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Men's working-time flexibility and transition to 2nd birth: Evidence for couples in Germany

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Abstract: Advances in information and communication technologies have accelerated the diffusion of flexible working-time arrangements, with important implications for work–family reconciliation and fertility. Yet flexible schedules are not uniform. Employee-oriented flexibility, which grants workers control over when they work, differs fundamentally from employer-oriented flexibility, characterised by unpredictable hours and employer-driven schedule changes. These forms are unevenly distributed across social groups and may have contrasting consequences for family formation. While previous research has focused largely on women and employee-oriented flexibility, much less is known about how men's working-time flexibility—particularly employer-oriented forms—shapes fertility behaviour. This paper examines the association between fathers' working-time flexibility and the transition to a second birth in Germany. Using longitudinal data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) for 2003–2019 and applying event history analysis, we analyse couples with one child, adopting a couple-level perspective that accounts for mothers' employment status and schedule flexibility. The results show no overall association between men's flexible schedules and second births in baseline models. However, important heterogeneity emerges once a couple's characteristics are considered. Among dual-earner couples, fathers' employer-oriented working-time flexibility significantly reduces the likelihood of a second birth, particularly when mothers have fixed schedules. In contrast, employee-oriented flexibility is positively associated with second births, but only in male breadwinner couples. Further analyses reveal that these relationships also vary by men's socio-economic status. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of distinguishing between types of flexibility and considering couple-level contexts when assessing how labour market changes influence fertility.

Keywords: working-time flexibility, fertility, flexible hours, Germany, GSOEP

JEL codes: J12, J13, J16, J22

1. Introduction

Advances in technology and the growing use of information and communication technologies (ICT) have brought substantial changes to the labour market, with implications that extend far beyond the workplace. These developments reshape family life by altering how paid work and care are organised and, consequently, how individuals make fertility-related decisions (Matysiak & Vignoli, 2024). One important aspect of these changes is the flexibilisation of working schedules. Flexible working-time is becoming increasingly common among workers; yet they encompass two distinct forms that are differentially distributed across social strata and have different implications for workers and their families. Employee-oriented working-time flexibility (also called schedule or working-time autonomy) is typically described as an opportunity to determine one's own start and end times, compress or extend work hours and choose when to work (Chung & van der Horst, 2020). It is usually available to highly skilled workers and is often framed as a valuable resource that supports work-family reconciliation (Voydanoff, 2004). In contrast, employer-oriented working-time flexibility arises when workers are required to adjust to the uncertain schedules and last-minute changes imposed by the employer (Korunka & Kubicek, 2017). Although common in low-skilled occupations (Zapf & Weber, 2017), it is also observed among professionals and managers who are expected to respond to rapidly changing organisational needs or client demands (Kałamucka et al., 2025).

These two different types of working-time flexibility can have substantially different consequences for work-and-family reconciliation (Golden & Kim, 2017) and thus may have different consequences for fertility. Employee-oriented flexibility can reduce time-related pressure, facilitate the combination of paid work and childcare, and buffer work demands (Demerouti et al., 2014; Shockley & Allen, 2007), thereby potentially supporting childbearing. Employer-oriented flexibility, by contrast, implies unpredictability and time-related pressure, which can intensify work–family interference and compromise planning required for managing daily childcare routines (Kaduk et al., 2019). Understanding how different forms of flexibility shape childbearing behaviours is essential for comprehending how labour market developments affect childbearing, given the rapid diffusion of flexible working-time arrangements and persistent social inequalities in their prevalence.

Past empirical research has examined only fragments of this broad picture. Studies on fertility have focused predominantly on women and their employee-oriented flexibility, showing that ability to control their own schedules may support childbearing among highly educated mothers by easing work–family tensions (Begall & Mills, 2011; Bratsberg & Walther,

2024; Wang & Dong, 2024). For childless women, however, schedule autonomy may instead encourage career development and lead to motherhood postponement (Osiewalska & Matysiak, 2025). Although men's growing involvement in childcare (Pailhé et al., 2021; Sullivan et al., 2014) and the rapid expansion of both types of flexible working-time among fathers (Baxter, 2019), much less is known about men's flexibility and fertility. On the one hand, employee-oriented flexibility may enable fathers to become more involved in childcare (Kuang et al., 2025) easing work-family tensions experienced by partners and potentially facilitating family enlargement. On the other hand, however, men more often than women hold jobs characterised by employer-oriented flexibility, which is likely marked by unpredictable hours, last-minute schedule changes, or overtime. These conditions increase the spillover from paid work to family (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020; Kaduk et al., 2019) and ultimately may hinder childbearing.

This paper contributes to the ongoing discussion on flexible schedules and fertility by examining the relationship between fathers' employee- and employer-oriented working-time flexibility and the transition to a second birth. We focus on couples who already have one child, as men's working schedule may play an important role, especially when childcare demands are high. We make at least three contributions. First of all, we extend the perspective to encompass both employee- and employer-oriented working schedules, recognising that they can affect childbearing differently. Secondly, we provide evidence on men's working-time flexibility, complementing previous research which focused mostly on women's schedules. Evidence on the role of men's flexibility in fertility is increasingly needed, as men more and more often undertake employee-oriented schedules (McCrate 2012), while employer-oriented working-time flexibility is even more prevalent among fathers than mothers (Kałamucka et al., 2025). In light of the central role of men's working conditions in couples' fertility decisions (Juni & Vitali, 2025) these developments indicate that men's working-time flexibility constitutes an important, and previously underexamined, determinant of fertility. Finally, we extend the perspective by adopting a couple-level approach. We distinguish between households where the female partner is not working versus those in which she is employed, taking into account the extent of this employment (part-time versus full-time) and the flexibility of her working time. This distinction is important because the mechanisms linking fathers' flexibility to fertility may vary depending on whether both partners face job demands or whether the mother's full-time caregiving buffers couples-level work pressures.

Our study is based in Germany - a country in which flexible working-time arrangements have become widespread in the labour market over the past decades (Jacobi, 2023); however, the majority of families still adhere to traditional gender roles (Dechant & Rinklake, 2016).

In 2019, around 40% of German employees reported having some control over their working schedules (Backhaus et al., 2020). At the same time, the utilisation of employer-driven flexible workin-time remains high, especially among men (Wanger & Zapf, 2022). This entails the culture of male employees working full-time and being accessible to the organisation without any constraints relating to family time (Bernhardt & Bünning, 2017).

We make use of the data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) for the period of 2003-2019. By performing event history analysis, we find evidence that, for dual-earner couples, employer-oriented working-time flexibility decreases the likelihood of a second child being born, particularly when the woman has a fixed schedule. Furthermore, we observed a positive relationship between men's employee-oriented flexible schedules and the transition to having a second child, but only among male breadwinner couples. The heterogeneity analysis reveals that not only couple characteristics matter, but also men's socio-economic status.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Men's paid work and childbearing

Labour force participation of individuals remains an important factor in contemporary debates about childbearing. Early economic theories, most notably the specialisation theory (Becker, 1981), proposed that gendered divisions of labour maximise household utility. Within this framework, men's earnings facilitate childbearing, while women's employment generates opportunity costs and leads to fertility postponement and smaller family size. As women's employment has become more widespread, many of them indeed faced the well-documented double burden of combining paid work and unpaid caregiving and opted for having fewer children (McDonald, 2000). In these new circumstances, sustaining family formation required higher participation of men in domestic duties, especially among those who already have at least one child, to ease the work-family tensions experienced by mothers (Goldscheider et al., 2015).

Yet higher involvement of men in childcare may also generate new tensions: employed fathers are increasingly exposed to work–family conflict as they need to juggle employers' requirements of intensive employment and their own or partners' expectations to be more involved at home (Matysiak & Nitsche, 2016; Okun & Raz-Yurovich, 2019). In this context, not only men's income but also their working conditions - including the degree of control over their working hours, schedule predictability and flexibility embedded in their jobs - have become an important factor in shaping childbearing decisions, as they can influence men's

involvement at home and either alleviate or exacerbate work-family conflict experienced by partners. Consequently, flexibility of men's working time may constitute an important, yet often overlooked, factor in fertility studies.

2.2 Employee- and employer- working-time flexibility

Flexibility in working time is not a uniform concept. Rather than representing a single arrangement, flexible work schedules typically take two qualitatively distinct forms. Employee-oriented flexibility is often described as an opportunity to obtain the start and end times one needs, compress or extend work hours and choose when to work and is often provided as a benefit to the most valued employees in high-status occupations (Chung & van der Horst, 2020). It thus typically grants workers genuine control over their hours and can facilitate work–family balance (Kelly et al., 2011).

Employer-oriented flexibility, in turn, is a worker's adjustment to the uncertain schedules and last-minute changes imposed by the employer or clients. It shifts temporal uncertainty onto employees and restricts their ability to plan daily life. It may occur in both the lower and upper segments of the labour market (Kałamucka et al., 2025). At the lower end, it is typical of low-wage precarious employment, in which workers face irregular and employer-decided working hours or on-call arrangements (Lambert et al., 2012; Swanberg et al., 2014; Lehdonvirta, 2018). They have limited bargaining power and must adjust to fluctuating consumer demand—often by taking on several jobs, remaining available, or accepting volatile hours to make ends meet (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020; Danziger & Boots, 2008). At the upper end of the occupational hierarchy, employer-oriented flexibility appears in professional and managerial positions, which often require high availability and responsiveness to clients (Gerstel & Clawson, 2018; Kaduk et al., 2019; Green et al., 2022). In such jobs, employer-oriented flexibility frequently coexists with employee-oriented autonomy and implies trading control over work schedule for high work intensity (Chung & Tijdens, 2013; Kałamucka et al, 2025).

2.3 Men's flexible working-time arrangements and second birth

According to the job demands-resources model by Bakker & Demerouti (2007), high work demands increase the risk of experiencing work-to-family conflicts, particularly when they coincide with high family demands. This is particularly pertinent given that men experience more work-to-family conflict than women after becoming parents (Shockley et al., 2025). Resources such as employee-oriented flexible schedules can mitigate the consequences of high work demands during such periods and encourage fathers to utilise them. As involved

fatherhood becomes more widespread (Bataille & Hyland, 2023; Pailhé et al., 2021), in particular in dual earner couples, some men may use employee-oriented flexible working-time to care for their children (Borgkvist, 2022; Kuang et al, 2025), and intentionally choose non-standard working hours to accommodate childcare (Kim, 2020). This can be particularly helpful when children are young, as they require the most care time (Garsztka, 2024), and employees with preschool and school-age children experience the most work-family conflict (Allen & Finkelstein, 2014). All in all, fathers who can utilise employee-oriented flexibility may participate in childcare and family obligations to a greater extent or experience weaker work-to-family conflict than men without access to flexible work schedules. At the same time, mothers whose partners use flexible schedules to participate more in childcare also experience less family-to-work conflict (Nagase & Brinton, 2017). In fact, it was found that women whose partners have a flexible schedule return to paid employment more quickly after their first birth than women whose partners have rigid working hours (Büchler & Lutz, 2021; Lott, 2019). As a result, men's use of employee-oriented flexibility may be positively related to second birth rates, as it reduces work-to-family conflict for fathers and family-to-work conflict for their female partners.

H1: Couples in which the male partner has employee-oriented working-time flexibility are more likely to transition to a 2nd birth than those in which the male partner has rigid working hours; that is, the relationship between employee-oriented flexibility and the transition to a second birth is positive.

Nonetheless, fathers may not only have access to employee-oriented flexibility but may also be exposed to employer-driven scheduling demands, whereby their working time must be adjusted to organisational requirements or client needs. In this context, such an employer-oriented flexibility constitutes rather a demand than a resource. Namely, fathers with employer-oriented flexibility face more unpredictability and stress (Kaduk et al., 2019), which likely intensifies the work-to-family conflict they experience as well as the family-to-work conflict experienced by their female partners who have to adjust to the changing work schedules of their male partners (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020). Such a working-time arrangement may be particularly difficult for couples with young children who face high time-sensitive caregiving demands. As a result, men's employer-oriented flexibility may undermine the conditions necessary for family enlargement and hinder couples' transition to a second birth.

H2: Couples in which the male partner is exposed to employer-oriented working-time flexibility are less likely to transition to a second birth than couples in which the male partner

has rigid working hours; that is, the relationship between men's employer-oriented working-time flexibility and the transition to a second birth is negative.

2.4 Couple context

The two types of men's working-time flexibility can also affect childbearing differently among male-breadwinner couples and dual-earner families where the working schedules of both spouses must be coordinated (Scheffel, 2010). Germany had long been characterised by a male-breadwinner model, in which men worked full-time, and women gave up employment after they became mothers (Dechant & Rinklake, 2016; Matysiak & Steinmetz, 2008). Over the past several decades, there has been a notable increase in the prevalence of dual-earner couples, though mothers predominantly work part-time (Berghammer & Milkie, 2021). These shifts imply growing diversity in how couples combine paid work and childcare responsibilities.

In dual-earner couples, the organisation of paid work and childcare requires substantially greater coordination than in male-breadwinner families, where caregiving responsibilities are typically concentrated on the non-employed mother (Shockey et al., 2025). These coordination demands are particularly pronounced when mothers are employed full-time (Carriero, 2009). In such contexts, fathers' access to employee-oriented working-time flexibility can represent a key resource. When fathers are able to adjust the timing of their work, they can compensate for mothers' restricted availability, ease each partner's time pressures, and enable a more balanced division of childcare (Kuang et al., 2025). By alleviating work–family conflict and enhancing couples' capacity to reconcile paid work with caregiving, men's employee-oriented working-time flexibility is therefore especially likely to facilitate the transition to a second child in dual-earner families, and most strongly so when mothers work full-time. We thus formulate the following hypotheses:

H3a: Fathers' employee-oriented working-time flexibility is more positively associated with the transition to a second birth in dual-earner than in male breadwinner couples.

H3b: The positive association between fathers' employee-oriented working-time flexibility and the transition to a second birth is strongest in dual-earner couples in which the mother works full-time.

Men's employer-oriented working-time flexibility, by contrast, may substantially constrain couples' ability to organise childcare and household responsibilities, particularly in families in which both partners are employed. Fathers' unpredictable schedules may limit

partners' capacity to plan care arrangements in advance and are likely to increase work–family conflict for both working partners (Harknett et al., 2022) Within dual-earner couples, these constraints vary by mothers' employment intensity (Carriero, 2009). When mothers work part-time, they may still retain some capacity to absorb unexpected changes in their partner's working hours, because they have more time resources free of professional obligations which they can mobilise. When mothers work full-time, however, their opportunities to compensate for partner's schedule instability are far more limited, rendering employer-oriented working-time flexibility especially demanding. By contrast, in male-breadwinner couples, where mothers are not employed, changes in fathers' working time can be more easily accommodated by the female partner through the reorganisation of domestic routines. The following hypotheses are formulated:

H4a: Fathers' employer-oriented working-time flexibility is more negatively associated with the transition to a second birth among dual-earner couples than among male breadwinner couples.

H4b: The negative association between fathers' employer-oriented working-time flexibility and the transition to a second birth is strongest in dual-earner couples in which the mother works full-time.

Finally, the implications of men's working-time flexibility for couples' fertility decisions may depend not only on whether women are employed, but also on the degree of flexibility in women's own work schedules. In dual earner couples in which mothers lack employee-oriented flexibility - because their work schedules are either rigid or subject to employer-oriented flexibility - constraints on coordinating paid work and care are particularly strong (Grönlund & Öun, 2022). Under these conditions, men's employee-oriented flexibility may become especially valuable, allowing partners to adjust to childcare opening hours or unexpected family demands. At the same time, men's employer-oriented flexibility will be particularly challenging in these couples, as mothers will not be able to absorb shocks caused by the demands of their partners' jobs, such as last-minute overtime, irregular working hours, or client-driven schedule changes. Taken together, these considerations lead to the following hypotheses::

H5: Fathers' employee-oriented working-time flexibility is particularly positively associated with the transition to a second birth in dual-earner couples in which the female partner either has rigid working hours or has employer-oriented working-time flexibility.

H6: Fathers' employer-oriented working-time flexibility is particularly strongly negatively associated with the transition to a second birth in dual-earner couples in which the female partner either has rigid working hours or has employer-oriented flexibility.

3. Data and Method

3.1 Sample

We use data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), an annual longitudinal household survey conducted since 1984. The analysis is restricted to couples observed between 2003 and 2019, as information on working-time flexibility was first collected in the 2003 wave. In order to circumvent the potential for confounding influences introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic, we censor the observations at the onset of the pandemic. The pandemic may have exerted an influence on both working-time flexibility and childbearing decisions, thereby introducing a bias to the relationship under analysis.

The SOEP includes 24,746 cohabiting couples observed during the 2003–2019 period. From this sample, we restrict the analysis to couples with one child, excluding 19,294 childless or higher-parity couples. We further limit the sample to couples in which the woman is aged 18–44, excluding an additional 1,014 cases. After applying these restrictions, the final analytical sample consists of 4,438 couples, among whom 1,110 transitions to a second birth are observed during the study period. Couples are followed from the birth of their first child until the occurrence of a second birth, panel attrition (i.e. when at least one partner exits the survey), or the last survey wave included in the analysis, whichever occurs first.

3.2 Measures of working-time flexibility

The major explanatory variables are constructed based on the question about the type of working hours: "*There exist very different working time arrangements nowadays. Which of the following applies to your work best?*". The possible answers are as follows: [1] Fixed start and fixed end of the daily working period, [2] Business fixed, partly changing working hours per day, [3] No formal regulation of working time, regulate working time myself, [4] Flexitime with working time account and a certain self-determination on the daily working time in this context. We classify answers [3] and [4] as employee-oriented flexibility, answer [2] as employer-oriented flexibility, and answer [1] as fixed schedules / no flexibility. Self-employed

respondents do not answer this question as their working schedules are not comparable regarding flexibility.

The question about working-time flexibility appeared for the first time in the wave 2003, and until 2008, it was included in the questionnaire every two waves. Starting from 2009, the question has been asked with every wave; however, in the waves of 2010, 2012 and 2013, it was not included in all questionnaires. Our approach to missing data in waves where the question is not asked consists of three steps. Firstly, we check the employment status, and if the person is not working, we input the category "not working" into the working-time flexibility variable. Secondly, if the person is employed, then we check the variable based on the question "if the person changed the job" the year before or the year after and if the respondent didn't change the job, then we input the information about flexibility from that wave accordingly, assuming that the working schedule types are stable within the same job. Thirdly, the other missing values we compute as a separate category: "working but no information about flexibility". We check the robustness of our findings by applying alternative imputation strategies (see the Robustness checks section).

As a result, our main explanatory variables consist of five categories: (1) no flexibility, (2) employee-oriented working-time flexibility, (3) employer-oriented working-time flexibility, (4) not working, and (5) working but no information about flexibility. We create separate variables for men and women, which we use in the main analysis.

3.3 Other variables

We measure the duration of couple exposure to the 2nd child's birth by utilising the variable of the age of the first child (0-2 years old, 3-5 years old, 6-13 years old, 14+ years old). We also include a series of control variables, which may confound the relationship between working-time flexibility and transition to second birth. These are: men's education based on ISCED classification (upper secondary or below; tertiary) and men's occupation based on ISCO classification (managers and professionals; technicians and clerical support workers; other occupations), men's type of contract (full-time; part-time) and household income (categories based on quartiles). We also add some controls that distinguish couple characteristics important for childbearing decisions: cohabitation status (married couple; cohabitation), nationality of male partner (German; European; other), and age group of the female partner (less than 25; 26-30; 31-35; 36-40; 41-45) as well as region of residence (East

Germany; West Germany) and year (before 2008, 2008-2015, after 2015) to capture regional and period differences.

3.4 Moderating variables

In our analysis, we take into account two moderating variables. Firstly, we consider the women's employment situation variable (not working, part-time, full-time). The category "not working" comprises non-working women, including those on maternity leave. Secondly, we account for women's working-time flexibility (no flexibility, employee-oriented working-time flexibility, employer-oriented working-time flexibility, not working, working but no information about flexibility), which is constructed the same way as men's working-time flexibility (see *Measures of working-time flexibility* section).

3.5 Method

We perform an event history analysis using mixed-effect complementary log-log (cloglog) models for the transition to 2nd birth. Our outcome variable is thus the child birth (yes/no). The observations are clustered at the couple level. All variables connected to work and employment characteristics (including moderating variables of mother employment situation) are lagged compared to the outcome variable to capture the situation from before 2nd birth by one year (if a birth occurs the same year of the survey but the mother was not pregnant during the previous survey) or 2 years (if the mother was already pregnant at previous survey). The variable about pregnancy during the survey of the previous wave is calculated based on the date of the survey and the child's birth date.

We perform our analysis in the following order. Firstly, we address our hypotheses H1 and H2 on men's working-time flexibility and transition to the second birth. To this end, we estimate model M1, which contains our main explanatory variable of men's flexibility and the control variables. Secondly, we test hypotheses H3a,b and H4a,b on the role of men's working-time flexibility in dual earner versus (modernised) male breadwinner couples. To this end, we estimate model M2 in which we include the same control covariates as in M1 but, in addition, interact men's working-time flexibility with women's employment status (full-time/part-time/not working). Finally, we address hypotheses H5 and H6 on the moderating role of women's working-time flexibility. This is achieved by estimating model M3, which is similar to M2, but this time we interact men's working-time flexibility with women's working-time flexibility. In order to interpret our findings, we compute predicted probabilities of transition to

2nd birth by men's working-time arrangements and his partner's employment characteristics. We next assess differences between the categories of interest by comparing confidence intervals for pairwise comparisons. It has been established in the literature that the differences between two predicted probabilities should be considered significant at α=0.05 level if the 83% confidence intervals do not overlap (Austin & Hux, 2002; Knol et al., 2011).

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive statistics

Men in our sample most commonly work fixed schedules (43%) or have access to employee-oriented flexibility (36%), while employer-oriented flexibility is least prevalent among them (20%) (Table 1). Employee-oriented flexibility is most common among highly educated employed men (72,7% versus 32,8% among below-tertiary educated men). Employer-oriented flexibility is more prevalent among men with below-tertiary education (23,1 % versus 12,5% with tertiary education).

Notably, the distribution of men's working-time arrangements varies little across women's employment status; men are equally likely to hold a particular type of schedule regardless of whether their partners work full-time, part-time, or not at all. Clear patterns emerge, however, when considering women's own flexibility. In couples where the female partner has employee-oriented flexibility, the male partner typically does as well. In couples where the woman has no flexibility, men most frequently work fixed schedules or - though less often - have employee-oriented flexibility. In turn, when she has employer-oriented flexibility, no clear pattern is displayed for him.

Table 1. Distribution of partners' work arrangements in couples with one child

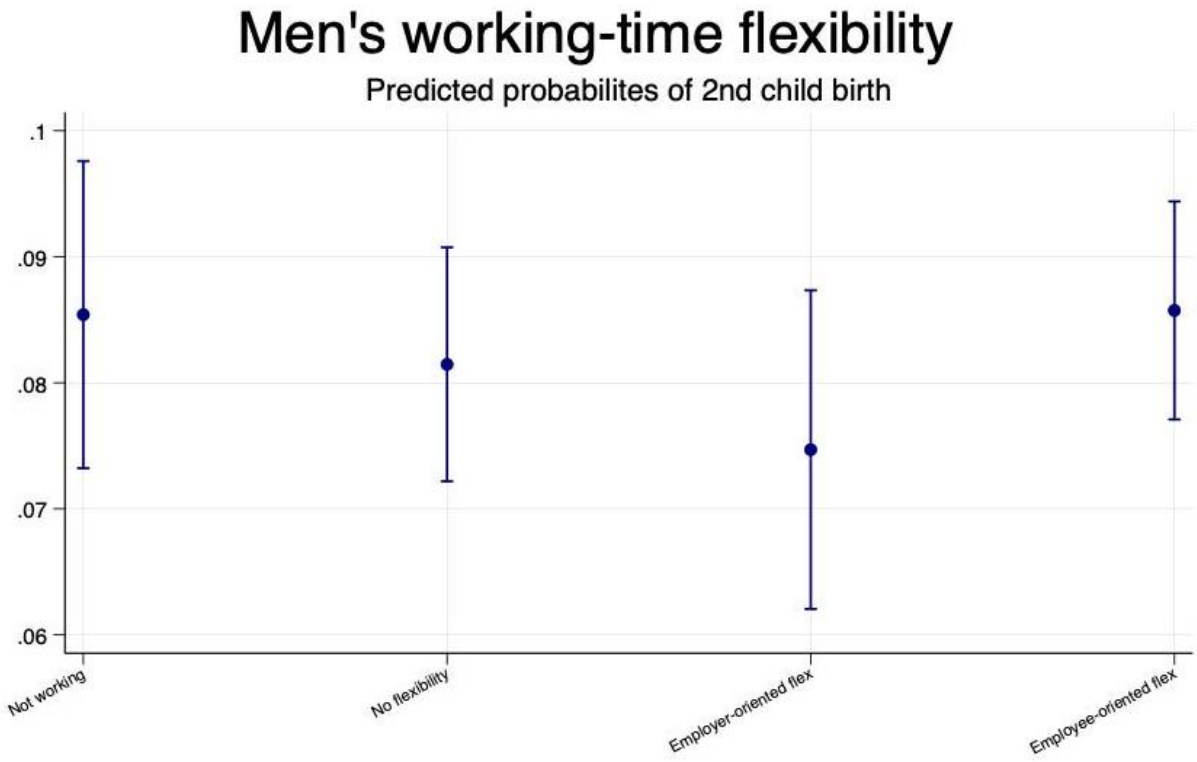
men's w-t flexibility	total	all couples			dual-earner couples		
		woman is not employed (39,7%)	woman works part-time (37,7%)	woman works full-time (22,6%)	woman has employee-oriented w-t flexibility	woman has employer-oriented w-t flexibility	woman has fixed schedule
employee-oriented	36,4%	37,2%	35%	37,5%	63,1%	35,6%	35,8%
employer-oriented	20,3%	22,4%	19%	19,6%	12,8%	31,5%	17,5%
fixed schedules	43,3%	40,4%	46%	42,9%	24,1%	32,9%	46,7%
SUM	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Own calculations

4.2 Men's working-time flexibility and transition to 2nd birth

As a first step, we investigate a basic relationship between men's working-time flexibility and transition to 2nd birth. The findings come from the model M1. Our full model estimates are presented in the Appendix (Table A1), while here we display them graphically in Figure 1. We do not see any significant differences in second birth probabilities with respect to men's working-time flexibility. These findings are inconsistent with our hypotheses H1 and H2 and suggest that if flexibility matters for second births, its effects may be heterogeneous—emerging only within specific groups of men or couples whose characteristics interact with the type of flexibility in ways not visible in the aggregate findings.

Figure 1. Men's working-time flexibility and transition to 2nd birth



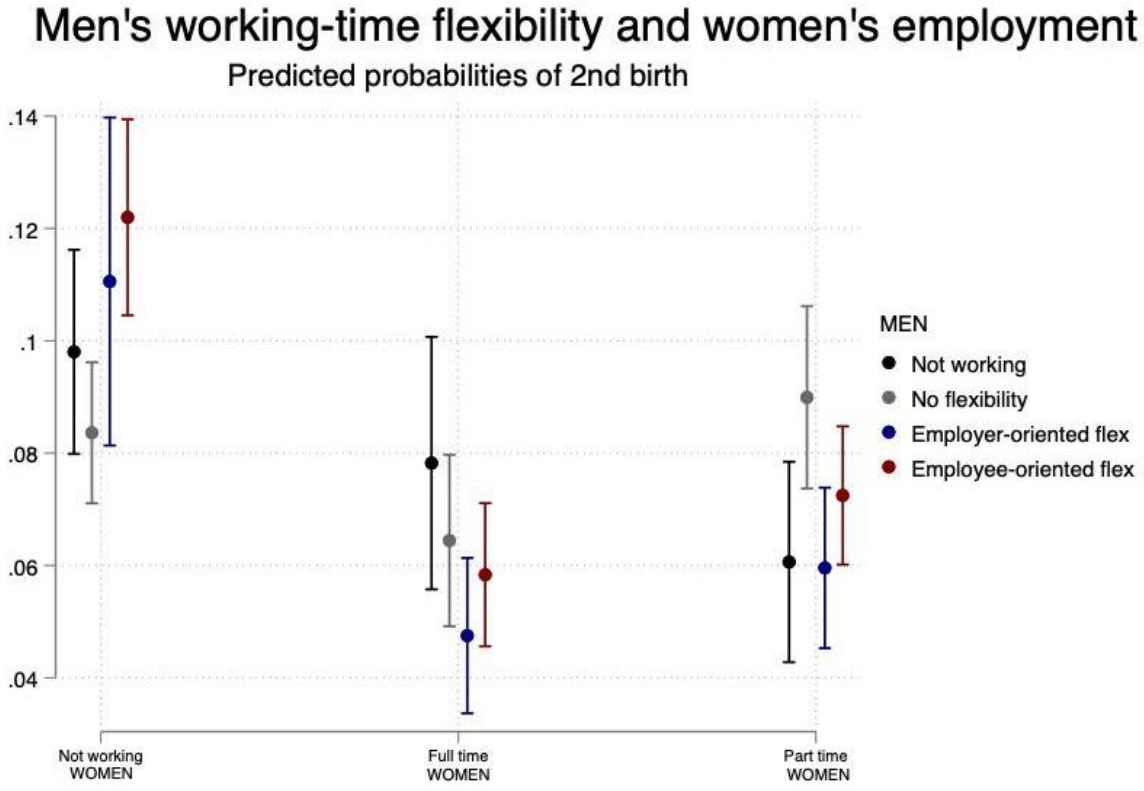
Note: Predicted probabilities of 2nd birth with 83% CI estimated from the model that consists of men's working schedule characteristics (M1)

4.3 Men's working-time flexibility and 2nd birth in the context of women's employment

Next, we examine findings from the model M2, which allow us to examine heterogeneity in the effects of men's working-time flexibilities on second birth probabilities by women's employment status (full model estimates in Table A1 in the Appendix, predicted probabilities in Figure 2). Contrary to our hypothesis H3a-b (positive role of employee-oriented flexibility among (a) dual-earner couples, (b) particularly when female partner works full-time), we find

that men's employee-oriented flexibility is positively associated with the transition to a second birth only in couples in which the female partner does not work, whereas among dual-earner couples, we find no significant differences in second-birth probabilities by men's working-time flexibility. Furthermore, we do not find men with employee-oriented flexibility to be more likely to have a second birth than men with no flexibility, neither in couples with women working full-time nor in couples with women working part-time. Moreover, contrary to our hypothesis H4a-b on the negative role of men's employer-oriented flexibility among dual-earner couples, especially when women work full-time, we find no relationship between employer-oriented flexibility and second birth probabilities in any couple type, apart from couples with part-time working women. Namely, dual earner couples with a woman working part-time have slightly lower birth probabilities if a man has employer-oriented flexibility than similar couples with inflexible men. In general, however, our findings are inconsistent with our hypotheses H3a-H4b.

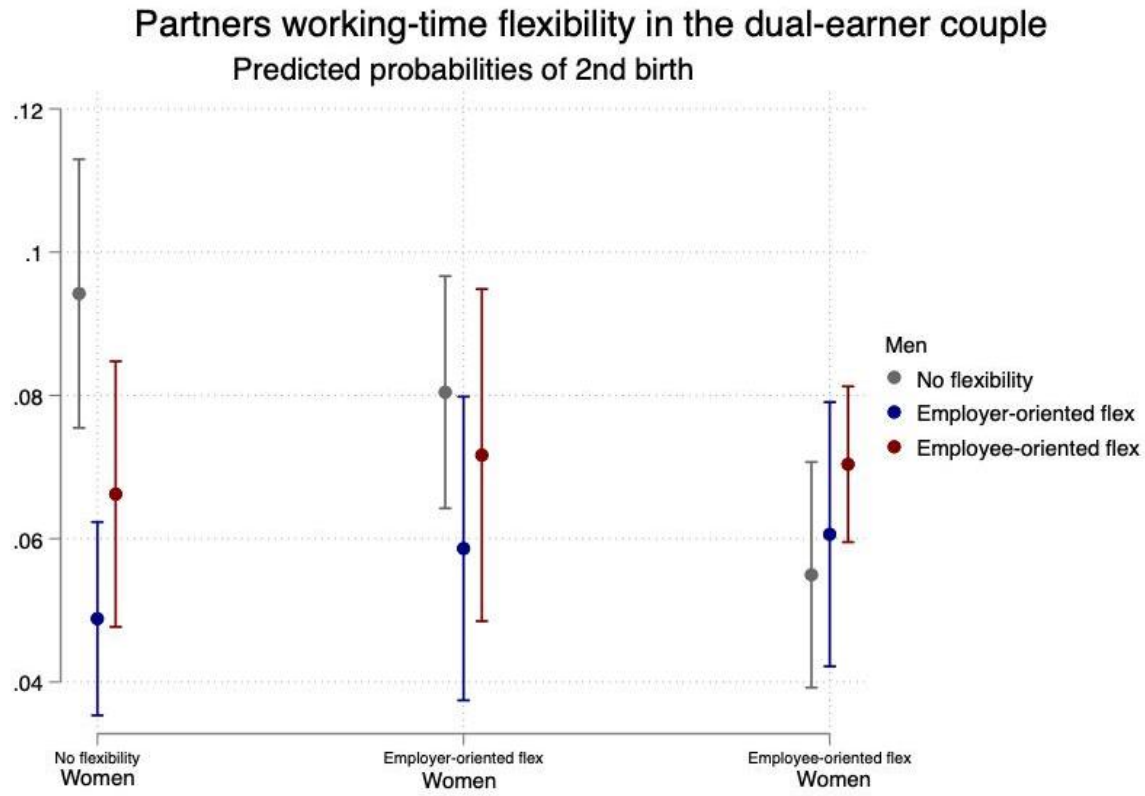
Figure 2. Men's working-time flexibility versus women's employment status and transition to 2nd birth



Note: Predicted probabilities of 2nd birth with 83% CI estimated from the model that consists of men's working schedule characteristics interacted with female partner's employment status (M2)

In the final step, we check if men's working-time flexibility is linked to the female partner's working-time flexibility (Table A1 in the Appendix and Figure 3 below). Specifically, we expected that in dual-earner couples in which the female partner has rigid working hours or employer-oriented working-time flexibility, men's employee-oriented working-time flexibility is particularly positively associated with the transition to a second birth (H5), whereas men's employer-oriented working-time flexibility is particularly strongly negatively associated with the transition to a second birth (H6). We did not find evidence consistent with H5. In fact, men's employee-oriented working-time flexibility does not seem to differentiate second birth probabilities in any of the couple types. However, our results are partially consistent with H6 as among couples in which women work with fixed schedules, men's employer-oriented working-time flexibility relates to a lower probability of transition to 2nd birth. No such a pattern is, however, observed among couples in which a woman has employer-oriented flexibility.

Figure 3. Men's and Women's working-time flexibility and transition to 2nd birth among dual-earner couples



Note: Predicted probabilities of 2nd birth with 83% CI estimated from the model that consists of women's and men's working schedule characteristics (M3)

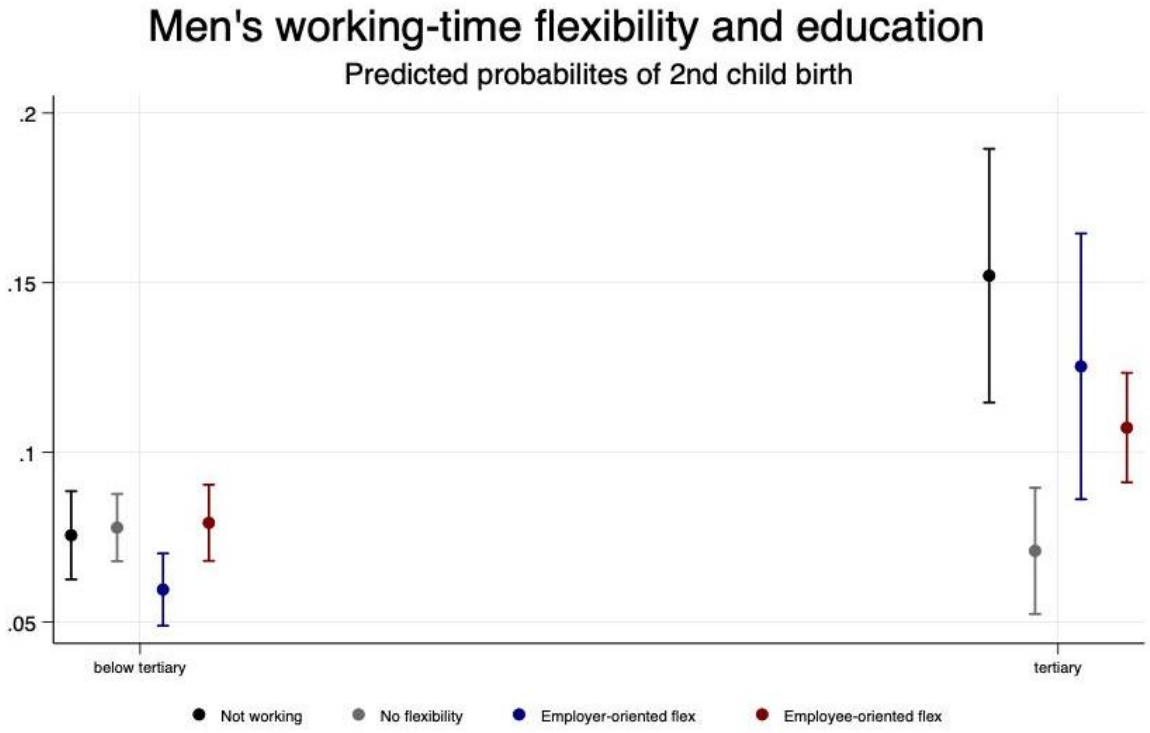
4.4 Heterogeneity analysis

All in all, we found little evidence that men's working-time flexibility matters for partners' transition to the second birth. In fact, our findings even speak against our expectations as we found men's employee-oriented flexibility to be positively related to second births in male bread-winners but not in dual-earner couples. We also found some traces of the negative impact of employer-oriented flexibility on second births among dual-earner couples, but confined to those in which the female partner works part-time rather than part-time or has fixed working hours. One possible explanation for these findings might be that men's employer-oriented flexibility has a different character among men with high and low socio-economic status. While in the former it may go hand in hand with good earnings and some sort of control over the work schedule, in the latter it is tied to precarious employment in which the employee has little control over the working time and little bargaining power. For these reasons, we decided to further investigate working-time flexibility in models M1-M3 with men's education. This implies performing a two-way interaction between men's education and working-time flexibility in M1 and three-way interactions between men's education, men's working-time flexibility and women's employment status/working-time arrangements in M2 and M3, respectively.

Our findings (Figure 4) illustrate that highly educated men with employee-oriented flexibility are more likely to have a second child than similar men with fixed schedules. Thus, among highly educated men, employee-oriented flexibility is positively related to second birth probabilities (in line with H1, but for highly educated). Among lower-educated men, the differences between the predicted second birth probabilities across men's working-time arrangements are not significant, though there seems to be a tendency toward a lower second birth probability among men with employer-oriented flexibility than among men with fixed schedules (in line with H2, but for lower-educated).

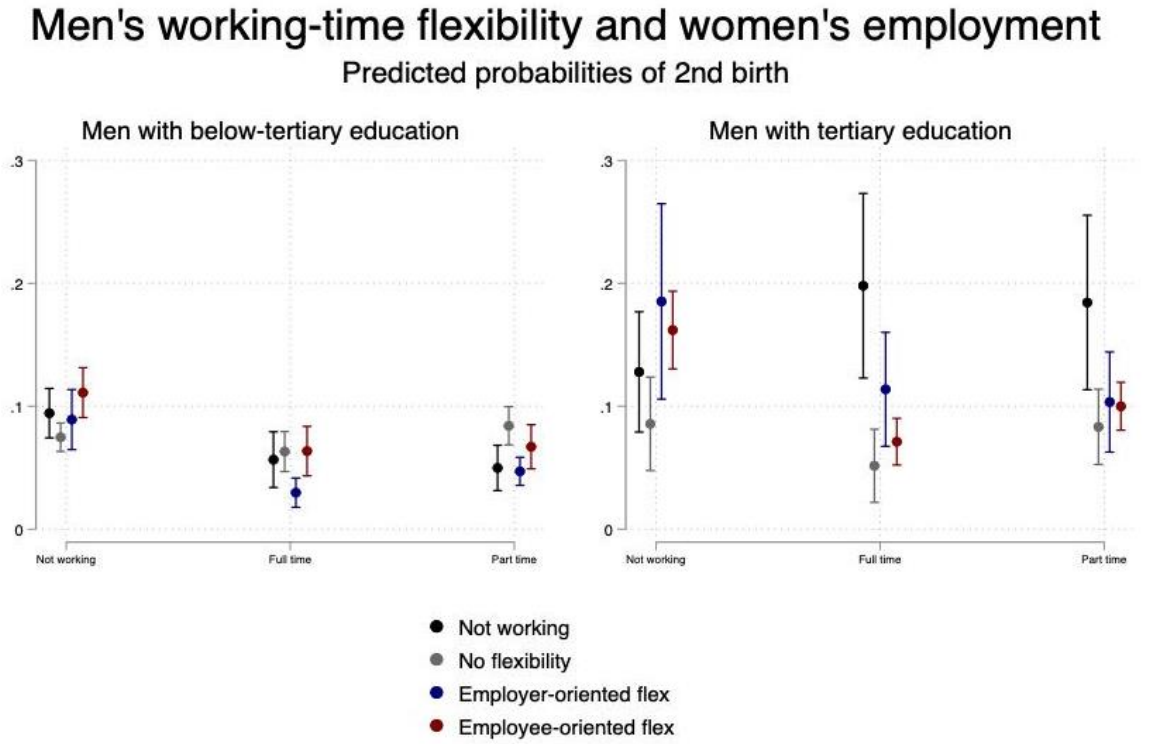
Furthermore, we also find signs of the negative effect of men's employer-oriented flexibility on second birth probabilities among dual earner couples, consistently with H4a, but only among couples in which the man has below tertiary education (Figure 5). This finding pertains to couples with a full-time as well as a part-time working mother. We find no significant relationship between men's working-time flexibility and second birth probabilities among dual-earner couples with highly educated men. The previously found positive effect of employee-oriented flexibility among male breadwinner couples persists, regardless of the man's socio-economic status.

Figure 4. Men's working-time flexibility and transition to 2nd birth - differences by educational groups



Note: Predicted probabilities of 2nd birth with 83% CI estimated from the model that consists of men's working schedule characteristics interacted with his education

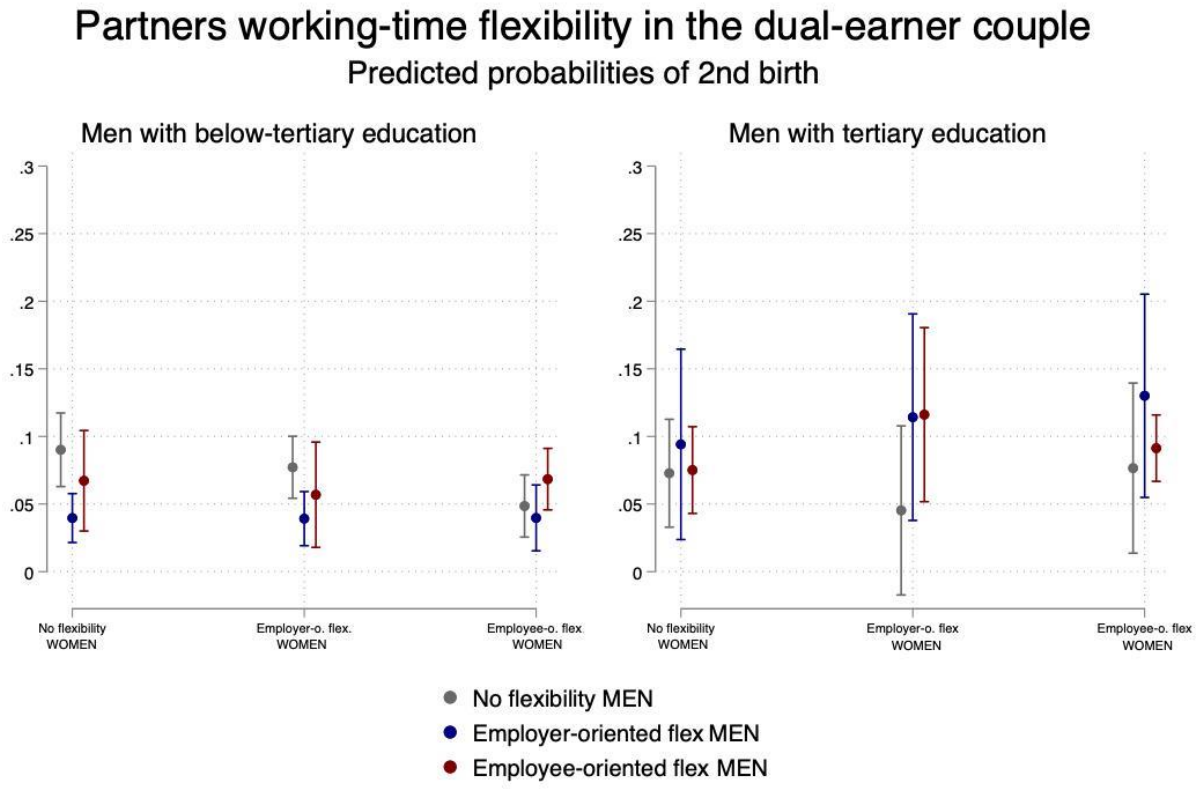
Figure 5. Men's working-time flexibility and transition to 2nd birth - differences by women's employment and men's education



Note: Predicted probabilities of 2nd birth with 83% CI estimated from the model that consists of men's working schedule characteristics interacted with women's employment and his education

Finally, we also find that couples in which the man is not tertiary educated and has employer-oriented flexibility are more less likely to have a second child if a woman has no flexibility or she has the employer-oriented flexibility (the latter effect being marginally significant likely due to rare situations in which mothers have employer-oriented flexibility) (see Figure 6). These findings are consistent with our Hypothesis H6, but only for couples with less educated men. Among couples with tertiary educated men no discernible differences in birth probabilities by his and her working time flexibility have been observed. However, it is noteworthy that among such couples, which are a relatively uncommon occurrence within the sample, men are disproportionately represented in instances of employee-oriented working-time flexibility, which makes the estimates less precise. Importantly, we do not find his-employee-oriented flexibility to be positively related to second birth risks when she has no employee-oriented flexibility herself.

Figure 6. Partners' working-time flexibility and transition to 2nd birth - differences by women's schedule flexibility and men's education



Note: Predicted probabilities of 2nd birth with 83% CI estimated from the model that consists of men's working schedule characteristics interacted with women's working schedule characteristics and his education

4.5 Robustness check

We performed several sensitivity tests to verify the stability of our findings (see Appendix, Table A2). Firstly, we checked the results for married couples only, as in the German context, a significant proportion of cohabiting couples are married, which can lead to differences compared to unregistered cohabitation. Secondly, we reduced the sample to couples where the man is a German national, as a substantial number of migrants were added to the pool of respondents from wave 2016 onwards. Thirdly, information about working-time flexibility was missing in some waves, so we imputed missing data using information based on whether or not the person had changed jobs. To assess the impact of the imputed values on a selected sample of occupationally stable workers on our results, we limited the sample to waves with flexibility information and re-ran the models. No significant changes were observed between models in any case, and the results for the main explanatory variable remained similar.

5. Discussion

In this study, we examined how fathers' flexible working-time relate to the transition to a second birth among German couples. We also checked how this relation differs by mother's employment status and schedule type. We expected, in general, that men's employee-oriented flexibility will be positively and employer-oriented flexibility negatively related to second birth risks, because they respectively enhance or undermine partners' control over their time schedules and abilities to adjust to unexpected care demands (H1 and H2). We also hypothesised these relationships to be more pronounced in dual-earner than male breadwinner couples (H3a and H4a), in particular in those in which the female partner works full-time (H3b and H4b) or has no employee-oriented flexibility (H5 and H6).

Our findings are only partially consistent with these expectations and reveal that the fertility implications of fathers' working-time flexibility are highly contingent on both fathers' socio-economic position and the couple's context. First of all, we found no significant differences in the 2nd birth risks by men's working-time schedules in the basic model. This is inconsistent with our hypotheses H1 and H2. However, once we accounted for the heterogeneity by men's socio-economic status, some meaningful patterns were established.

Starting with the employee-oriented working-time flexibility, we found it to be positively associated with a second birth risk, but only among tertiary-educated men. This finding may suggest that employee-oriented flexibility allows highly educated fathers to spend more time

with their children or intervene in case of unexpected care demands, easing the work-to-family conflict they would otherwise experience. More in-depth analyses by employment status of the female partner shed, however, more light on this finding. They demonstrate that these positive associations emerge only in male-breadwinner households, for which they appear both among men with high as well as lower socio-economic status. Contrary to H3a and H5, we did not find men's employee-oriented flexibility to be positively associated with second births in dual-earner couples, regardless of mothers' working hours or work schedule. This suggests that men's employee-oriented flexibility may primarily function as a resource for reducing fathers' own work-to-family conflict when mothers are not employed, rather than as a tool for facilitating egalitarian care arrangements. This interpretation is consistent with evidence showing that fathers' flexible schedules increase their involvement mainly in specific, work-intervening tasks (such as school drop-offs or responding to emergencies) rather than leading to a substantial redistribution of routine care (Kuang et al., 2025). Such limited involvement may provide crucial support in moments of an emergency, but it may be insufficient to offset the double burden faced by working mothers. As a result, women partnered to men with employee-oriented flexibility in Germany may face a choice between either returning to paid employment after the first birth, which some of the past research demonstrated (Buchler & Lutz, 2021; Lott, 2020), or opting for the second child, but not combining the two activities. An alternative and perhaps complementary explanation is that employee-oriented flexibility may be used by fathers to intensify paid work rather than to expand caregiving. Evidence from Germany shows that men who switch to flexible schedules often increase their working hours, reinforcing work devotion rather than reducing it (Wanger & Zapf, 2022). If employee-oriented flexibility leads to longer or more intensive work, it may exacerbate work–family tensions for working mothers, remaining compatible with family expansion only for nonworking mothers.

Turning to employer-oriented flexibility, we found it to be marginally negatively associated with second-birth risks where man has a below-tertiary education. These results are in line with research showing that employer-oriented flexibility among lower-status workers often goes hand in hand with precarious employment, limited bargaining power, and high schedule unpredictability (Lambert et al., 2012; Adams-Prassl et al., 2020). Such work arrangements limit partners' control over their time and reduce their capacity to coordinate paid work and care. Furthermore, such jobs provide lower-educated workers with little financial or social resources to buffer the negative consequences of employer-oriented flexibility, such as

the ability to outsource some of the care duties or the opportunity to negotiate working hours in case of unexpected care demands.

Among highly educated workers, in turn, employer-oriented flexibility shows weak positive associations with second births. This likely reflects the fact that, at higher occupational levels, employer-driven time demands often coexist with employee-oriented flexibility (Chung & Tijdens, 2013; Kałamucka et al., 2025). In such settings, men may have a better position to negotiate autonomy when needed. They may also compensate for high demands on their time with a higher income, which provides them with the opportunity to purchase external care services. Unfortunately, due to data limitations in the SOEP, where respondents report only their dominant form of flexibility, we were unable to explicitly identify whether respondents who declared employer-oriented flexibility as their main schedule type also have access to employee-oriented flexibility.

Further, our results demonstrate that the role of employer-oriented flexibility in childbearing is contingent not only on men's education, but also on the mothers' employment and flexibility. This time, our findings are more consistent with our expectations. In line with H4a, employer-oriented flexibility is more negatively associated with second-birth risks in dual-earners than in male-breadwinner couples, but again only among men with lower education. This finding emphasises the importance of schedule coordination when both partners are employed: unpredictable working hours among fathers restrict mothers' ability to plan paid work and care, intensifying work–family conflict for both partners, especially in couples with lower socio-economic status and thus poorer resources to negotiate work schedules with the employer or outsourcing care in case of emergencies. However, we did not find the strongest negative effects of employer-oriented flexibility among couples in which mothers work full-time, contrary to H4b. This finding may be specific to the German context, where mothers often shift from full-time to part-time employment after birth (Matysiak and Steinmetz 2008; Berghammer et al., 2016). Mothers who choose to work full-time may thus constitute a selected group with stronger labour market attachment and better opportunities for outsourcing childcare.

We also found that when mothers themselves lack any flexibility, men's employer-oriented flexibility is more strongly negatively associated with second births compared to the situation in which he has no flexibility, though this finding holds only among couples in which he is lesss than tertiary educated. Likewise, when mothers experience employer-oriented flexibility, his schedule is marginally significantly linked to second birth rates (in couples in which the man has below-tertiary education). These findings partially support H6. Indeed, when

she has no employee-oriented flexibility, and he has to adjust his schedule to employers' needs, couples are seriously exposed to time insecurity and coordination problems.

Taken together, our findings highlight that flexibility is not inherently family-friendly. Its fertility implications depend on who controls time and within which couple arrangements. They are also clearly stratified by partners' socio-economic status. Employer-oriented flexibility has clearly more negative implications on childbearing than employee-oriented flexibility, though this impact is further dependent on men's socio-economic status and the financial or social resources related to it, as well as their bargaining power at work. The effects of employee-oriented flexibility on fertility, in turn, are positive but only among male breadwinner couples, highlighting the limited impact of this sort of flexibility for easing work-family tensions among dual earner couples in the German context. These results also demonstrate the limited ability of working-time flexibility to support egalitarian division of paid and unpaid labour in contexts in which mothers are still responsible for most of the childcare and where reducing working hours after the birth of a child constitutes a strong social norm.

Our study is not without limitations. Most importantly, employer-oriented flexibility can coexist with employee-oriented flexibility, particularly among higher-educated, highly skilled workers, e.g. in managerial positions (Goldin, 2021; Green et al., 2022; Kaduk et al., 2019). However, in the GSOEP questionnaire, respondents may subjectively identify only one type of flexibility, which could introduce measurement bias by obscuring the differences between individuals who experience both types and those who experience only one. A more nuanced measure, such as that used in the 2019 Labour Force Survey ad hoc module on working conditions (e.g. Kałamucka et al., 2025), which separates questions on employee- and employer-driven flexibility, would allow for a more accurate assessment of workers' control over their schedules. This is an important dimension that remains unobserved in our study and should be taken into account in future data collections. Despite this limitation, our study provides important implications for demographic research on parental working conditions and fertility. The findings highlight the multidimensional nature of working-time flexibility and demonstrate that its implications for fertility depend not only on the type of flexibility but also on the couple context. Future research in other national settings is needed to assess whether these patterns are specific to the German institutional and cultural context or reflect more general mechanisms linking work organisation and family formation.

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Annexes

Table A1. *Model estimations*

	M1	M2	M3
VARIABLES	hazard ratio	hazard ratio	hazard ratio
Working-time flexibility (ref. fixed)			
MEN			
Not working	1.495*	1.992**	0.873
	(0.308)	(0.618)	(0.313)
Employer-oriented flexibility	0.910	0.721	0.489***
	(0.144)	(0.208)	(0.132)
Employee-oriented flexibility	1.058	0.898	0.677
	(0.134)	(0.225)	(0.187)
Working but no info. about flexibility	1.172	1.064	1.096
	(0.168)	(0.313)	(0.391)
Age of the 1st child (ref. 0-2)			
3-5	3.670***	3.666***	3.650***
	(0.455)	(0.463)	(0.461)
6-13	1.194	1.252	1.233
	(0.180)	(0.195)	(0.193)
14+	0.326***	0.349***	0.339***
	(0.107)	(0.115)	(0.113)
Education (ref. secondary or below)			
MEN			
Tertiary	1.577***	1.516***	1.516***
	(0.192)	(0.182)	(0.182)
Missing	0.693	0.621	0.623
	(0.258)	(0.245)	(0.248)
Type of contract (ref. full-time)			
MEN			
Part time	1.074	1.170	1.150
	(0.190)	(0.213)	(0.206)
Occupation (ref. other)			
MEN			
managers and professionals	1.357**	1.291*	1.263
	(0.192)	(0.184)	(0.180)

technicians and clerical support workers	1.375**	1.340**	1.334**
	(0.199)	(0.192)	(0.187)
Household income (ref. low income- 1st quartile) in square root equivalence scale			
Middle low income (2nd quartile)	0.919	0.659	0.660
	(0.207)	(0.315)	(0.316)
Middle high income (3rd quartile)	1.268*	1.355**	1.338**
	(0.169)	(0.195)	(0.194)
High income (4th quartile)	1.212	1.392*	1.394*
	(0.171)	(0.238)	(0.239)
Not applied	0.935	1.259	1.269
	(0.159)	(0.254)	(0.260)
Period (ref. 2003-2007)			
2008-2015	1.070	1.072	1.074
	(0.110)	(0.112)	(0.113)
2016-2019	1.056	1.031	1.023
	(0.163)	(0.157)	(0.156)
Region (ref. West Germany)			
East Germany	0.956	1.023	1.026
	(0.117)	(0.127)	(0.127)
Type of relationship (ref. married)			
Cohabitation	0.499***	0.514***	0.514***
	(0.066)	(0.068)	(0.068)
Age WOMEN(ref. 18-25)			
26-30	0.919	0.942	0.936
	(0.151)	(0.150)	(0.148)
31-35	1.003	1.016	1.015
	(0.161)	(0.158)	(0.158)
36-40	0.527***	0.522***	0.520***
	(0.097)	(0.093)	(0.092)
41-45	0.121***	0.120***	0.120***
	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.032)
Nationality (ref. German)			
Other European	1.032	1.043	1.037
	(0.188)	(0.194)	(0.193)
Outside of Europe	1.113	1.166	1.168

	(0.175)	(0.182)	(0.182)
Type of contract (ref. full-time)			
WOMEN			
Not working		1.103	0.860
		(0.253)	(0.192)
Part time		1.438	1.288*
		(0.340)	(0.169)
Working-time flexibility (ref. fixed)			
WOMEN			
Employer-oriented flexibility			0.837
			(0.191)
Employee-oriented flexibility			0.555**
			(0.152)
Working but no info. about flexibility			0.554
			(0.264)
Interactions			
M2 W:not working x M:not working **M3** W:not working x M:not working		1.590	2.849*
		(0.913)	(1.687)
M2 W:not working x M:Employer-o flex **M3** W:not working x M:Employer-o flex		2.036*	2.793***
		(0.751)	(0.988)
M2 W:not working x M:Employee-o flex **M3** W:not working x M:Employee-o flex		1.653*	2.258**
		(0.498)	(0.716)
M2 W:not working x M:Work but No info **M3** W:not working x M:Work but No info		1.024	1.237
		(0.382)	(0.516)
M2 W:Part-time x M:not working **M3** W:Employer-o flex x M:not working		0.623	1.253
		(0.246)	(0.666)
M2 W:Part-time x M:Employer-o flex **M3** W:Employer-o flex x M:Employer-o flex		0.909	1.452
		(0.333)	(0.607)
M2 W:Part-time x M:Employee-o flex **M3** W:Employer-o flex x M:Employee-o flex		0.833	1.301
		(0.256)	(0.532)
M2 W:Part-time x M:Work but No info		1.087	1.297

M3 W:Employer-o flex x M:Work but No info			
		(0.392)	(0.725)
M3 W:Employee-o flex x M:not working			4.313***
			(2.129)
M3 W:Employee-o flex x M:Employer-o flex			2.269*
			(0.955)
M3 W:Employee-o flex x M:Employee-o flex			1.926*
			(0.705)
M3 W:Employer-o flex x M:Work but No info			1.526
			(0.862)
M3 W:Work but No info x M:not working			2.240
			(1.530)
M3 W:Work but No info x M:Employer-o flex			1.965
			(1.816)
M3 W:Work but No info x M:Employee-o flex			0.888
			(0.635)
M3 W:Work but No info x M:Work but No info			1.388
			(0.832)
Constant	0.047***	0.034***	0.044***
Observations	13,375	13,375	13,375

Note: Robust seeform in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table A2. *Robustness checks*

VARIABLES	**Main analysis** hazard ratio	**Only married** hazard ratio	**Only German nationality** hazard ratio	**Flexibility without imputation** hazard ratio
Working-time flexibility (ref. fixed)				
MEN				
Not working	1.495*	1.288	1.533*	1.530*
	(0.308)	(0.274)	(0.358)	(0.337)
Employer-oriented flexibility	0.910	0.933	0.920	0.993
	(0.144)	(0.158)	(0.164)	(0.182)
Employee-oriented flexibility	1.058	1.037	1.059	1.060
	(0.134)	(0.142)	(0.146)	(0.162)
Working but no info. about flexibility	1.172	1.266	1.294*	

	(0.168)	(0.190)	(0.200)	
Age of the 1st child (ref. 0-2)				
3-5	3.670***	3.984***	4.096***	3.457***
	(0.455)	(0.532)	(0.549)	(0.508)
6-13	1.194	1.077	1.229	1.136
	(0.180)	(0.175)	(0.195)	(0.196)
14+	0.326***	0.281***	0.275***	0.399**
	(0.107)	(0.106)	(0.107)	(0.145)
Education (ref. secondary or below)				
MEN				
Tertiary	1.577***	1.591***	1.510***	1.438**
	(0.192)	(0.205)	(0.203)	(0.209)
Missing	0.693	0.831	0.631	0.589
	(0.258)	(0.328)	(0.244)	(0.278)
Type of contract (ref. full-time)				
MEN				
Part time	1.074	1.102	0.997	1.177
	(0.190)	(0.206)	(0.210)	(0.267)
Occupation (ref. other)				
MEN				
managers and professionals	1.357**	1.405**	1.503***	1.524**
	(0.192)	(0.215)	(0.224)	(0.259)
technicians and clerical support workers	1.375**	1.415**	1.396**	1.444*
	(0.199)	(0.219)	(0.224)	(0.276)
Household income (ref. low income- 1st quartile) in square root equivalence scale				
Middle low income (2nd quartile)	1.268*	1.371**	1.264	1.245
	(0.169)	(0.201)	(0.187)	(0.202)
Middle high income (3rd quartile)	1.212	1.287	1.214	1.145
	(0.171)	(0.200)	(0.186)	(0.196)
High income (4th quartile)	0.935	0.976	0.860	0.844
	(0.159)	(0.183)	(0.155)	(0.172)
Not applied	0.919	1.175	0.800	0.864
	(0.207)	(0.279)	(0.218)	(0.199)
Period (ref. 2003-2007)				

2008-2015	1.070	1.035	1.088	1.009
	(0.110)	(0.112)	(0.110)	(0.126)
2016-2019	1.056	1.068	1.093	1.021
	(0.163)	(0.179)	(0.184)	(0.168)
Region (ref. West Germany)				
East Germany	0.956	0.975	0.982	0.984
	(0.117)	(0.135)	(0.126)	(0.144)
Type of relationship (ref. married)				
Cohabitation	0.499***		0.465***	0.533***
	(0.066)		(0.067)	(0.079)
Age WOMEN(ref. 18-25)				
26-30	0.919	1.000	0.756	0.853
	(0.151)	(0.183)	(0.141)	(0.158)
31-35	1.003	1.052	0.904	0.888
	(0.161)	(0.186)	(0.161)	(0.159)
36-40	0.527***	0.574***	0.454***	0.472***
	(0.097)	(0.115)	(0.090)	(0.097)
41-45				
	0.121***	0.133***	0.095***	0.121***
	(0.032)	(0.039)	(0.028)	(0.037)
Nationality (ref. German)				
Other European	1.032	1.003		0.974
	(0.188)	(0.200)		(0.176)
Outside of Europe	1.113	1.042		1.191
	(0.175)	(0.169)		(0.204)
Constant	0.047***	0.040***	0.048***	0.055***
Observations	13,375	10,399	11,685	9,241

Note: Robust seeform in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

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