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within partnerships**

Proposal for a short survey instrument

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SFB 882 “From Heterogeneities to Inequalities”
University of Bielefeld
Faculty of Sociology
PO Box 100131
D-33501 Bielefeld
Germany
Phone: +49-(0)521-106-4942 or +49-(0)521-106-4613
Email: office.sfb882@uni-bielefeld.de
Web: <http://www.sfb882.uni-bielefeld.de/>

Measuring social support within partnerships

Proposal for a short survey instrument

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Abstract

In this technical report, we propose a short survey instrument for measurement of social support within partnerships with a particular focus on received and provided emotional and instrumental support in different work-related situations. The paper begins with a brief summary of our scientific motivation and highlights some important gaps in existing research. We then present a set of new survey questions. We suggest integration of our survey instrument in the Socio-economic Panel (*SOEP*) or the German Family Panel (*pairfam*) and establish some research areas of interest to researchers who come from a variety of disciplines.

Keywords: work-related social support, couple, career, instrument development

1. Scientific motivation

Significant gender inequalities persist in the labour market careers of men and women, even among the highly qualified (e.g. Holst & Busch 2010). Earlier research has analysed the extent to which individual resources such as human capital or occupational experiences determine these gender inequalities (see Blossfeld & Drobnič, 2001). Others have examined the role of a person's social capital – understood as “the number of people who can be expected to provide support, and the resources those people have at their disposal” (Boxman et al. 1991, p. 52) – in increasing an individual's chances of finding a better job, being promoted, or receiving a high income (Lin 2000; Burt 2000). An individualistic line of thought has major limitations, however. As Moen and Han describe with their concept of “coupled careers” (Han & Moen 1999), the individual occupational career is always linked to the occupational career of one's partner. Following, human capital, income, occupational experiences and access to social networks are not only meaningful resources for an individual's career. If shared with the partner, they constitute an important stock of resources for the occupational career of the partner as well (Bröckel et al. 2012; Busch et al. 2013). In this technical report we argue that social support provision and social support receipt within a partnership can be considered to be one key to understanding inequalities between partnerships and within partnerships. Moreover, we also expect to find interdependence with social inequality in other life domains over the life course.

Over the past decades growing human capital endowments of women have led to a radical increase of homogamous partnerships (Blossfeld & Buchholz 2009; Blossfeld & Drobnič 2001), enlarging resource inequality *between* families. Compared to more traditionally oriented (resource-poor partnerships) resource-rich dual-earner couples, and dual-career couples in particular, are in comparative advantage: They have higher incomes as well as more resource-rich social networks. But there is not only inequality in the availability of resources between families but also inequality in the resource allocation *within* families and partnerships: Partner's resource richness can also create an increasingly competitive situation within the couple since couples often negotiate whose career will take precedence. Thus, a partner's resources do not automatically initiate supportive behaviour due to status competition between partners or stereotypical gender-role bargaining. Not much is known about the social mechanisms at work within couples, however (Rusconi & Solga 2008).

Looking at coupled careers, a static view of couples, their resources, aspirations, and occupational careers is not sufficient (Solga & Rusconi 2011). The stock of individual resources and aspirations changes over a lifetime as well as resource allocation and negotiation within partnerships. Of particular importance is the family cycle, often linked to a traditionalization process within partnerships (Grunow et al. 2007; Schulz & Blossfeld 2006). Not only does this become visible through less gender equity at home; it also has long-term penalties for women's careers (e.g. Aisenbrey et al. 2009). Other studies showed that social support provision and social support receipt may vary throughout the life cycle as well (Gordon & Whelan-Berry 2004).

While in the past many researchers employed a single measure of social support, more recent studies have revealed that it is vital to disentangle different types of social support and to

distinguish between provision and receipt of social support (Xu & Burleson 2001; Verhofstadt et al. 2007; Ezzedeen & Grossnickle Ritchey 2008). Following Perrewé and Carlson (2002), we conceive social support as consisting of emotional and instrumental support from significant others. Emotional support encompasses the availability of individuals who provide encouragement and sympathy and a sounding board to speak about personal thoughts and feelings. Instrumental support refers to direct assistance received from other persons. Partners can help to solve work-related problems, discover suitable career opportunities, make career decisions, as well as giving career advice (Ezzedeen & Grossnickle Ritchey 2008; Sonnert 2005; van der Gaag & Snijders 2005). On the other hand, social support can also be burdensome for individuals (Ezzedeen & Grossnickle Ritchey 2008; Verhofstadt et al. 2007). Let us take stressful arguments and conflicts as an example of unhelpful emotional support and a lack of assistance with domestic work or child-rearing as an example of unhelpful instrumental support behaviour. Studies also showed that persons best profit of partner's social support when the support is "invisible", meaning that the partner, who is receiving support, is not aware of doing so (Howland & Simpson 2010). Bolger et al. also find evidence for this invisible support: In their study "many transactions reported by supporters are not reported by recipients" (2000: 953).

Prior research on social support in couples has paid particular attention to emotional support and instrumental support in the form of help with household tasks and caring for other family members. Previous studies on emotional support have shown that women receive support from a greater number of social support sources than men (Schwarzer & Gutiérrez-Doña 2005; Umberson et al. 1996). Yet, within partnerships, women receive less emotional support from their partner than men, a finding that is not associated with the spouses' occupations (Wallace & Jovanovic 2011). This social support gap has been traced back to gender differences in personality (Kessler & McLeod 1984) or to gender-role expectations (Xu & Burleson 2001; Neff & Karney 2005).

Examination of support in household chores and parenting reveals that women still carry out the lion's share of domestic work, even in dual-earner couples (Kroska 2004; Treas & Drobnič 2010; Cooke 2007; Holst & Busch 2010). Gender inequality in domestic work appears to be related to wage penalties (Kühlhirt & Ludwig 2012) or occupational upward mobility (Busch et al. 2013; Bröckel et al. 2012). Social support for one's occupational career has been rarely studied (Ezzedeen & Grossnickle Ritchey 2008; Gordon & Whelan-Berry 2004; Tharenou 2001) using predominantly qualitative survey data and specific subsamples of managers.

To date, the issue of work-related social support within partnerships cannot be explored because of the scarcity of quantitative data on social support within partnerships in Germany. The gaps in existing research on work-related social support within partnerships can be summarized in the following research questions:

- Are there differences in the reported need for support and support seeking behaviours within couples and between couples? What are the determinants of potential differences?
- Under what circumstances will the partner's resources lead to social support for an individual? Or whose partner is more likely to withhold social support?

- Is there evidence for a support gap? To what extent differ social support types for men and women?
- Are there gender differences in the partner's awareness of social support provision and the reported social support provision of an individual?
- What is the role played by status competition between spouses or stereotypical gender-role bargaining?
- Is social support within partnerships systematically related to turning points?
- To what extent does social support within partnerships determine individual chances for labor market (re-)entry and career advancement in the long run?

In this technical report a new survey instrument for measuring work-related social support provision and social support receipt within partnerships is suggested. In the next sections a description of a set of new survey questions, the target group, mode of data collection and estimated length of interview time is given. We argue that implementation of this instrument in a large-scale longitudinal survey such as the Socio-economic Panel (*SOEP*) or the Panel Analysis of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics (*pairfam*) will be most fruitful. The final section establishes some research areas of interest to researchers who come from a variety of disciplines.

2. Proposed survey questions

We are interested in developing an understanding of the circumstances under which men and women receive and provide work-related social support within partnerships. Two areas are of special concern:

1. Emotional and instrumental support when work-related problems arise, and
2. Emotional and instrumental support for potential career advancement.

In line with the BSSS (Schulz & Schwarzer 2003) and following the practical suggestions of Verhofstadt et al. (2007), our instrument for the measurement of social support within partnerships covers four dimensions:

- i. **Need for support**, measured by the item:
"It is important to me to talk to my partner about work-related issues."
- ii. **Support seeking**, measured by the item:
"When I have to make an important decision about my professional future, I ask my partner for advice."
- iii. **Received support**
 - a. Emotional support, measured by the following three items:
"My partner shows recognition for what I do at work."
"When I have work-related problems, my partner listens to me."
"If I had the opportunity to improve or change my professional situation, my partner would encourage me."

- b. Instrumental support, measured by the following items:
 - “When I am under stress at work, my partner takes some load off my shoulders.”*
 - “My partner helps me to find a solution, when I have work-related problems.”*
 - “If I had the opportunity to improve or change my professional situation, my partner would give me helpful advice.”*

iv. **Provided support**

- a. Emotional support, measured by the following three items:
 - “I show my partner recognition for what he/she does at work.”*
 - “When my partner has work-related problems, I listen to him/her.”*
 - “If my partner had the opportunity to improve or change his/her professional situation, I would encourage him/her.”*
- b. Instrumental support, measured by the following three items:
 - “When my partner is under stress at work, I take some load off his/her shoulders.”*
 - “I help my partner to find a solution when he/she has work-related problems.”*
 - “If my partner had the opportunity to improve or change his/her professional situation, I would give him/her advice.”*

A 4-point response scale ranging from “does not apply to me” to “applies to me perfectly” may be best suited. All items are also presented in Figure 1 (English version) and Figure 2 (German Version) in the Appendix of this technical report.

3. Target group, mode of data collection and estimated length of interview time

The instrument is designed for individuals living in a partnership in which at least one partner is employed at the date of the interview or intends to engage in paid employment in the future. The instrument can be applied to individuals who live together with a partner in the same household and can be targeted at individuals living (permanently) separated from their partner as well. Yet, in the case of living-apart-together relationships a comparison of intra-familial social support provision and receipt is only possible if both partners are interviewed. For instance, this is the case in the *pairfam*, where partners who reside in separate households are also followed-up.

Which items are asked depends on the employment constellation within the partnership. In partnerships in which both partners are employed all items can be asked because both partners can receive and provide support. If one partner is not employed and does not intend to do so only questions on the provision of support can be asked. For someone who intends to work again in near future only items on occupational change can be asked. A partner who is not employed, but has an employed partner, can only answer items on provided support for the working partner.

Data will be best collected by using self-administration modes. If the core mode of data collection is computer assisted personal interviews (CAPI), we suggest implementing a computer-assisted self-administration questionnaire (CASI). Alternatively, pen-and-paper self-completion interviews (PAPI) are also possible. The expected length of interview time varies between 2 and 3 minutes.

4. Implementation of the survey instrument

Our new instrument can only unfold its full potential if it is incorporated into a large-scale longitudinal family survey. Both, the *SOEP* (Wagner et al. 2007) and the *pairfam* (Huinink et al. 2011) provide many advantages but also show some disadvantages.

The *SOEP* already includes a specific set of questions on family and social networks (Diewald et al. 2006). In 2006 and 2011, all respondents were asked to specify up to three/five persons from their strong and weak ties who provide positive or negative emotional support as well as instrumental support. Prior research on social support in couples has derived information on social support within partnerships from this network generator (Golsch 2012; Busch et al. 2013). Yet, there are some shortcomings with respect to this survey instrument for measuring partners' support adequately. It does not allow us to disentangle need for social support and support seeking, reported support receipt and support provision. Further limitations may also result from a lack of measures on the quality of partnerships and intra-couple bargaining processes. At the same time, since the *SOEP* is a general household panel survey it offers a great opportunity to interview both, provider and recipient. Also, the *SOEP* already includes valuable, in-depth information on labour market careers of men and women, their occupations, working conditions and work-related stress and strain. It is therefore promising to implement our new instrument specifically designed to measure different dimensions of work-related social support provision and social support receipt within partnerships.

The *pairfam* as a multi-disciplinary, longitudinal study with focus on partnership and family dynamics includes questions regarding support seeking as well as actually received support by provider and recipient offered within partnerships. The questions on received support focus on dyadic coping of stress though and do not regard work-related situations. Our instrument could be a supplement to these questions. The *pairfam* has the great advantage that it yields rich information on equity and justice within partnerships, work-family conflict, or intentions – while not much space is devoted to these issues in the *SOEP*. Moreover, the *pairfam* allows the study of living-apart-together relationships and job-related mobility. In contrast to the *SOEP*, it is less precise with respect to the partner's occupational career and occupational status, however.

In summary, the potential research areas will depend a great deal on the survey the instrument will be implemented in. The next section provides a short outlook on these research areas.

5. Potential research areas

We identify four potential research areas of interest to researchers who come from a variety of disciplines:

(1) Explanations for differences in social support receipt and social support provision

Integration of our new survey instrument in large scale longitudinal surveys such as the *SOEP* permits further elaboration on couples' employment careers to scrutinize more clearly how individual chances of finding a job or being promoted are associated with social support receipt and social support provision within couples.

Additional research is also necessary to analyse whether and to what extent social support within partnerships is moderated by negotiation patterns and power relations within the couple, an issue that could be addressed with interview data from *pairfam*.

Of particular interest is also examining support in household chores and parenting (time use). Measuring social support provision and receipt within partnerships with our new survey instrument provides the opportunity to relate perceived support, self-reported provided support and actually spent time for supportive behaviour. Relevant information on time use is available in both, the *SOEP* and *pairfam*.

In future research, it would also be interesting to investigate the role that personality traits play in explaining differences in social support receipt and social support provision. Information on personality traits is also available in both, the *SOEP* and *pairfam*.

(2) Mechanisms generating inequality in different areas and phases of life

For future research it is promising to consider different phases of life and examine whether mechanisms generating inequality within partnerships give rise to an accumulation of disadvantages. Future research should be devoted to turning points such as getting married and having children since these may induce stresses and strains within networks, as well as changes of network orientations and network composition. For instance, using information from the network generator provided in the *SOEP* (Diewald et al. 2006), a disaggregated analysis is valuable to inquire into compensation mechanisms, i.e. individual's chances of compensating a support gap within the couple by having more weak ties or strong ties, respectively. The latter analysis is possible in much greater detail when using the *pairfam*, since there network data is collected using name generators (Kneip 2008).

(3) Consequences for an individual's job career

The study by Busch et al. (2013) has demonstrated that instrumental support for career advancement within partnerships is certainly an important factor in both men's and women's chances to promote to top positions. For future research it is promising to consider an array of outcomes across the life course: school-to-work transitions and type of entry-level job, transitions

out of the labour market, labour market re-entry after phases of inactivity and occupational mobility.

Social support within partnerships is likely to affect not only individual job careers, but also people's psychological wellbeing, perceptions, and expectations about their labour market career and social life. In future it could prove fruitful to focus on individual career aspirations and orientations, career plans and expectations, as well as worries about job security, all included in the *SOEP* and *pairfam*.

(4) Consequences for the partnership

Previous research has shown that social support within partnerships also has an effect on social strain (DeLongis et al. 2004), marital quality (Mickelson et al. 2006), satisfaction, and family-to-work spillover (Ferguson et al. 2012; Stevens et al. 2007). These themes deserve further exploration and require longitudinal data. Comprehensive information on the quality of partnerships is provided in the *pairfam*.

6. Conclusion

The aims of this short technical report were to highlight the need for a survey instrument for measurement of work-related social support within partnerships and to provide a set of survey questions. Pilot testing of this instrument will need to be done. Implementation of the instrument in the *SOEP* or *pairfam* appears particularly promising and we hope that our instrument will be employed in near the future.

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Appendix

Figure 1: Items for measurement of social support within partnerships (English version)

	does not apply to me	does rather not apply to me	partially applies to me	applies to me perfectly
1. It is important for me to talk to my partner about work-related issues.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. When I have to make an important decision about my professional future, I ask my partner for advice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. My partner shows recognition for what I do at work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. When I have work-related problems, my partner listens to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. If I had the opportunity to improve or change my professional situation, my partner would encourage me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. When I am under stress at work, my partner takes some load off my shoulders.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. My partner helps me to find a solution, when I have work-related problems.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. If I had the opportunity to improve or change my professional situation, my partner would give me helpful advice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	does not apply to me	does rather not apply to me	partially applies to me	applies to me perfectly
9. I show my partner recognition for what he/she does at work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. When my partner has work-related problems, I listen to him/her.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. If my partner had the opportunity to improve or change his/her professional situation, I would encourage him/her.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. When my partner is under stress at work, I take some load off his/her shoulders.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. I help my partner to find a solution when he/she has work-related problems.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. If my partner had the opportunity to improve or change his/her professional situation, I would give him/her advice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 2: Items for measurement of social support within partnerships (German version)

		trifft nicht zu	trifft eher nicht zu	trifft eher zu	trifft voll zu
1.	Es ist mir wichtig, mit meinem Partner über Dinge zu sprechen, die mit meiner beruflichen Tätigkeit zusammenhängen.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	Wenn ich einmal eine wichtige Entscheidung über meine berufliche Zukunft zu treffen habe, frage ich meinen Partner um Rat.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Mein Partner zeigt mir Anerkennung für meine berufliche Tätigkeit.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	Wenn bei meiner beruflichen Tätigkeit einmal Probleme auftauchen, hört mein Partner mir zu.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	Wenn ich die Möglichkeit hätte, mich beruflich weiterzuentwickeln oder zu verändern, ermutigt mich mein Partner dabei.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	Wenn ich mal beruflich unter Stress stehe, hält mein Partner mir den Rücken frei.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	Wenn bei meiner beruflichen Tätigkeit einmal Probleme auftauchen, hilft mein Partner mir eine Lösung zu finden.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	Wenn ich die Möglichkeit hätte, mich beruflich weiterzuentwickeln oder zu verändern, gibt mein Partner mir hilfreiche Ratschläge.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		trifft nicht zu	trifft eher nicht zu	trifft eher zu	trifft voll zu
9.	Ich zeige meinem Partner Anerkennung für seine berufliche Tätigkeit.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	Wenn bei der beruflichen Tätigkeit meines Partners einmal Probleme auftauchen, höre ich ihm zu.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11.	Wenn mein Partner die Möglichkeit hätte, sich beruflich weiterzuentwickeln oder zu verändern, ermutige ich ihn dabei.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12.	Wenn mein Partner mal beruflich unter Stress steht, dann halte ich ihm den Rücken frei.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13.	Ich helfe meinem Partner eine Lösung zu finden, wenn bei seiner beruflichen Tätigkeit einmal Probleme auftauchen.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14.	Wenn mein Partner die Möglichkeit hätte, sich beruflich weiterzuentwickeln oder zu verändern, gebe ich ihm Ratschläge.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Previously published SFB 882 Technical Reports:

Meinert, Julia & Sünkel, Zara (2013): *Die Entstehung und Entwicklung devianten und delinquenten Verhaltens im Lebensverlauf und ihre Bedeutung für soziale Ungleichheitsprozesse: Methodendokumentation der Schülerbefragungen in Dortmund und Nürnberg. Erste Erhebung 2012*, SFB 882 Technical Report Series, No. 01, DFG Research Center (SFB) 882 From Heterogeneities to Inequalities, Bielefeld.

Pausch, Stephanie; Harald, Julia; Schunk Reinhard & Jacobebbinghaus, Peter (2013): *Methodenbericht Betriebsbefragung Projekt B3: Wechselwirkungen zwischen Verwirklichungschancen im Berufs- und Privatleben*, SFB 882 Technical Report Series, No. 02, DFG Research Center (SFB) 882 From Heterogeneities to Inequalities, Bielefeld.