Gendered employment histories and the accumulation of wealth over the life course

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We examine the relationship between employment trajectories and wealth accumulation (personal wealth and pension entitlements) over the life course in East and West Germany, focusing on gender differences. We use the combined survey and register data of the SOEP-RV linkage, the sample includes individuals born between 1918 and 1976. Our contribution is fourfold: a) to highlight the potential of the SOEP-RV linkage to construct comprehensive retrospective employment biographies that complement information from both sources, b) to introduce a dynamic and holistic perspective on both personal wealth and public pension accumulation over the life course, c) to provide an individual perspective on wealth accumulation to understand gender inequality, and d) to include both older and younger, less studied cohorts to examine temporal changes. First, we use sequence analysis to identify clusters of employment trajectories. The SOEP-RV linkage allows us to overcome problems of recall bias and misreporting in retrospective survey data on employment trajectories. Our analyses shows that this is especially important for periods of unemployment. In a second step, we apply growth curve models to analyze individual wealth accumulation. First, our results show that employment patterns are structured not only along East vs. West Germany, but also gender and cohort. Second, the growth curve models of individual wealth reveal significant differences in patterns of wealth accumulation according to life course cluster. Results highlight the redistribution of wealth in couples since female- and care-work dominated clusters are not substantially penalized. In contrast, descriptive analyses of public pension entitlements reveal the largest gap between the male-dominated, continuous high-earner full-time cluster and all other low earner, discontinuous, part-time or care-oriented clusters. Subsequent analyses will extend these findings by modelling monthly public pension entitlements and augmented wealth in a dynamic perspective.