retirement Age (ERA), 2010, Employed, Living with Partner**

	<=ERA (up to -5yrs)	>ERA (up to +5yrs)
<i>Can decide when to start/finish work</i>		
Not at all	48.6	44.1
A little	20.0	16.8
Quite true	11.9	13.0
Very true	19.5	26.1
<i>Choose or change pace of work (scale 0 [low]-10 [high])</i>		
Mean	6.85	6.96
(Std. Err)	(0.14)	(0.31)
Median	8	8
<i>Decide how daily work is organised (scale 0 [low]-10 [high])</i>		
Mean	7.12	7.69
(Std. Err)	(0.13)	(0.29)
Median	8	9
N	1,053	376

Base: All in employment (and living with a partner).

Source: ESS 2010 (own analysis).

#### 4.2 Testing Hypotheses

In this section we begin to examine the validity of our research hypotheses, first, by exploring domestic divisions of labour, and how they may be affected by work and, specifically, certain aspects of flexibility in, and control over, job arrangements. This also means that our focus shifts exclusively onto pre-ERA and post-ERA workers *living with a partner*.

*4.2.1 Hypothesis 1: Couples in Households Extending Working Lives beyond the Typical Retirement Age Sustain (Unequal) Domestic Divisions of Labour Typical for Couples Close to, but not yet, Retired from Work*

We find no statistical difference in the time that pre-ERA workers (mean: 13 hours) and post-ERA workers (11 hours) reported spending on doing housework each week, or the hours they reported for their partners (mean for partners of pre-ERA workers: 16 hours; post-ERA workers' partners: 18 hours) (Table 4).

Pre-ERA workers thus spent, on average, three (2.8) fewer hours on housework than their partners, whereas this rises to almost 8 hours (7.5) for post-ERA workers. This difference is statistically significant, but is driven by proportionately fewer partners of post-ERA workers being in paid work themselves (50%) when compared with partners of pre-ERA workers (63%). In both pre-ERA and post-ERA households, partners of the non-retiring workers took on the larger share of domestic work.

Overall, the statistical evidence lends support to Hypothesis 1. Moreover, it suggests that divisions of labour become more unequal in post-ERA coupled households in which the older worker is the only one (remaining) in paid work.

*4.2.2. Hypothesis 2: In the Absence of an Equalisation in Domestic Divisions of Labour Typical for Couples of Retiring Age, Partners of Post-ERA Workers are more Critical of the Pressures Associated with Work than Partners of Pre-ERA Workers*

Table 5 summarises pre- and post-ERA workers' responses to three survey questions that seek to capture the workers' own or their partners' assessment of their ability to balance work and daily living. Both pre- and post-ERA workers lean towards neutral-to-positive assessments. Asked to rate their satisfaction with the "balance between time [spent] on the job and time on other aspects" on a scale from 0 to 10, both recorded similar mean and identical median scores (Table 5).

Table 4

**Domestic Divisions of Labour, Employees in Employment within 5 Years Above or Below the Effective Retirement Age (ERA), 2010, Employed, Living with Partner**

	<=ERA (up to -5yrs)	>ERA (up to +5yrs)	Statistically significant differences
<i>Hours spent doing housework each week</i>			
Mean	12.94	10.90	
(Std. Err)	(0.62)	(0.78)	
Median	10	8	
N	1,257	358	
<i>Hours partner spends doing housework each week</i>			
Mean	15.72	18.31	
(Std. Err)	(0.66)	(1.33)	
Median	12	15	
N	1,257	350	
<i>Difference between own and partner's housework</i>			
Mean	-2.81	-7.45	**
(Std. Err)	(0.78)	(1.38)	
Median	0	-6	**
N	1,239	348	

Base: All in employment and living with a partner.

Note: \*\*statistically significant at 5 percent level.

Source: ESS 2010 (own analysis).

Table 5

**Job and Work Life Balance Satisfaction, Employees in Employment  
within 5 Years Above or Below the Effective Retirement Age (ERA), 2010,  
Employed, Living with Partner**

	<i>&lt;=ERA (up to -5yrs)</i>	<i>&gt;ERA (up to +5yrs)</i>
<i>Satisfied with balance between time on job and time on other aspects (scale 0 [low]–10 [high])</i>		
Mean	6.64	6.83
(Std. Err)	(0.1)	(0.18)
Median	7	7
<i>Job prevents you from giving time to partner/family, how often ...</i>		
Never	16.6	23.0
Hardly ever	22.6	26.3
Sometimes	35.8	29.9
Often	22.3	18.4
Always	2.7	2.5
Pearson: Uncorrected chi2(5) = 13.7096		
Design-based F(4.29, 7351.97) = 1.1444 P = 0.3340		
<i>Partner/family fed up with pressure of your job, how often ...</i>		
Never	33.9	34.4
Hardly ever	24.3	28.2
Sometimes	30.6	26.3
Often	9.9	8.7
Always	1.2	2.4
Pearson: Uncorrected chi2(4) = 6.5226		
Design-based F(3.92, 6714.49) = 0.5308 P = 0.7095		
<i>Logistic regression: Partner/family fed up with pressure of your job, how often ... (always/often)*</i>		
Difference between own and partner's housework	Odds ratio: .99 Std. Err. .007 t: -0.18 P: 0.857	
N	1,374	376

Note: Logistic regression estimates ERA status association with partner perception of job pressure, no control variables used.

Base: All in employment and living with a partner.

Source: ESS 2010 (own analysis).

They were also equally likely (or indeed unlikely) to state that their job prevented them from giving time to their partners or family. Likewise, pre-ERA and post-ERA workers agreed in their judgement as to how often their partners might be “fed up with the pressure of (the workers’) job”: in both instances, around 60 per cent stated this was “never” or “hardly ever” the case. Controlling for inequality in the distribution of domestic work cp. Table 4 had no statistical effect.

In summary, the statistics suggest that, whilst post-ERA workers on the whole barely reduced their hours in work when compared with pre-ERA workers, inequalities in the domestic division of labour evidently rose. Continued work commitments and the greater gap in contributions to housework between partners in post-ERA households, however, were not accompanied by any more frequent reporting of dissatisfaction with work-life balance, such as with post-ERA workers’ ability to spend time with their families. If anything, the data point to a fairly low level of concern about work infringing on family life shared by *both* ERA groups (although in both cases around one fifth indicated that their job often or always prevented them from giving time to their partner or family).

We therefore reject Hypothesis 2, which had postulated a higher level of concern about work pressure impacting on family life in post-ERA working households.

#### *4.2.3 Hypothesis 3: Partners are more Accepting of Post-ERA Working if Non-Retiring Older Workers are Allowed more Control over Managing their Working Day*

In this section, we extend the previous regression in order to identify work-related factors that are most strongly associated with pre-ERA and post-ERA workers acknowledging their partner’s dissatisfaction with the former’s continued work commitment, in particular the role of hours spent in paid work as well as doing domestic work, and flexibility of work arrangements, measured through indicators of job control discussed earlier. To test these and other factors’ influence on partners’ assessments of workload, we conducted a series of logistic regression analyses with the statement that partner/family is fed up with the pressure of your job as the dependent variable.<sup>5</sup>

Initial modelling showed a statistically significant positive association between partners’ perceptions of the respondent’ job pressures, on the one hand,

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<sup>5</sup> We also subjected the data to ordered probit analysis, which used a fuller set of (non-aggregate) dependent and independent variables, and generated directionally similar results. For simplicity and ease of presentation, we limit the following discussion to the results of the logistic regression analyses.

and the extent to which workers were able to control the organisation of their daily work, regardless of their ERA status (*Table 6*, Model A). In both instances, respondents in a small number of countries (France, Finland, Greece and Norway) were independently less likely to state that their partners were concerned about the respondent's job pressures than in the comparison country (Belgium) and elsewhere.

In Model B we interact job control with ERA status and find that partners' concerns over job pressures were lower for post-ERA workers with a high level of control than pre-ERA workers with a high level of control (significant at the 10% level). In addition, in Model B we add an indicator capturing workers who were never, hardly ever or sometimes too tired after work to enjoy things they like to do at home (compared with those who were often or always too tired). Partners of those workers who reported that work affected enjoyment of things at home less, were also significantly less concerned about job pressures. The inclusion of this tiredness indicator did not alter the relationship between job control and partner concerns about job pressures.

In Model C, we include a number of additional controls: respondents' total household income and respondents' share contributed to total household income, gender, their actual hours worked per week, industry and occupation of employment, time spent on domestic work, a subjective measure of health and partner's employment status. Total household income was significant (at the 10% level), whilst other variables were not significant and are not reported in *Table 6*. The inclusion of these additional controls does not change the association between partners' concerns about job pressure and job control and tiredness after work.

This evidence tentatively supports the assertion of Hypothesis 3 that partners are more accepting of post-ERA working (and arguably less frequently experience its adverse effects) if older workers have greater control over their working day.

#### 4.3 Discussion: How Should we Interpret these Results?

To summarise, our findings indicate that neither actual work engagement, measured in hours spent at work, nor unequal contributions to housework immediately affected partners' perceptions of job pressures and their impact on family life. Rather, it was work and the workplace that were most strongly associated with partners' assessments of job pressures: first, via the association with tiredness after work; secondly, via the opportunity the workplace gave workers to organise their daily work.

It is though arguably curious that, however tentatively (because of its marginal statistical significance), the association between partners' assessments of job

Table 6  
 Logistic Regression of Agreement with the Statement “Partner/Family  
 is Fed Up with Pressure of your Job” (Always or Often)

	Model A			Model B			Model C		
	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	P>t	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	P>t	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	P>t
ERA status: working beyond ERA	0.89	0.32	0.755	2.67	1.94	0.178	3.27	2.66	0.147
Job control: allowed to decide how daily work is organised									
high level of control [score 7–10]	2.66	0.99	0.008	3.26	1.51	0.01	3.25	1.69	0.023
ERA status#Job control									
Post-ERA#high level of control				0.23	0.20	0.087	0.17	0.17	0.072
Too tired after work to enjoy things like do at home									
Never; hardly ever, sometimes				0.16	0.05	0.000	0.15	0.06	0.000
Country (Belgium)*									
Finland	0.19	0.15	0.039	0.19	0.15	0.043	0.19	0.16	0.054
France	2.60	1.30	0.055						
Greece				0.26	0.18	0.048	0.19	0.16	0.054
Norway	0.20	0.26	0.049	0.23	0.19	0.082	0.21	0.19	0.081



pressures and workers' control over their daily work should differ for pre- and post-ERA couples. As seen in *Table 3*, in terms of prevalence, there was, in fact, no difference in any of the three job control indicators between pre- and post-ERA workers.

It may be that pre-ERA and post-ERA workers made different use of their opportunities to organise their working days and that this was not adequately captured by the present data. Or it may be that job control generated its own burden, increasing work intensity for one group (pre-ERA workers), but not or less so for the other (post-ERA workers). This would correspond with findings from recent work by *Lott/Chung* (2016) who found that workers in Germany increased their paid and also unpaid overtime as they were given greater control over their work schedules. Pre-ERA workers may be more prone to such action because, unlike post-ERA workers, they are less able to avoid exposure to work pressures, for instance, by retiring, whilst tight labour markets and age discrimination add pressure on older workers to conform and perform.

These interpretations need not be mutually exclusive, although their implications for balancing work and family life would be different, requiring either a judicious choice of tools and modes of work organisation, or of workplaces that do not expect the granting of organisational freedom to be reciprocated by increased work input. The present data offer no obvious means for testing the validity of these potential explanations for our research findings. Future research will need to identify and exploit alternative data sources to do so.

In the meantime, and often overlooked in sociological and economic studies, tiredness after work remains the principal adversary to a successful balancing of work and daily living among pre-ERA and post-ERA workers alike.

## 5. Conclusion

*Loretto/Vickerstaff* (2013, p. 12) have recently called for “future research and policies [that] surround retirement ... ^= to focus on the household not the individual”. With this in mind, the present paper asked whether extending working lives beyond conventional retirement ages might affect relationships in coupled households. Its main interest was to examine the extent to which continuing to spend time at work, when one could have retired, might be contested by working or non-working partners, and which role domestic divisions of labour and paid work organisation might take in this.

Our analyses found that households with post-ERA workers displayed very similar unequal divisions of labour as pre-ERA households (Hypothesis 1), but there was no evidence to suggest that partners of post-ERA workers were less accepting of the effects that job pressures associated with paid work were having on family life than partners of pre-ERA workers (Hypothesis 2).

Instead, the analysis found that the partners of post-ERA workers were less frequently reported to be concerned about job pressures than those of pre-ERA workers if the workers had a higher level of job control over the organisation of their working day (Hypothesis 3). We suggest that it may be differences in the way that older workers utilised their freedom to organise their daily work that explain this finding. With the support of their employers granting this freedom to arrange their daily work, post-ERA workers thus have better means for balancing their work with daily living, although this does not extend to their overcoming the physical or mental burden of work.

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