



Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research



SWISS NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

Loter, K. & O. A. Becker (2016)

Differences in Health between East and West Germans: The “Long Arm of Childhood” under Divergent Political Regimes in Germany

in G. Ritschard & M. Studer (eds), Proceedings of the International Conference on Sequence Analysis and Related Methods, Lausanne, June 8-10, 2016, p. 361.



UNIVERSITÉ
DE GENÈVE



UNIVERSITÉ
DE GENÈVE

GENEVA SCHOOL OF
SOCIAL SCIENCES

F FONDATION
POUR L'UNIVERSITÉ
DE LAUSANNE

Unil

UNIL | Université de Lausanne

Institut des sciences sociales

Differences in Health between East and West Germans

The “Long Arm of Childhood” under Divergent Political Regimes in Germany

Katharina Loter and Oliver Arránz Becker

Abstract The aim of our study is to investigate the “long arm of childhood” under two divergent political regimes in Germany. Children of the former socialist German Democratic Republic (GDR) grew up in a regime with full-time working mothers and around the clock child care services – in a regime that differed significantly from the German Federal Republic (FRG, also West Germany). GDR, year 1980: Almost 60% children aged 0-3 attend nurseries and more than 90% children aged 3-6 attend all-day kindergartens. In contrast, the respective percentages in the FRG are 1% for nurseries and 65% for predominantly part-time kindergartens. Thus, a great majority of children born and raised in the GDR experienced “equal” educational and nutritional conditions during early childhood regarded as a critical period of development, irrespective of their families’ socio-economic situation. Within few years after the German unification health care in East Germany came up to the level of West Germany, nonetheless, for the “former children of the GDR” early childhood influences may continue to affect their adult health in a specific way. Our research question is: Does the childhood experience under a socialist regime play a role in explaining health at subsequent stages of the life course? First, we hypothesize that spending childhood in the GDR, unlike in the FRG, might have an adverse long-term effect on health. Second, we assume that “equal” GDR childhood conditions might attenuate the long-term impact of parental socio-economic status on adult health. To examine these hypotheses we use data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) for birth cohorts 1950-1980 and apply latent growth curve analyses. Our preliminary results provide evidence of health disparities according to the kind of socialization. Further, we observe different patterns in the social health gradient for East and West Germans.

Katharina Loter · Oliver Arránz Becker
Institute of Sociology, Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, Germany
e-mail: katharina.loter@gmail.com

