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HOW INSTRUMENTAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT FROM FAMILY DIFFERS BETWEEN VOCATIONAL DECISIONS TO BECOME SELF-EMPLOYED OR EMPLOYED (INTERACTIVE PAPER)

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Principal Topic

This study investigates how instrumental and emotional support from family differentiates between the vocational decision to become self-employed and the vocational decision to become employed in an existing organization.

The study makes two original contributions to existing entrepreneurship theory. First, apart from integrating nascent entrepreneurship research with career choice theory, it overcomes hitherto lopsided focus on instrumental support. Instrumental support denotes advice and information individuals obtain from their networks. By contrast, this study builds on social support theory to investigate emotional aspects of support as well (Agneessens et al. 2006).

Second, debate continues as to whether or not women are disadvantaged as employees and self-employed. Although the empirical evidence is mixed, it is often argued that women lack suitable and effective networks. We investigate whether or not men and women are equally likely to obtain instrumental and emotional support respectively.

Method

This study is based on a representative sample of individuals (N=517) engaged in career decisions identified through a random adult population survey. The sample consists of individuals considering self-employment and individuals considering job. The sample comprises those who are already employed or self-employed, ensuring that the career considerations under investigation are opportunity based.

Hierarchical logistic regression analyses with instrumental and emotional support as dependent variables were employed to test hypothesized relationships.

Results and Implications

Consistent with career choice theory, we find that individuals are more likely to receive instrumental support when considering traditional employment compared to self-employment. By contrast, obtaining emotional support was equally likely for individuals considering self-employment and traditional employment. This suggests that the career choice to become self-employed – although still socially embedded in family structures – is a more isolated and autonomous decision compared to career decisions regarding job change.

Further consistent with social support theory, we find that women engaged in career change are less likely to receive instrumental support and emotional support compared to men in equivalent situations. Thus, women seem to lack family support both regarding considerations to become either self-employed or employed. This supports the idea that women are challenged with less suitable and effective employment networks.

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