

Time with children – (why) does social class (not) matter?

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Background

- Time that parents devote to child(ren) is important, as kids benefit from parental interaction in terms of acquisition of cognitive, social, emotional and linguistic skills - parental involvement is essential to children's good social, psychological and educational outcomes (Craig et al 2014).
- Parents are spending a lot more time with their children today than they used to. However, findings also reveal an increasing class (educational) gap in time spent with children, further deepening childhood inequalities.



1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Does Estonian parents' level of education make a difference when it comes to time spent with child(ren)?
- What is the role of parents' labour market attachment with regard to this relationship?



2. THEORETICAL APPROACHES – Cultural logic or institutional effects?

- The „way“ parents spend time with children has lasting effects on their future careers and family lives (Lareau 2011)
- Family level factors (parents' education and socio-economic status) can be more important than the influence of educational institutions (Wheeler 2017)
- Social class differences in intellectual, emotional and behavioral development emerge in early childhood, before primary schooling starts (Cassen and Kingdon 2007; Goodman, Gregg and Washbrook 2011; Iwrin 2009)



Educational gaps in parental time:

- **total amount of time spent with children differs** (Guryan et al 2008; Gauthier et al 2001; Hill & Stafford, 1980; Leibowitz, 1977)
- **type of parental time differs** – more individual time with a child, more shared time with the whole family (both parents present) (Vinopal and Gershenson 2017)
- **focus and composition of parental time differs:**
 - a) focus on developmental activities (Sayer et al 2004)
 - b) match the activities to children's developmental needs (Kalil et al 2012)



3. ESTONIAN COUNTRY CONTEXT

- Low levels of gender inequality in terms of access to the labour market
 - In 2016, 81% of men and 73% of women aged 20-64 years were active in the LM (Eurostat), mostly full-time
- High rates of labour market participation for women with children:
 - 79% of mothers with children aged 3-5 years work (OECD 2014);
 - **HOWEVER**, the maternal employment rate for women with children under the age of 3 only around 20%



- Time devoted to childcare highly gendered:
 - Parents entitled to a care leave for up to 3 years, first 1,5 years are covered by social insurance (100% of last working year's earnings).
 - Although care leave could be taken by either parent, it is mostly taken by women (less than 10 % of men take some parental leave)
- Extensive use of child-care institutions
 - **For children under 3:** 30% in formal child care (EU average 33%) (Eurostat)
 - **From age 3 to compulsory school age:** 93% in early childhood education institutions (Eurostat)
 - **3-6 years old children spend circa 40 hours a week in formal child care** (EU average 28 hours) (Statistics Estonia)



3. HYPOTHESIS

- *More educated parents spend more time with children, however, **the effect of education in Estonia expected to be rather modest***
- *The **educational gap** exists for both mothers and fathers, however, **the effect is expected to be stronger for fathers;***
- *The **gap** is expected to be **bigger** when it comes to **educational activities compared to care activities;***
- *The **gap** is expected to be **clearer with regard to time spent with children in the weekend** compared to time spent during working days.*



4. DATA

Quantitative data:

1. *Estonian Time-Use Survey 2010:*

- Effective sample: couples who have at least one child under 10 years; N=495 households; Couple data
- ***Dependent variable:*** time spent with child(ren) on a) care activities, b) on educative activities (playing, reading, teaching); main and side-activity; working day and weekend; calculated from time-use diaries
- ***Central independent variable: education*** (ISCED 1-2; ISCED 3-4; ISCED 5-6)
- Controls: age, gender, ethnicity, employment status, working hours, household composition, 'outsourcing' of early care



Qualitative data:

- 42 semi-structured interviews with mothers and fathers of Estonian-speaking families living in Tallinn
- Both middle class and working class parents with children aged 3-6 years included (children who are of kindergarten age)
- Narrative discourse analysis performed

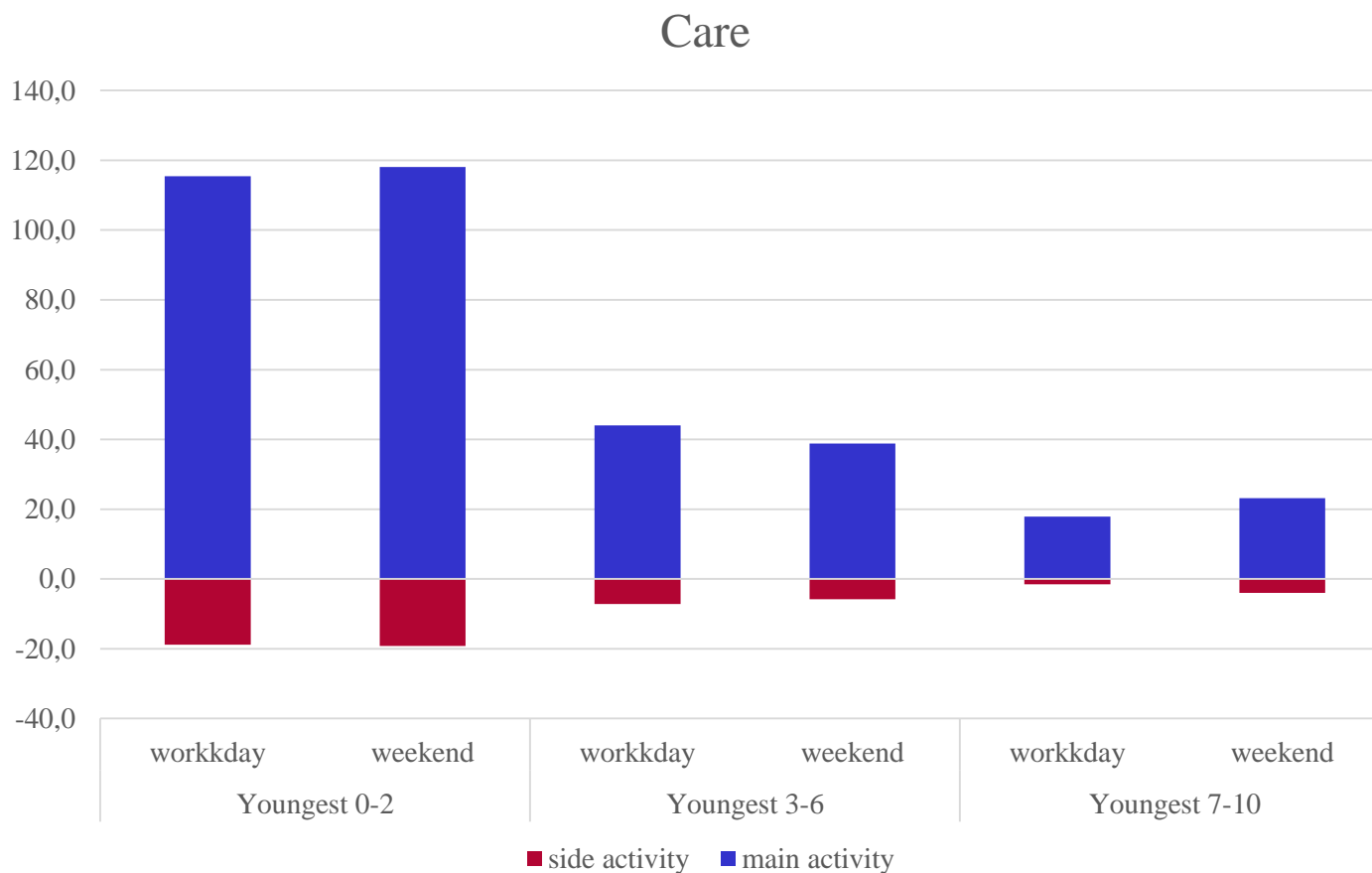


RESULTS

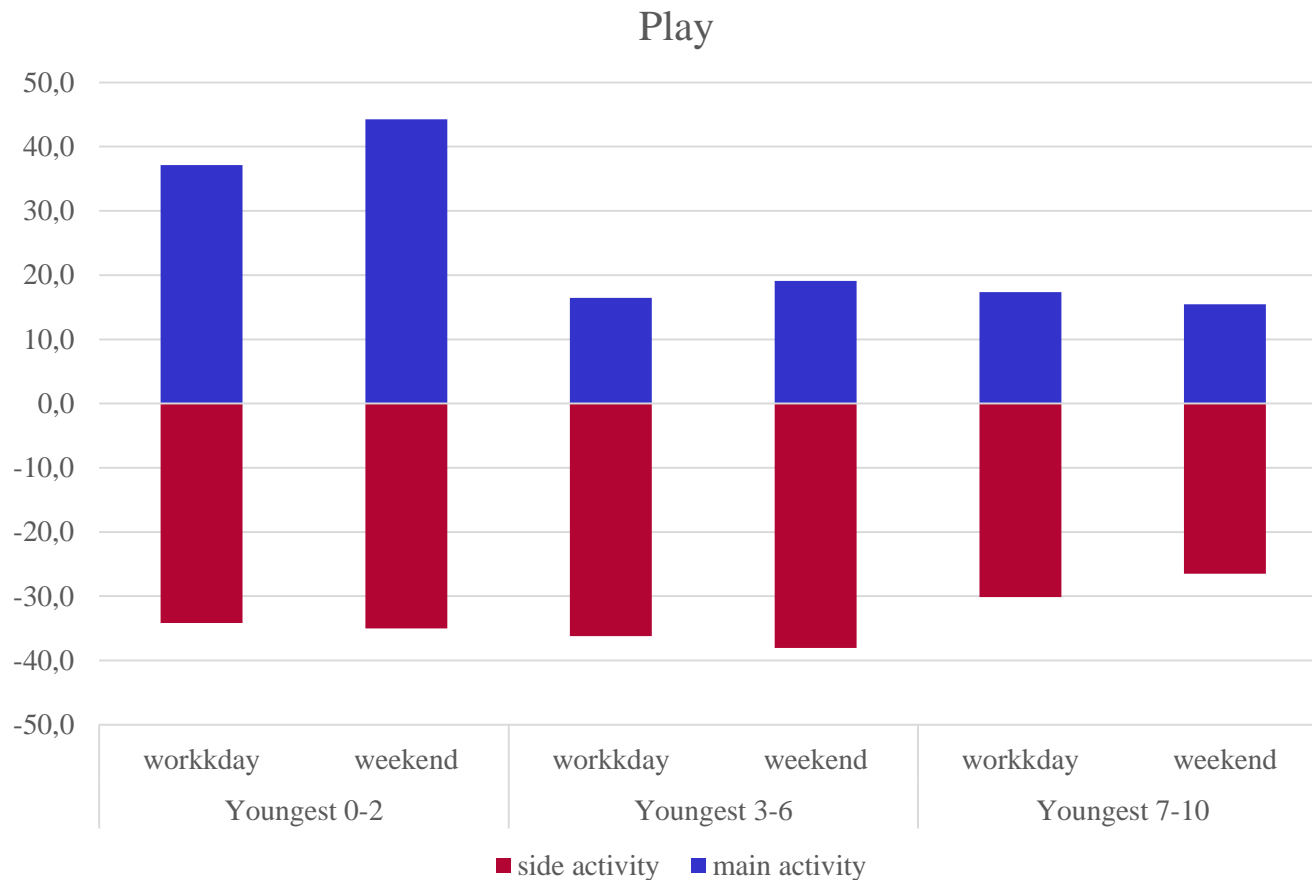


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Time with children: care, main and side activity

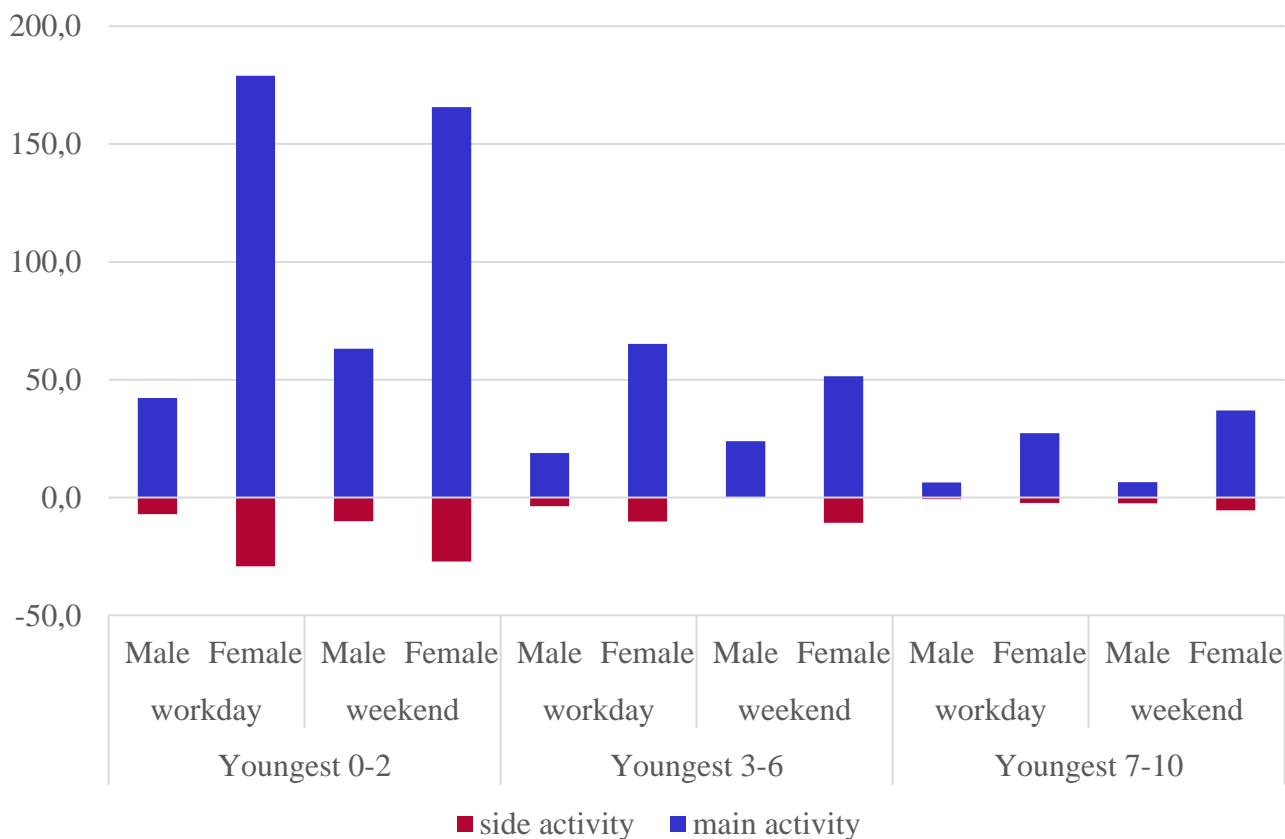


Time with children: play/interaction, main and side activity

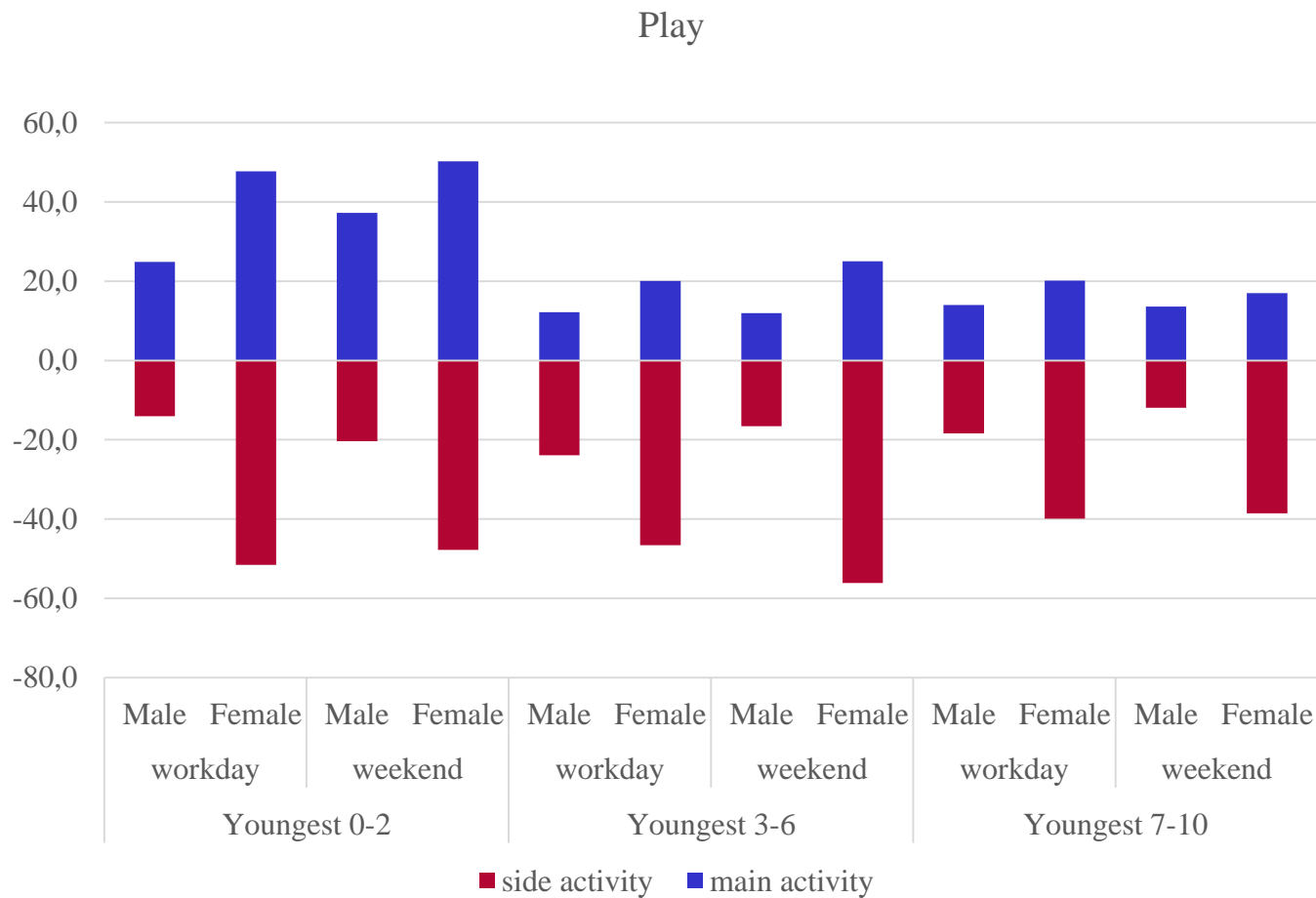


Time with children: care, main and side activity, by gender

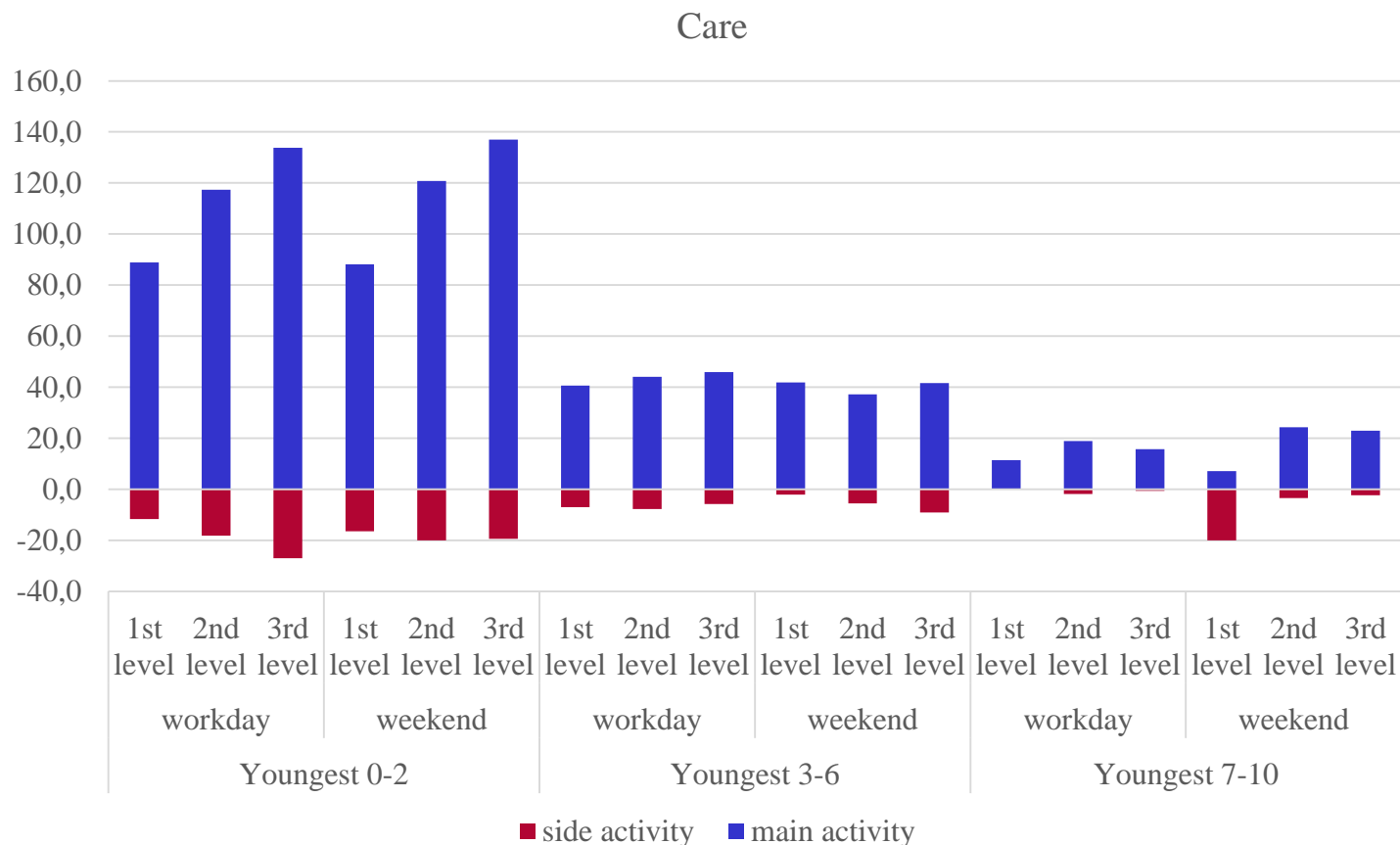
Care



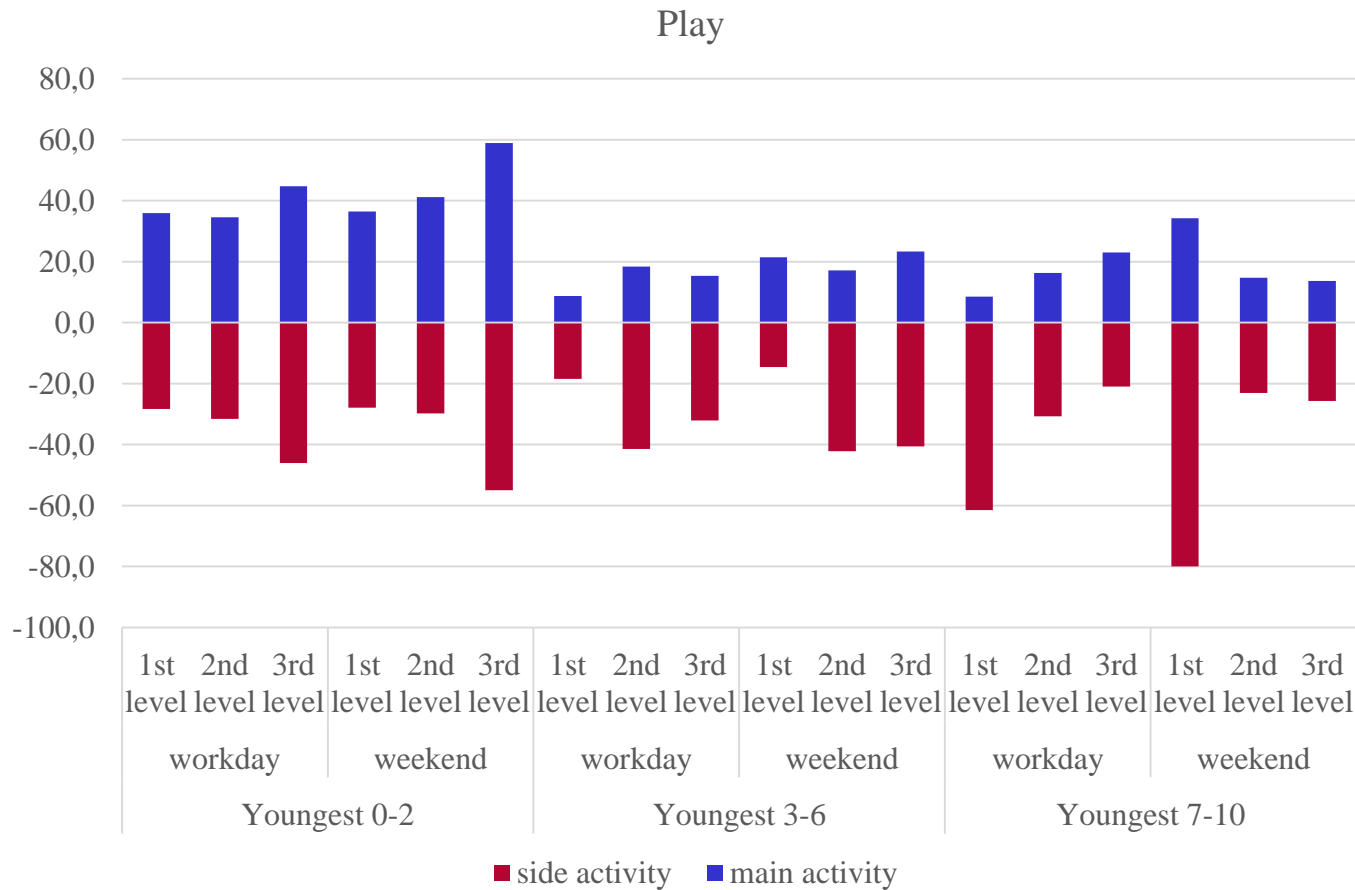
Time with children: play, main and side activity, by gender



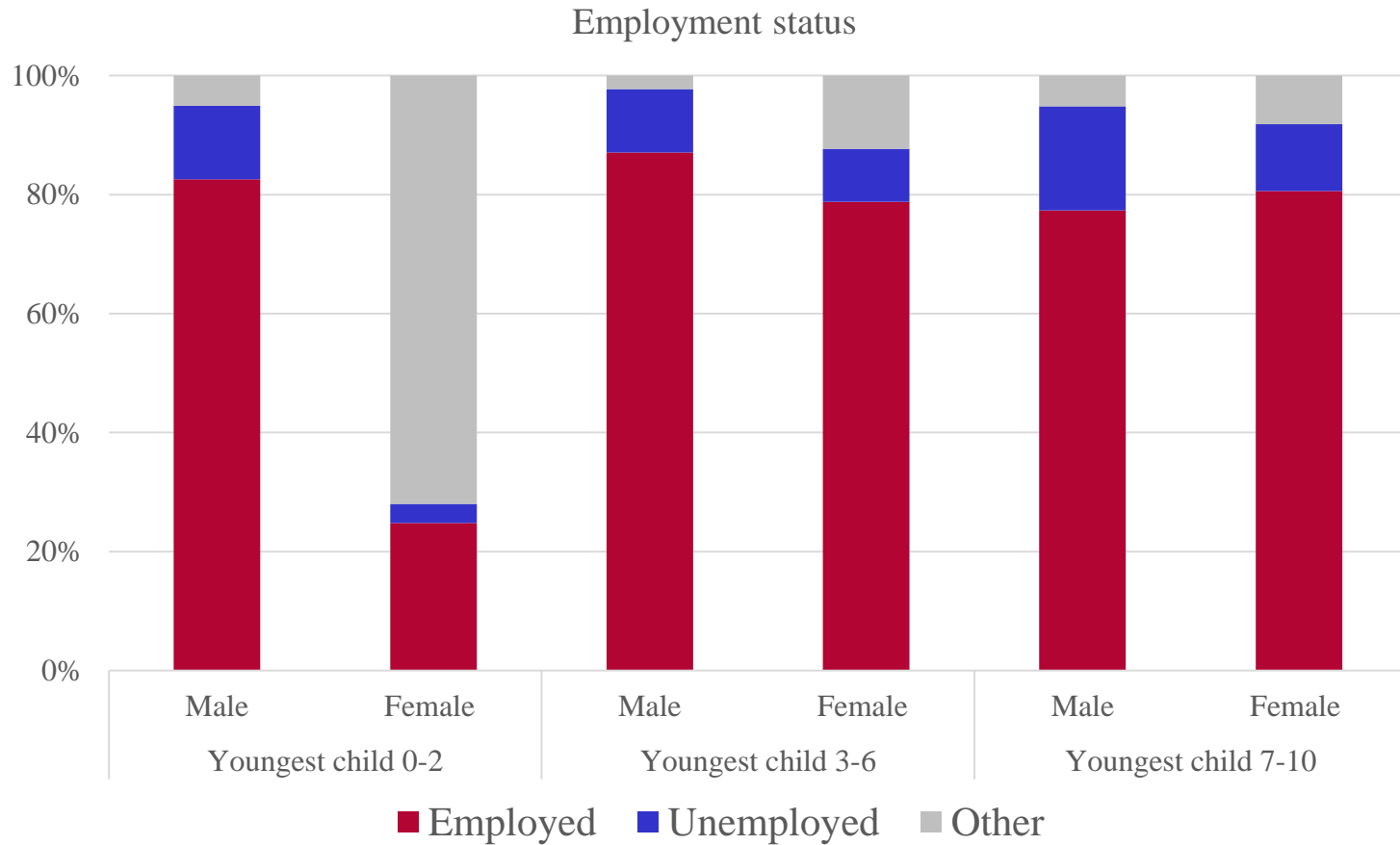
Time with children: care, main and side activity, by education



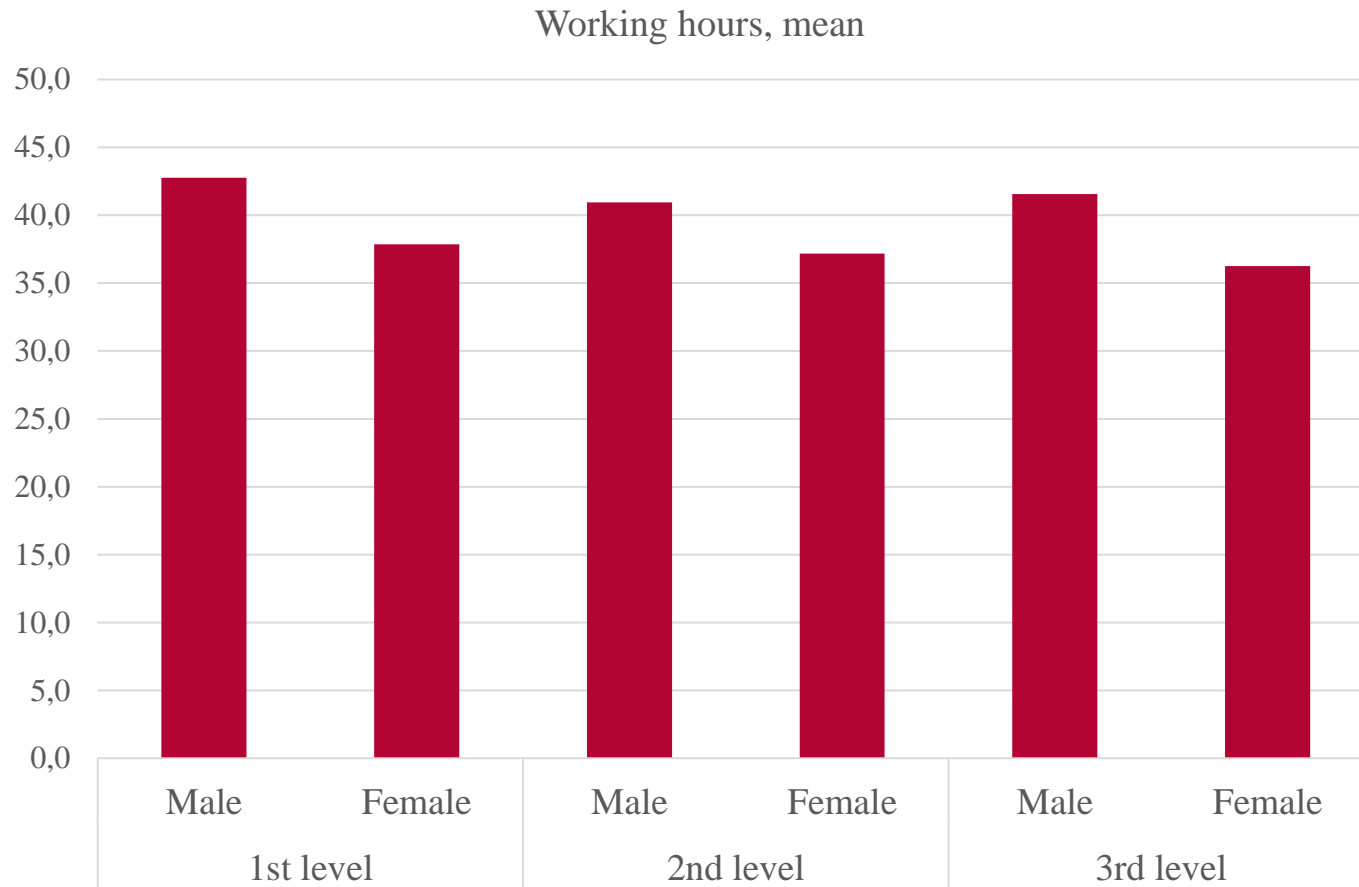
Time with children: play, main and side activity, by education



Employment status, by gender and age of the youngest child



Working hours by gender and education



From regression analysis:

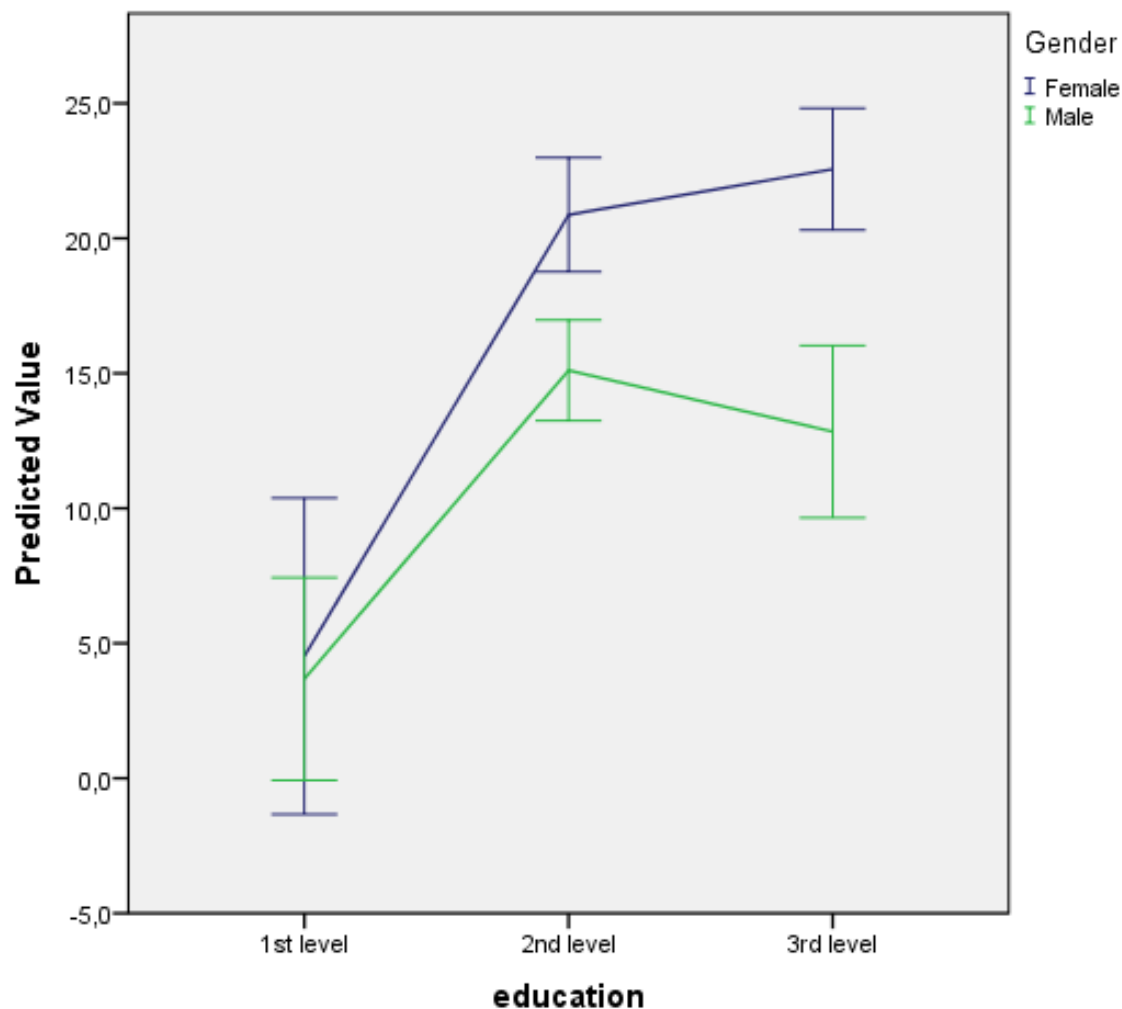
- There is almost no main effect of education on time spent with children.
- Significant differences:
 - Less educated parents (compared to more educated parents) spend significantly **less time on play as a main activity during working days,**
 - **on play as a side activity during working days**
 - **and on care as a side activity on the weekends**
- The effect remains significant when controlling for individual, household, employment, partner and the outsourcing of early age care characteristics



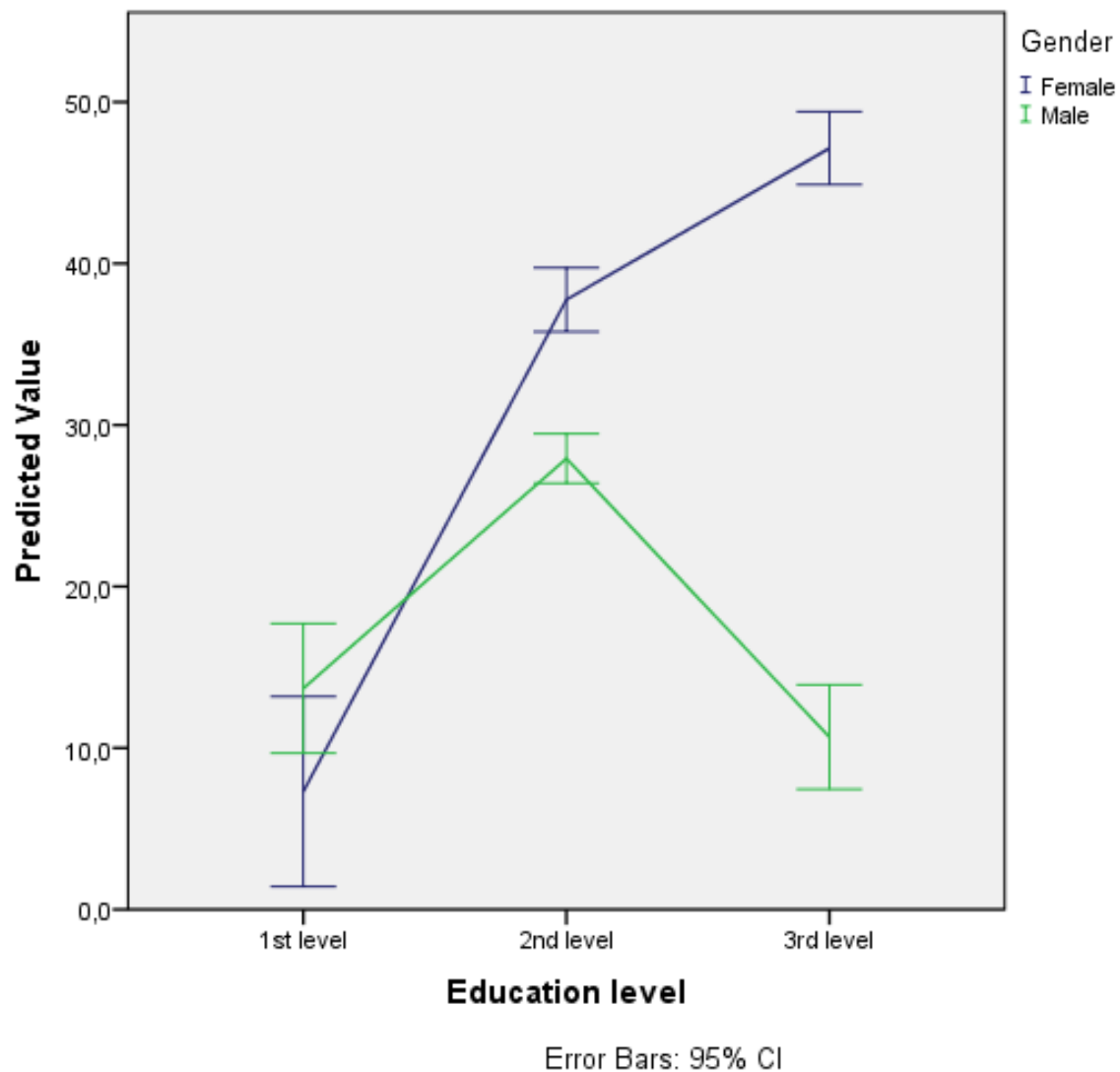
- The main differences are related to gender – women do considerably more than men when it comes to time spent on raising (caring, educating) children
- Some interaction effects with gender can be observed:
 - For men, the effect of education on time spent on playing with children as a side activity during working days is weaker compared to women (**for women, education makes a bigger difference**)
- Thus, contrary to our expectations, the education effect is more likely found among women than men, although it still often remains modest



Effect on play as the main activity on a working day : more educated parents spent more time on this activity compared to lower educated parents, both for men and women

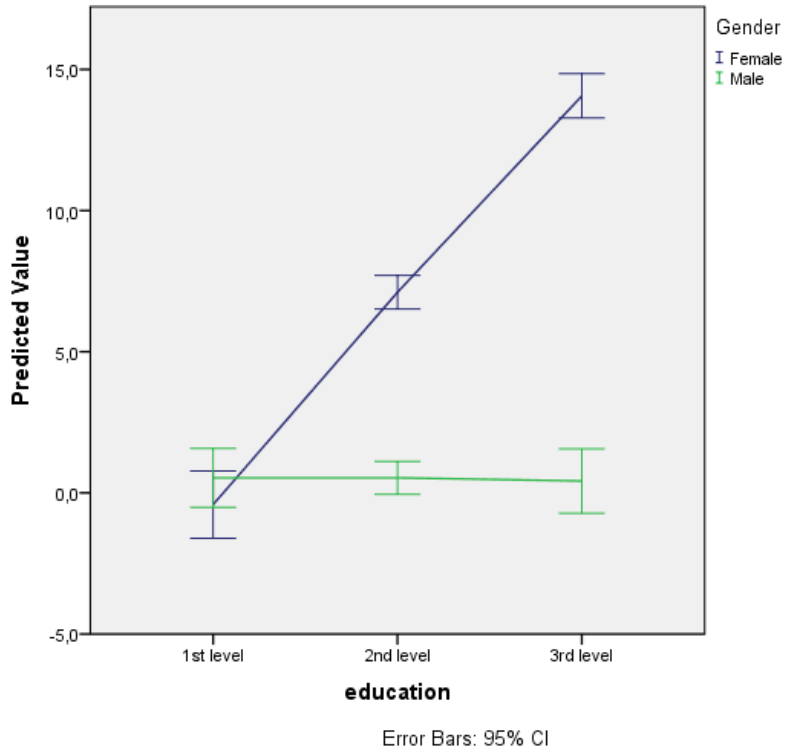


Effect on play as a side activity on a working day: more educated parents spent more time on this activity compared to lower educated parents, both for men and women

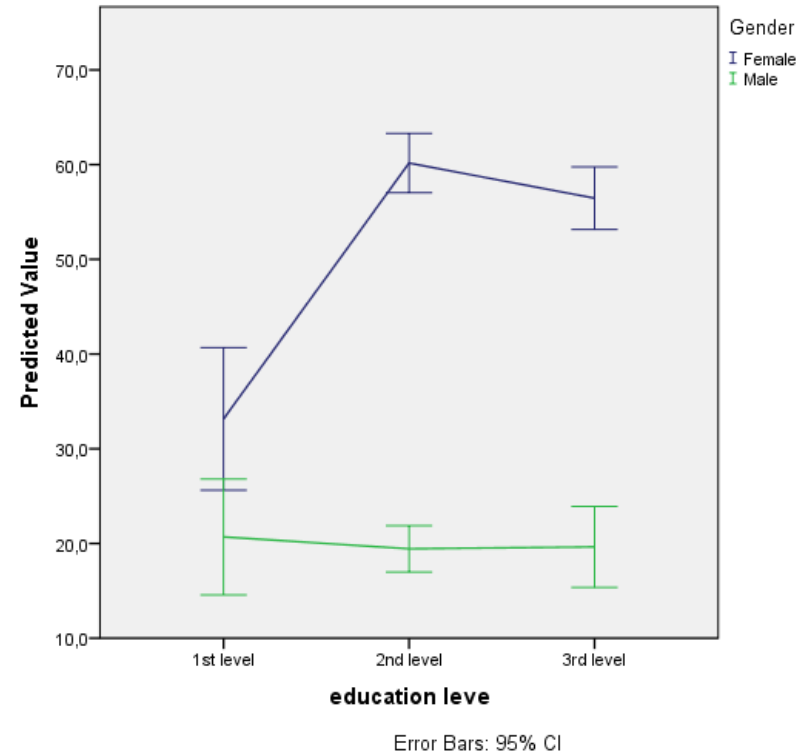


Weekend, side activity

Care



Play



Qualitative study: working class parents' irregular working hours

- *I: Mhmh. But what happens during the weekends?*
- ***Ruth (3-yr-old son):** There is this option, lets say, that my partner's schedule runs into the weekends as well and let's say that if the child is sick, for example, then I'd do it this way that if my man is at home, I do not take the sick leave, but I do try to change my schedule. They let we do this from time to time. Then I am working the weekends as well. /.../ And then yes, if my man is working, I'll be home with the child and then the other way around. [whispering] This is not nice at all.*
- *I: So this is not nice...?*
- ***Ruth:** No. **Because it is extremely exhausting.**/.../*



Qualitative study: middle class parents' extracurricular ambitions

- **Felix (3-yr-old and 5-yr-old sons):** *Of course they [extracurricular activities] take time away from the child. Well, at the moment these judo lessons, they happen during the kindergarten day, so he just exchanges his play time with that. /.../ But if he did something similar after his day at the kindergarten, during the evening, then well... I don't know if you are supposed to fill up your child's day like this. I **have read some articles about how children nowadays have way too structured childhoods** /.../. So yes, you're not supposed to overdo it. You cannot plan hobby activities so that they would take up all of your child's time. **Maybe you are supposed to choose one, maybe two**. And well, yes, the time-use would be reasonable.*



To sum up...

- *The **education effect rather modest** (as expected);*
- *However, if there is an effect, it appears **more in the area of play** (interactive activity) than care (as expected and also found by previous research);*
- *Different results when looking at main and side activities – more educational differences in side-activities, which could be due to „child-time“ taking place after working hours and during other household activities;*
 - ***Education effect also clearer in the case of side-activities***



Discussion

- *Parents' full-time employment and children's full-time outsourcing leaves little space for educational differences (especially when quantitatively measured);*
- *„Time with children“ often becomes a 'side activity' after the working day;*
- *Still, if any parents' educational effects appear, they are mostly related to educational activities/play with children;*
- *Another trend appearing (cannot be measured with time-use data) is the parents' use of extra-curricular activities*



Thank you for your attention!
