

A life-course approach to the study of paid and unpaid activities in mid to late life in Britain

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Background

In light of population ageing, policies aimed at extending working lives are being considered or have been implemented in many industrialised countries. However, given older adults' substantial contributions to unpaid activities, such as informal care and volunteering, longer working lives may have repercussions for engagement in these activities.

Previous research on the relationship between paid and unpaid activities has predominantly focused on single activities and taken a short-term perspective (Burr et al. 2007; Morrow-Howell et al. 2014). Using longitudinal data, we examine how individuals combine paid work (full and part time), informal care provision to someone who is sick or disabled, volunteering and civic engagement in mid to late life.

Data and Methods

We used 7 waves of data, collected between 1996 and 2008, from the British Household Panel Survey, which is representative of British households. Using two stage longitudinal latent class analysis (LCA) (Macmillan & Eliason 2003), we examined engagement patterns from the age of 55 to 70 (Figure 1). The first stage LCA yields latent variables for the configurations of engagement in paid work, caregiving, volunteering and civic engagement at each age from 55 to 70. The second stage longitudinal LCA provides mid to later life engagement paths. The result of these models is combined to show longitudinal patterns of engagement in paid and unpaid activities (figure 2). Finally, we examined associations between sociodemographic and health characteristics at age 55 with the latent engagement paths.

Results

3 distinct paths of engagement in paid and unpaid activities were identified for both men and women (figure 2). For both genders the majority of the sample conformed to a path of lower engagement in unpaid activities (Path 1). Women with intermediate and low education had lower odds of being classified in path 2 (OR=0.37 CI: 0.25-0.53; OR=0.21 CI: 0.13-32) and path 3 (OR=0.41 CI: 0.24-0.68; OR=0.21 CI: 0.11-0.40), compared to the low engagement path 1. Similarly, women from lower occupational social classes (intermediate and routine/manual occupations) had lower odds of being in path 2 (OR=0.57 CI: 0.37-0.89; OR=0.25 CI: 0.16-0.40) and 3 (OR=0.38 CI: 0.19-0.76; OR=0.29 CI: 0.15-0.54) than in path 1. Women who reported poor or very poor health had lower odds of being in path 2 (OR=0.48 CI: 0.27-0.83) than in path 1. Amongst men, intermediate and low education was found to be associated with lower odds of being in path 2 (OR=0.50 CI: 0.31-0.81; OR=0.26 CI: 0.14-0.48) and 3 (OR=0.35 CI: 0.16-0.74; OR=0.16 CI: 0.06-0.47), compared to the low engagement path 1. Men from intermediate and routine/manual occupational social classes had lower odds of being classified in path 2 (OR=0.56 CI: 0.33-0.94; OR=0.23 CI: 0.13-0.41) and 3 (OR=0.44 CI: 0.18-1.04; OR=0.27 CI: 0.12-0.65) than in path 1.

Conclusion

We found preliminary evidence of socioeconomic and health related inequalities in engagement in paid work and unpaid activities in mid to later life. This has implications for the implementation of the active ageing framework and extending working lives policies, as working longer and engaging in unpaid activities in later life may not be feasible for individuals in worse health and with lower socioeconomic status.

References

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Figure 1 - Two stage longitudinal latent class analysis

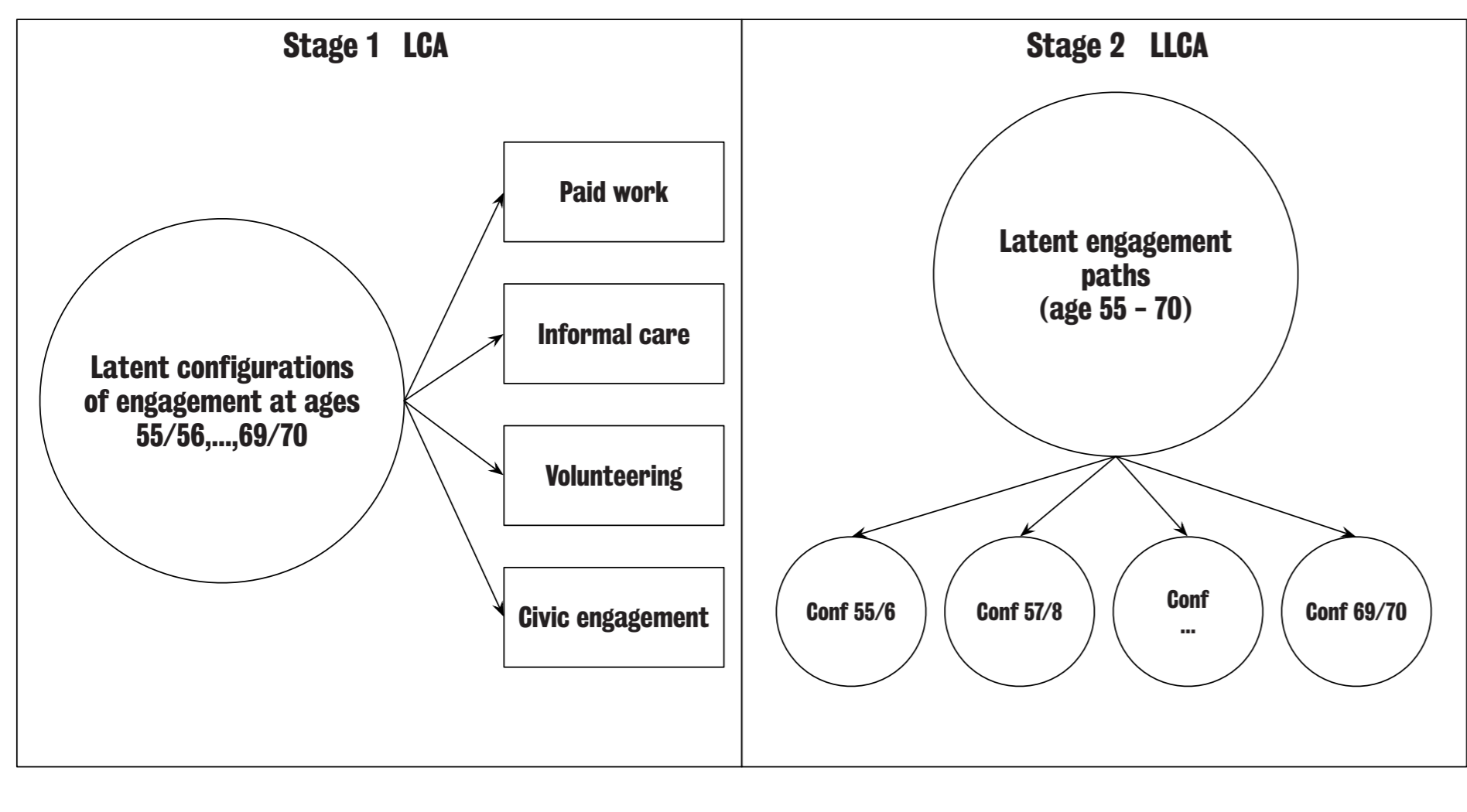


Figure 2: mid to late life engagement paths in paid work, caregiving, volunteering and civic engagement

