

## **Shuffling across the career ladders - Intergenerational inequalities in occupational mobility**

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### **Motivation**

The intergenerational transmission of occupational status has long been one of the main interests of stratification research. Starting from the comprehensive description of intergenerational transmissions through parental and individual education and occupation by Blau and Duncan (1967), inequality research since has studied the processes and associations extensively with varying measures and approaches, across countries and disciplines. Many studies focus on one's occupational 'destination' but few studies have raised the question how family background influence career mobility before obtaining the stable status at the labour market. The recent literature that applies life course perspective, are starting to show more complex mechanisms and associations of occupational attainment and intergenerational inequalities (DiPrete 2002; Hillmert 2011; Manzoni et al 2014). This paper aims to shed light to the varying paths of early occupational career and how intergenerational inequalities occur within and across these pathways.

Previous literature have emphasised the persistent inheritance of socioeconomic resources (Raftery & Hout 1993; Torche 2011). Relative risk aversion (RRA) theory argues that individuals and families try to obtain at least the same class for the offspring as the parents have (Breen & Goldthorpe 1997; Holm & Jæger 2008). Literature on educational inequality has expressed strong evidence for this mechanism, highlighting cumulative and compensatory advantage (Bernardi 2014; Bernardi & Boado 2014; DiPrete & Eirich 2006) but less is known whether occupational attainment and career mobility contribute to the persistent intergenerational inequalities. The transitions during early careers influence, not only the individual resources, but also the overall openness of the society by altering the importance of family background in the distribution of occupational resources. In this regard, we test whether individuals from higher classes are more prone to experience upward career mobility because they aim to reach the occupational status of their parents, whereas persons from lower classes do not have this pressure.

### **Data and methods**

Benefiting from high-quality Finnish register data, this paper studies occupational mobility of the 1974-86 birth cohorts. The analytical period starts 2004-2006, including all who graduate from their highest achieved education and continues across the first 10 years in the labour market.

International Socio-Economic Index of occupational status (ISEI) provides a standardised measure for occupation. In order to analyse intragenerational occupational mobility, ISEI is divided into five deciles relative to the cohort entering the labour market at the same time, as they can be seen as competing more or less for the same job pool. Individual educational attainment (secondary, lower tertiary, higher tertiary) is controlled for in the analyses (basic education level omitted due to extremely low number of cases).

Family background is measured as the highest achieved educational level (basic, secondary, tertiary) of the parents using the dominance principle. Parental education is measured at age 10 to 15 with dominance principle, reflects the childhood setting and resources. Later, parental labour market attainment will be included in the analysis as it can have a distinct influence on career mobility outside parental education.

In order to analyse how much volatility occurs in the intragenerational career mobility during the early career, sequence analysis will provide information whether certain types of pathways are associated with specific family background. Further, event history analysis will be conducted to study the career mobility according to the level of parental resources. Conditional multinomial logistic regression allows us to test if persons from higher classes have a higher risk for downward or upward mobility compared to individuals from lower class. With this setting we can test whether the Breen-Goldthorpe hypothesis on avoiding downward intergenerational mobility applies in the labour market by pursuing higher occupational status until the aimed one is reached.

### **Preliminary results**

Preliminary regression results demonstrate that transitions across the occupational ladder are nowhere near rare. Both upward and downward intragenerational mobility takes place in the early career, across family backgrounds and gender. Both upward and downward career mobility diminish family background differences in later occupational attainment. Further, men and women from advantaged backgrounds had overall more mobile early careers, and they were more likely to experience upward mobility after the early career. These findings contribute to the recent studies on how advantage can compensate negative life events, but also raise a positive aspect of career mobility reducing intergenerational inequalities.

### **Discussion**

This study unravels new details on the inequalities in the labour market, and how persistent and flexible intra- and inter-generational transmissions can be. The intergenerational advantage in educational and occupational transmissions has been proved to be the most persistent, despite

interventions and promotion of equality of educational opportunity. This paper aims to provide empirical evidence on the mechanisms of intergenerational transmissions across the career, and how the persistent occupational inheritance takes place. In order to tackle occupational inequalities, this type of information can provide valuable insights about at which stages of the life course interventions or public support would be beneficial in promoting greater equality.

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