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Gender norms and household responses to economic shocks

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Abstract

Do gender norms lead to an inefficient reallocation of resources? This study investigates the role of gender norms in how households respond to major economic shocks. We leverage rich longitudinal data from the UK on couples' employment, time use, and self-reported gender norms to test whether gender norms prevent households from achieving income-maximising arrangements after a negative employment shock, and, in particular, after a trade-induced employment decline. We find that, after a layoff, men are more likely than women to return to work in the long run. This asymmetry is fully explained by women who subscribe to traditional gender norms: progressive women have the same labour market response to a layoff as men. Analogous results emerge in response to a trade shock: while the so-called "China shock" had a long-lasting negative employment effect on traditional women, we find no discernible employment effect for progressive women.

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Non-Technical Summary

How economies respond to trade shocks depends not only on firms and workers, but also on how households adjust when employment opportunities change. This research asks whether gender norms in the UK influence those household responses and, in doing so, shape the wider economic effects of trade shocks. Understanding these mechanisms is important for predicting who bears the costs of trade adjustment and for designing policies that make trade more inclusive.

We use data from Understanding Society and its predecessor, the British Household Panel Survey, to examine how UK households respond to two types of economic shocks: involuntary job loss (layoffs) and changes in employment opportunities caused by increased import competition from China following its accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001. We compare households with more traditional and more progressive views on gender roles, measured using respondents' agreement with statements such as "A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works."

We first study layoffs to understand how UK households adjust when one partner suddenly loses their job. In principle, families can cushion the shock by reallocating paid and unpaid work between partners. However, this adjustment may be constrained if gender norms limit how household responsibilities are shared.

Immediately after a layoff, UK households behave in remarkably similar ways regardless of whether the displaced worker is a man or a woman. The person who loses their job takes on more housework, reducing the amount of unpaid work carried out by their partner. However, partners do not use this additional time to increase their own labour market participation.

The longer-term picture is very different. Over the following decade, most displaced men return to employment, while many displaced women remain outside the labour market. Importantly, this difference is concentrated entirely among couples with traditional gender norms. Among couples with more progressive attitudes, women's employment trajectories after job loss closely resemble those of men. This suggests that persistent employment losses are not an inevitable consequence of layoffs, but depend on how households organise work and care responsibilities.

We find a strikingly similar pattern when examining trade shocks. In the UK, individuals employed in sectors that were more exposed to increased import competition from China experienced a modest decline in employment over the following two decades. However, average effects conceal substantial differences across households. For women with traditional gender attitudes, greater trade exposure translated into a small but persistent reduction in employment. By contrast, women with more progressive gender norms experienced no lasting decline in employment and fully recovered their working hours.

These findings show that gender norms influence not only household outcomes but also the economy's capacity to adjust to structural change. Households facing similar labour market shocks can respond very differently depending on how they divide paid work and caring responsibilities. As a result, social norms shape the persistence and distribution of the employment effects of trade.

The policy implications are clear. Analyses of trade adjustment typically focus on differences across industries, occupations or regions. Our findings suggest that household dynamics are another important source of variation in how people experience trade shocks. Policies designed to support adjustment should therefore recognise the barriers that may prevent some household members—particularly women in more traditional households—from remaining attached to the labour market.

Measures that reduce these barriers could strengthen households' ability to adapt to economic change. By enabling more flexible labour market responses, such policies would not only improve gender equality but also enhance the economy's resilience to future trade shocks.

Gender Norms and Household Responses to Economic Shocks

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Abstract

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1 Introduction

Men and women in the labour market look more similar than ever before. However, gender norms persist: there is ample evidence of gendered patterns in couples' time use, even when financially suboptimal (Ichino et al., 2024; Giommoni and Rubolino, 2022; Siminski and Yetsenga, 2022; Jessen et al., 2024; Andresen and Nix, 2022; Bertrand et al., 2015; Hancock et al., 2024). But how much are couples willing to pay to abide by gender norms? Do the same norms that bring households to deviate from income maximisation when the money at stake is relatively low also shape how they cope with large shocks, such as losing one's job?

The answer is macro-relevant. During the first months of COVID-19, job losses were greater among women than men, leading commentators to characterise the downturn as a 'she-cession' (Alon et al., 2022). Openness to trade tends to shed jobs in manufacturing, a sector into which more traditional individuals tend to sort. If laid-off women who hold traditional views are more likely to retreat into home production instead of returning to the labour force, this could affect the speed of recovery after a crisis, or how an economy adjusts to trade shocks. Aggregate employment dynamics would then depend not only on how many jobs are lost, but also on which spouse loses them and on the couple's underlying views about breadwinning and caregiving. Yet the literature has little evidence on whether large, involuntary separations trigger gender-asymmetric adjustments, on whether any asymmetry is stronger in traditional families, or on whether this has aggregate implications for an economy's response to shocks.

This paper fills this gap. Using rich longitudinal data from the United Kingdom, we first provide empirical evidence on how heterosexual couples' employment and home production change when one partner is laid off, and we then apply the same lens to the so-called "China shock," the surge in Chinese import competition that followed China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001. In the short run, men and women respond similarly to their own layoff: they are broadly equally likely to be out of employment and to take on additional responsibilities in home production. Instead, large asymmetries emerge in the longer run: two to ten years after their layoff, women are twice as likely as men to remain out of employment and four times as likely to have taken on additional household responsibilities. Strikingly, the entire labour market asymmetry can be explained by gender norms: progressive women have the same post-layoff labour market be-

haviour as men, and the long-run divergence is driven entirely by traditional women. Similarly, employment responses to the China shock are fully concentrated among traditional women, and are essentially zero for progressive women.

To interpret our results, we outline a framework of joint household decision-making. Following Ichino et al. (2024), a couple derives utility from consumption and a public good (e.g., children's well-being). The former is purchased with income earned from time in paid work, and the latter is produced via time in home production. Gender norms enter through the symmetry and magnitude of the elasticity of substitution between women's and men's time in the production of the public good. A symmetric and high elasticity of substitution characterizes "progressive" couples. In this case the two inputs are easily substituted - either partner can take over any task with little loss of efficiency. An asymmetric and low elasticity of substitution describes "traditional" couples. In this case the inputs are near complements; reallocating tasks from the wife to the husband is costly because it clashes with internalized gender roles. When an adverse labour market shock affects one partner, progressive couples can shift time seamlessly from home to market activity (or vice versa), mitigating the effect of the shock on the amount of consumption and of the public good; in contrast, traditional couples cannot, and the household ends up further away from the income-maximising allocation.

A testable implication of this framework is that, if gender norms did not matter, men's and women's time in paid work and home production would respond symmetrically to an economic shock, irrespective of which partner received it. We test this implication directly: we estimate both own and partner's responses to a layoff, separately for households where the laid-off partner is the man or the woman, and we allow responses to vary with reported gender norms.

The primary data source for this study is the *Understanding Society* survey, a longitudinal survey that, together with its predecessor (the British Household Panel Survey), has followed a representative sample of UK households since 1991 (University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research, 2024). We measure paid work and home production on both the intensive margin (hours) and the extensive margin (employment status, and the share of household tasks for which the individual is mainly responsible). We construct a "progressiveness index" by aggregating individuals' agreement with four statements about gender roles (e.g., "a pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works") via principal component analysis, and classify individuals as "progressive" or

"traditional" depending on whether they are above or below the median of the index. The exposure to trade shock is standard, and it is constructed using data on trade flows from the United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database, via Irastorza-Fadrique et al. (2025).

In the layoff analysis, we employ an event study and a difference-in-differences approach. The event is a layoff and the control group are couples in which neither partner is ever laid off in the sample. We compare how a heterosexual household responds to either the man or the woman's layoff, and analyse how the reaction varies with the level of progressiveness of the couple. The household outcomes of interest are time spent in paid work or home production, on the intensive and the extensive margin, by the laid-off individual and his or her partner.

In the short run, the gender differences in labour market and housework responses to their own or their partner's layoff are small. Immediately after their own layoff, both men and women work approximately 10 fewer hours and are approximately 21 and 28 pp less likely to be employed respectively. Regardless of gender, the laid-off individual increases his or her time doing housework by just over an hour per week, although women are twice as likely to take on more responsibilities at home, 4pp compared to 2pp. In response to their partner's layoff, neither men nor women are more likely to spend time on paid work.

In the long run, households respond very differently to whether it is the man or the woman who is laid off. Two to ten years later, most laid-off men have returned to paid work and given up the responsibility for household tasks that they picked up when they were laid off. In contrast, a sizeable share of laid-off women remain non-employed and maintain the higher level of responsibility for household tasks. Regardless of gender, the partner still shows no labour market response and only a negligible decline in home production.

The gender asymmetry in the long-run labour market response to one's own layoff is entirely driven by women who hold traditional gender attitudes. Two to ten years after their own layoff, they are 20pp less likely to be employed, while progressive women are only 10pp less likely to be employed. This puts the latter in a similar position to traditional men, who are 9pp less likely to be employed. Progressive men are also more likely to be employed in the long run relative to their traditional counterparts (by 5pp), but for men the difference between progressive and traditional individuals shrinks and often becomes indistinguishable from zero as soon as geography controls are included, while for women the difference is robust to including a battery of controls (geography,

family composition, income, industry and occupation, and education). Interestingly, there is no difference in the home production behaviour of women regardless of their gender norms.

When we turn to trade shocks, we confirm the results of the layoff analysis. Using a standard instrumental variable strategy, in which exposure to import competition from China through the initial sector of employment is instrumented with Chinese exports to other high-income countries, we find negative though insignificant employment effects of the China shock, as in Irastorza-Fadrique et al. (2025). While the negative effect on employment and hours worked of being employed in an import-competing industry is similar for men and women, for women the effect is fully concentrated among those holding traditional gender views.

Overall, the evidence suggests that gendered views alter the labour market behaviour of women: not only in steady state, but also in response to shocks. This has the potential to impact not only the welfare of the household, but also how the economy as a whole adjusts to shocks.

Related Literature Recent literature, building on the identity framework of Akerlof and Kranton (2000), shows that couples willingly incur private income losses in order to uphold gender norms. Small fiscal or ranking perturbations—e.g., marginal tax-rate changes (Ichino et al., 2024) or spouse-based tax credits (Giommoni and Rubolino, 2022)—prompt shifts in time use that leave joint earnings below the feasible frontier. Gender norms impact whether and how much couples respond to public policies, such as childcare provision (Mensinger and Zimpelmann, 2024). These studies, however, examine relatively low-stakes incentives. Whether the same normative frictions bind when households confront large, exogenous shocks remains largely unexplored. Understanding this margin is essential: if gender norms hinder efficient reallocation after layoffs, trade disruptions, or other macroeconomic shocks, both household welfare and aggregate recovery suffer. By focusing on severe employment shocks, the present paper moves the literature from "micro nudges" to high-cost events, thereby testing whether norms only shape the equilibrium allocation of labour or also impede its redeployment when economic circumstances change dramatically.

Our work also speaks to the literature on job loss, which documents large and persistent earnings losses for displaced workers (Jacobson et al., 1993). While a few papers have documented the unequal impact of job loss on men and women (Illing et al., 2024; Ivandi and Lassen, 2023), consistent with our findings, we are the first to map this asymmetry to gender norms and to draw

out its aggregate implications.

Finally, our work speaks to the literature on the impact of the China shock on Western economies (Autor et al., 2013; Dauth et al., 2014). The evidence from the UK (De Lyon and Pessoa, 2021; Irastorza-Fadrique et al., 2025) suggests milder negative employment effects relative to the US: we contribute by showing that, for women, the entirety of the effect is concentrated among those holding traditional gender views; thus confirming that gender views impact how households and the economy as a whole respond to shocks.

The rest of the paper is organised as follows. In Section 2 we present a conceptual framework linking gender norms and households' choices of time use. In Section 3 we present the data and our variables' construction. Section 4 discusses the micro-level results on household responses to layoffs, and Section 5 presents the results on the China shock. Section 6 concludes.

2 Conceptual Framework

To fix ideas, we briefly outline a conceptual framework linking gender norms and household allocation of time. This framework builds on Ichino et al. (2024).

Setup We assume that households, composed of heterosexual couples, maximise a joint utility function, U, which depends on two primary components: consumption (C) and a common household good (G):

$$U = U(C, G)$$

Consumption (C) is purchased with the total income of the household, which is the sum of both partners' labour earnings:

$$C = w_f W_f + w_m W_m$$

where w_f, w_m are hourly wages and W_f, W_m are hours spent in the labour market, for the woman and the man respectively. The household good (G) is produced using time inputs from both partners in home production:

$$G = f(H_f, H_m)$$

where H_f and H_m denote the hours spent on home production by the female and male partners, respectively. Each partner faces a time constraint:

$$T_g = W_g + H_g \quad \text{for } g = f, m$$

where T_g is the total time available, divided between paid work (W_g) and home production (H_g).

The Role of Gender Norms Gender norms are introduced into the framework as they influence the elasticity of substitution between H_f and H_m in the production of G. This elasticity serves as a proxy for the rigidity of gender norms: a symmetric, high elasticity indicates progressive norms, where male and female inputs are highly substitutable, allowing for flexible reallocation of tasks; an asymmetric, low elasticity indicates traditional norms, where substitution is limited, constraining the households ability to adapt to shocks. For example, in households with low elasticity of substitution, traditional gender norms may prevent men from taking on home production tasks, even when they are fully free from work. By contrast, households with high elasticity can reallocate tasks more efficiently, mitigating the effects of shocks on utility.

The framework yields a simple testable implication: if gender norms did not matter, men's and women's time in paid work and home production would respond symmetrically to an employment shock, irrespective of which partner received it and of the couple's stated views. Asymmetric responses—for instance, women substituting home production for market work after a layoff more persistently than men—and, especially, asymmetries concentrated among couples with traditional views would instead indicate that gender norms constrain the reallocation of the household's time. Anticipating the results, we find that responses are close to symmetric in the short run, but that in the long run women return to work at a much lower rate than men—and that this asymmetry is present only among traditional women.

3 Data

In this section we describe our main dataset (*Understanding Society*), our main outcome variables (intensive and extensive margin of employment and home production), and how we construct our measure of gender norms and of trade exposure.

3.1 Data Sources

The primary data source for this study is the *Understanding Society* survey, a longitudinal household survey covering the United Kingdom since 1991 (University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research, 2024). This nationally representative panel follows around 30,000 households over time, and follows individuals as they form new households.[1] All adult household members are interviewed, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of intra-household dynamics.

The *Understanding Society* dataset provides detailed data on employment outcomes, home production activities, and gender norms. In addition to information on employment, such as hours worked and job status, the survey asks about time spent on home production activities like cooking and cleaning, as well as the degree of responsibility for such activities, which is crucial to define an "extensive margin" of home production as we describe below. It also includes questions about gender norms, which are used to construct a "progressiveness index" to classify individuals. This feature is critical for investigating whether the rigidity of gender norms influences household responses to shocks.

Trade shocks are constructed using data on trade flows from the United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database, via Irastorza-Fadrique et al. (2025), and using data on employment by sector from the Office for National Statistics Annual Business Inquiry (via nomis).

3.2 Main Outcome Variables

Our main outcome variables are paid work and home production, both on the intensive and on the extensive margin.

Labour market variables are straightforward: individuals are explicitly asked about labour force status and number of hours spent in paid work.

The intensive margin of home production is also directly observable in the dataset. Respondents are asked how many hours per week they spend on common household tasks (e.g. cleaning, cooking, etc), omitting childcare. The question is asked in alternate waves, so we impute missing years using the average of the two adjacent years.

The extensive measure of home production is novel. In particular, we do the following: in the

[1] The full dataset combines the modern UK Household Longitudinal Study, which started in 2009 with 30,000 households, and the earlier British Household Panel Survey, which started in 1991 with 5,500 households.

survey, respondents are asked explicitly who does the cooking, who does the grocery shopping, who does the cleaning, who does the washing; respondents can answer: it's mostly me, we share equally, it's mostly my partner. For each task, we create a dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent answers "mostly me", and 0 otherwise.[2] We then average this value across tasks to obtain our measure of the extensive margin of home production ("Fraction of household tasks I am mainly responsible for"). This measure is important because the same number of hours of home production can have a very different impact on welfare and productivity on the labour market depending on whether they also require planning, being on call, etc.: the infamous "mental load". This is the concept we capture with our extensive margin measure of home production.

3.3 The Economic Shocks: Layoffs and Trade

The analysis focuses on two types of economic shocks: layoffs and trade shocks. These shocks differ in their nature, scope, and implications, providing complementary insights into household behaviour.

Layoff shocks are large, salient disruptions to an individual's employment. In the *Understanding Society* survey, layoffs are identified based on self-reported reasons for ending a job, specifically responses indicating that the individual was "made redundant" or "dismissed/sacked".[3] Layoffs provide a clear and immediate shock to household labour supply, making them a valuable setting for studying household responses. However, potential endogeneity concerns arise, as layoffs may be correlated with unobserved individual characteristics, such as poor job performance or pre-existing financial instability.

Trade shocks, instead, can determine quasi-exogenous variation in labour market opportunities, as they impacted different industries differentially. The analysis leverages the China shock, the rapid increase in Chinese import penetration across industries. Individuals are assigned industry exposure based on their sector of employment in the year 2001. To mitigate endogeneity concerns, the analysis employs an instrumental variable (IV) strategy, using Chinese export growth to other countries (excluding the UK) as an instrument. The construction of both measures is detailed

[2] Respondents can also indicate "others", though this answer is given only 2% of the time. In this case, we set the dummy to missing.

[3] Other possible reasons respondents could give are: promoted, left for better job, temporary job ended, took retirement, health reasons, left to have baby, look after family, look after other person, moved area, other reason

in Section 5. This approach isolates variation in trade exposure driven by China's global trade expansion rather than domestic industry characteristics in the UK.

3.4 Measuring Gender Norms

We construct a measure of gender norms based on people's self-reported beliefs. Specifically, we quantify gender norms using an individual's level of agreement with the following statements:

- A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works.
- All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job.
- Both the husband and wife should contribute to the household income.
- A husband's job is to earn money, a wife's job is to look after the home and family.

For each statement, individuals can choose from a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 "Strongly agree" to 5 "Strongly disagree". In order not to impose cardinality to these ordinal variables, for each possible answer we create a separate dummy variable. We then aggregate the resulting 20 dummy variables using principal component analysis (PCA) to construct a "progressiveness index": Appendix Figure A.1 shows how this constructed progressiveness index relates to the level of agreement with the statement "All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job."

Individuals are then classified as "progressive" or "traditional" based on whether their index score is above or below the median.

3.5 Sample Restrictions

The analysis focuses on heterosexual couples. Same-sex couples constitute less than 1% of the sample, which limits statistical power. We restrict to individuals aged 15 to 65. Individuals and couples with multiple layoffs are excluded to isolate the effect of a single shock; including them does not systematically change results. In the main analysis, we restrict to couples which remain married / cohabiting, though we show the results are robust to relaxing this criterion.

Since the trade analysis is based on exposure to the China shock in 2001, the sample restrictions are slightly different in this section: we restrict to individuals who are employed and aged 18 to 59 in 2001.

4 Evidence from Layoffs

In this section we show how households respond to a layoff and how this response varies depending on the level of progressiveness of the couple.

4.1 Empirical Strategy for Layoff Shocks

We start with an event-study approach, where the event is a layoff and the control group consists of individuals who are never laid off in the sample (and whose partner is never laid off in the sample). The specification is as follows:

$$Y_{it} = \alpha_i + \delta_t + \beta_{h(i)} + \sum_{k=-5, k\neq -2}^{10} \gamma_k D_{it}^{(k)} + \epsilon_{it}, \tag{1}$$

where Y_{it} is the outcome of interest for individual i in year t, $D_{it}^{(k)}$ is a dummy variable equal to 1 if the individual is k years from experiencing a layoff, and α_i, δ_t and $\beta_{h(i)}$ are individual, time, and age fixed effects, respectively. We estimate Equation (1) with the interaction-weighted estimator of Sun and Abraham (2021), using individuals who are never laid off as the control cohort, so that the estimates are robust to treatment-effect heterogeneity across layoff cohorts.

We also summarise the results in a simpler difference-in-differences specification:

$$Y_{it} = \alpha_i + \delta_t + \beta_{h(i)} + \gamma^{SR}\text{Post}_{it}^{SR} + \gamma^{LR}\text{Post}_{it}^{LR} + \epsilon_{it} \tag{2}$$

where $Post_{it}^{SR}$ is a dummy indicating the year of the layoff and the following year and $Post_{it}^{LR}$ is a dummy indicating years 2 through 10 after a layoff.

We test for heterogeneous effects by gender norms by including interactions of $Post^{SR}$ and $Post^{LR}$ with the dummy for being progressive (described in Section 3.4).

4.2 Results on Layoffs

4.2.1 Response of the Household when a Woman is Laid Off

Figure 1 and Table 1 show what happens to a woman and her partner when she loses her job.

When a woman experiences a layoff, her paid work hours drop significantly, while her time

spent in home production increases. As shown in panel (a) of Figure 1 and in the first column of Table 1, after a layoff women reduce their weekly hours of paid employment by approximately 10 hours on impact (the year of the layoff and the following year), with a partial recovery in the following years. In the long run (2 to 10 years after the layoff), women work approximately 6 fewer hours per week compared to pre-layoff levels. The reduction in paid work is accompanied by an increase in housework hours. Panel (b) of Figure 1 shows that women increase their weekly housework hours by approximately 1.2 hours immediately following the layoff, and this increase persists in the long run. This pattern indicates a reallocation of time from market work to home production.

The male partners of women who are laid off also adjust their behaviour, albeit in limited ways. As shown in Figure 1 (panels a and b) and as detailed in Table 1 (columns 3 and 4), male partners reduce their housework contributions slightly, by about 0.6 hours per week in the long run. However, they do not significantly increase their own paid work hours, despite having more time available due to their reduced housework contributions. This limited response suggests a lack of compensatory adjustments by male partners in response to their female partners layoff. The responsibility for household tasks also shifts following a womans layoff: panel (c) of Figure 1 shows that women take on a greater share of household tasks (cooking, cleaning, washing, and grocery shopping), for which they report being "mostly responsible", allowing their partner to be responsible for fewer of them.

4.2.2 Response of the Household when a Man is Laid Off

The household's response to a man's layoff does not differ dramatically from that of a woman's, at least in the short run. As shown in Figure 2(a) and in Table 2, men reduce their weekly paid work hours by about 10 hours on impact (the year of the layoff and the following year). Unlike women, however, men exhibit a steady recovery in employment over time. In the long run, which we take to be years 2 through 10 after the layoff, men work approximately 4 fewer hours per week compared to their pre-layoff levels, indicating a stronger long-term recovery relative to women.

In terms of housework, men increase their contributions significantly following a layoff. Panel (b) of Figure 2 shows that men increase their weekly housework hours by approximately 1.1 hours

in the short run, with a decline over the long run. The female partners of men who are laid off reduce their housework contributions by about 0.5 hours per week, as shown in Table 2 (Column 4). However, similar to male partners of laid-off women, these female partners do not significantly increase their paid work hours, as demonstrated in Figure 2 (a) and Table 2 (column 3). In terms of household tasks, panels (c) and (d) of Figure 2 indicate that men take on a greater share of responsibilities for tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare following a layoff. However, their increased involvement in household tasks diminishes over time as they return to the labour market, demonstrating the temporary nature of this adjustment.

4.2.3 Comparison Between Men and Women

A direct comparison between laid-off men and women reveals important long-run asymmetries in how they and their households respond to layoffs, which is harder to see in cross-figure comparisons. Panel (a) of Figure 3 shows that both men and women experience an immediate decline in employment following a layoff, but the long-term trajectories diverge sharply. Men are significantly more likely to return to the labour market, with their employment rates recovering steadily over time. By contrast, women exhibit a much lower probability of returning to work, with many remaining persistently out of the labour force. The persistence of these labour market differences is somewhat mirrored in household labour allocation. Panel (b) of Figure 3 shows that women's increased housework contributions following a layoff are somewhat more persistent than those of men. Women continue to bear a greater share of household responsibilities in the long run, whereas men's increased housework contributions fade as they reintegrate into the labour market. These gendered patterns suggest that traditional gender norms might play a significant role in shaping household responses to layoffs. Women are more likely to assume additional domestic responsibilities and less likely to re-enter the labour force, reinforcing traditional divisions of labour. Men, on the other hand, exhibit stronger labour market recovery and a more temporary adjustment to household tasks.

Partners of laid-off individuals somewhat adjust their housework contributions but do not significantly change their labour market behaviour, suggesting the presence of frictions in translating a reduced housework load into more hours in the labour market.

The restriction to partnered individuals is not driving the observed results. In panels (e) and (f) of Figure 3 we replicate panels (a) and (b) on the full sample and we obtain, if anything, even sharper asymmetries in post-layoff behaviour between men and women.

4.2.4 Heterogeneity by Gender Norms

The role of gender norms in driving these asymmetries is evident when analysing heterogeneity across households with different levels of progressiveness. Individuals are classified as "progressive" or "traditional" based on their responses to survey questions about gender roles, as described in Section 3.4. As shown in Table 3, progressive women are significantly more likely to return to the labour market after a layoff than traditional women: Column 1 shows that progressive women close the employment gap with men, with their long-term re-employment rates resembling those of their male counterparts (displayed in column 1 of Table 4). This finding underscores the importance of progressive gender norms in mitigating labour market scarring for women. For men, responses to layoffs are relatively similar across progressive and traditional individuals, as shown in Table 4 - more on this below. Regardless of norms, men exhibit a relatively strong labour market recovery.

While progressive women do return to the labour market after a layoff, they do not symmetrically reduce their responsibility for household tasks. While progressiveness helps women close the gap in the labour market, it does not seem to do the same within the household.

Robustness to the Full Sample As above, results are even stronger when we use the full sample rather than restricting to cohabiting couples. Table 5 replicates columns (1) and (2) of Tables 3 and 4 without couples restrictions (i.e., only restricting to individuals aged 15-65). The post-layoff employment gap between progressive and traditional women is still 9-10 pp and highly significant, while the corresponding figure for men is 3-4 pp and not significantly different from zero in the long run.

Including Interacted Controls In this section, we established that traditional and progressive women have different responses to a layoff–with traditional women substantially more likely to remain out of employment in the long run, and progressive women behaving essentially like men–while this is less true for men. However, this might be driven by composition: traditional women

might disproportionately live in regions or sort into occupations with weaker labour markets, for example.

Here we address this concern as follows. For each individual, we fix the pre-layoff value of each of the controls listed below: in the regression, we interact these pre-layoff controls with our post-layoff dummies ($Post^{SR}$ and $Post^{LR}$). If composition is driving the observed post-layoff difference between traditional and progressive women, then including these interacted controls will drive the coefficients on the interaction between $Post^{SR}$ and $Post^{LR}$ and the traditional dummy to zero. These are the controls we include (values fixed at the year before layoff)[4]:

- Demographics/geography: Age at layoff (in 10-year bins), Region fixed effects, Dummy for urban (versus rural)[5]
- Education: Dummy for having a bachelor's degree or above
- Household composition: Dummy for having kids under 16 in the household
- Income and income shares: Log total household income, Contributed share of household income (in 20pp bins)
- Industry and occupation: fixed effects for Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes (1 and 2 digits), fixed effects for Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes (groups and 2 digits)

Figure 4 plots the coefficients on the interaction between the progressive dummy and $Post^{LR}$, with employment as outcome variable, first in the baseline (i.e., as presented in the fourth row of column (1) in Tables 3 and 4) and then including various combinations of the controls above. The figure confirms that the difference in post-layoff employment behaviour between progressive and traditional women is not driven by composition: when including controls, the progressive–traditional gap actually *increases* in magnitude. For men, on the contrary, the coefficient remains relatively small and often not significantly different from zero.

[4]For the individuals in the control group, we assign fake layoff years and use that to assign "pre-layoff" values symmetrically.

[5]The "urban" dummy is only available starting in 2009, so we only include it in a subset of specifications.

5 Evidence from Trade Shocks

This section explores the effects of trade shocks on labour market outcomes. The analysis uses the China shock as a quasi-exogenous shock to employment opportunities, leveraging its variation across industries. Our findings confirm the evidence from layoffs: while the China shock was followed by a persistent decline in employment for traditional women, this did not happen for progressive women.

5.1 Context: The China Shock

The China shock—the rapid increase in Chinese import penetration following China's 2001 accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO)—had a pronounced impact on UK industries, particularly manufacturing. Figure 5 shows UK imports from China between 1993 and 2017, in levels and as a share of total UK imports: the share rises from around 3 percent in the early 1990s to a peak above 11 percent around 2010, with most of the increase concentrated in the decade following China's WTO accession.

A large literature studies the impact of China's export expansion on Western economies, starting with the US (Autor et al., 2013). For the UK, there is some evidence of an employment decline in sectors directly competing with Chinese imports (De Lyon and Pessoa, 2021; Irastorza-Fadrique et al., 2025): we complement this analysis by disaggregating the effect by individuals' gender views to provide a more nuanced picture of the dynamics following this shock.

5.2 Empirical Strategy for Trade Shocks

For trade shocks, the analysis employs a two-stage least squares (2SLS) approach: individual exposure to Chinese import competition, assigned on the basis of the industry of employment in 2001, is instrumented with the analogous exposure measure constructed from Chinese exports to other high-income countries. The notation $i(j)$ below emphasises that individuals are assigned the exposure of the industry j in which they were employed in the year 2001.

Industry Exposure Measure Industry exposure is defined following Irastorza-Fadrique et al. (2025), which in turn follows Autor et al. (2013):

$$IE_{j,2011-2001} = \frac{\Delta Imports^{China \to UK}_{j,2011-2001}}{Employment_{j,2001}}$$

where $\Delta Imports^{China \to UK}_{j,2011-2001}$ is the change in imports from China to the UK in sector j between the years 2001 and 2011, and $Employment_{j,2001}$ is total employment in sector j in the UK in 2001; sectors are at the three-digit UK Standard Industrial Classification (SIC92) level.[6] The measure is standardised to have weighted mean 0 and standard deviation 1,[7] so that coefficients are expressed per one standard deviation of exposure.

The instrument is constructed analogously, but using Chinese export growth to other countries (excluding the UK). In particular, following Irastorza-Fadrique et al. (2025), the instrument is the following:

$$\tilde{IE}_{j,2011-2001} = \frac{\Delta Imports^{China \to Other}_{j,2011-2001}}{Employment_{j,2001}}$$

where the numerator is the change in imports from China from 2001 to 2011 to other non-UK high-income countries.[8]

Dynamics Given that we are interested in dynamics, we split the panel into 5- or 10-year bins, and run the following regression. Let $\mathbb{1}[\tau_t \in P_b]$ be the indicator that wave t falls in bin b. The second stage is

$$y_{it} = \sum_{b \neq b_0} \beta_b \left(IE_{i(j)} \cdot \mathbb{1}[\tau_t \in P_b] \right) + \alpha_i + \delta_t + \varepsilon_{it}, \tag{3}$$

where α_i is an individual (person) fixed effect and δ_t a wave (calendar-time) fixed effect. Each endogenous interaction is instrumented by the corresponding leave-out interaction; the first stage for bin $b \neq b_0$ is

$$IE_{i(j)} \cdot \mathbb{1}[\tau_t \in P_b] = \sum_{b' \neq b_0} \pi_{bb'} \left(\tilde{IE}_{i(j)} \cdot \mathbb{1}[\tau_t \in P_{b'}] \right) + \eta^b_i + \zeta^b_t + u^b_{it}.$$

[6] The denominator differs from Irastorza-Fadrique et al. (2025), who uses turnover, since turnover by three-digit sector is not publicly available.

[7] The weights are the baseline 2001 cross-sectional interview weight.

[8] Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Spain, Switzerland, and the US.

Note that the exposure variable remains fixed, because we are interested in the dynamic impact of a specific shock rather than dynamic effects from a potentially varying intensity of treatment.

For reasons of power, we use 5-year bins for aggregate outcomes and 10-year bins once we focus on subsamples. When we split the sample by gender norms, individuals are classified as progressive or traditional using only survey responses given before 2001, so that the norms measure predates the shock. Observations are weighted by the baseline (2001) cross-sectional interview weight, and standard errors are clustered on the baseline 3-digit SIC92 industry j, the level of variation of the instrument.

Interpretation and identification The coefficient β_b is the effect of a one-standard-deviation-higher baseline China import exposure on the outcome y during period P_b, relative to the omitted pre-shock reference window, net of person and wave fixed effects. Identification rests on the leave-out instrument $\tilde{IE}_{i(j)}$: conditional on the fixed effects, differential import penetration from China across baseline industries is driven by common supply-side forces (captured by other high-income countries' imports) rather than by UK-specific demand shocks. The pre-reference bin in the 5-year scheme provides a check that treated and comparison individuals were not already diverging before the shock.

5.3 Results from the Trade Shock

Consistent with existing literature, we find a small negative effect of exposure to import competition from China on employment outcomes. While for women we find the effect to be particularly concentrated among those with traditional gender views, for men this is not the case.

Figure 6 shows the mild and often not significant decline in labour market outcomes due to Chinese import competition. Panels (a) and (b) show that instrumented exposure has no predictive power on employment or labour force participation during the early 1990s, but it does in the 2000s: working in 2001 in a sector that would face competition from China predicts a decline of about 1 percentage point in employment and labour force participation over the following 10-15 years, though the estimates are not significantly different from zero (consistent with analogous findings in Irastorza-Fadrique et al., 2025). Hours worked (panel c) display a significant decline, mirrored partially by an increase in hours spent in housework (panel d). We note that the instrument is not

strong in these binned specifications—the Kleibergen–Paap first-stage F statistics lie between 5.7 and 7.8, below conventional thresholds—so we are wary of drawing strong conclusions from these estimates.

Figure 7 shows that for women the trade-induced employment decline tends to be concentrated among those holding traditional gender views, while for men we do not see it—if anything, we see the opposite. Panel (a) shows that, for women, the one percentage point aggregate decline in labour force participation is the average between a 2 pp decline for traditional women and no decline at all for progressive women; panel (b) shows that, while the initial decline in hours worked is the same for the two groups, progressive women fully recover, while traditional women do not. In neither case are the differences statistically different from zero, so this evidence is suggestive rather than conclusive. Traditional and progressive men fare similarly in the short run and diverge in the long run, but in this case progressive men do worse—suggesting that the norms that shape women's labour market behaviour are different from those that shape men's.

6 Conclusion

This paper contributes to our understanding of how households respond to economic shocks by highlighting the central role of gender norms. The findings demonstrate that traditional norms reinforce gendered patterns of labour market adjustment and household labour allocation, with significant implications for womens long-term economic outcomes. Progressive households exhibit more equitable responses in the labour market, with women returning to the labour force at rates comparable to men, though not in the household. These results suggest that gender norms might be a critical barrier to the efficient reallocation of resources in response to economic shocks, and that a more progressive society might make both households and the economy as a whole more resilient to economic shocks.

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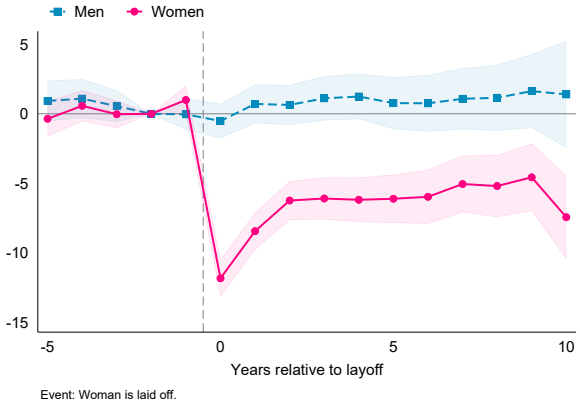
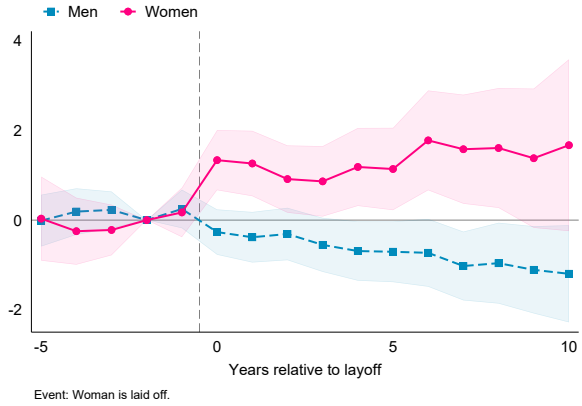
Figures

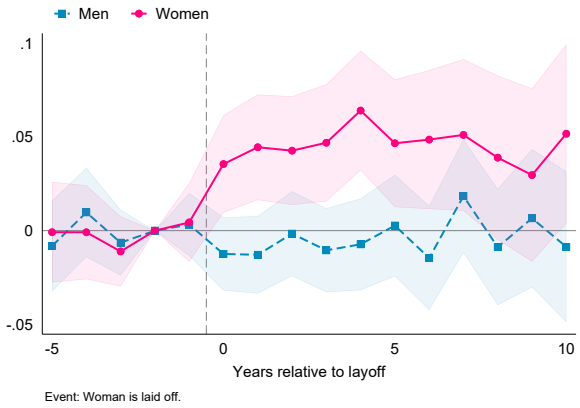
Figure 1: Responses To Woman's Layoff



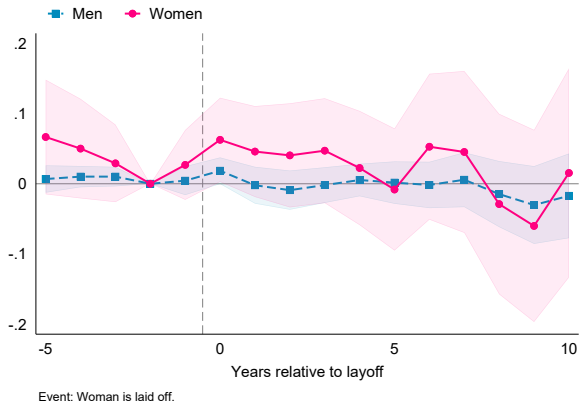
(a) Weekly hours in paid employment



(b) Weekly hours in housework



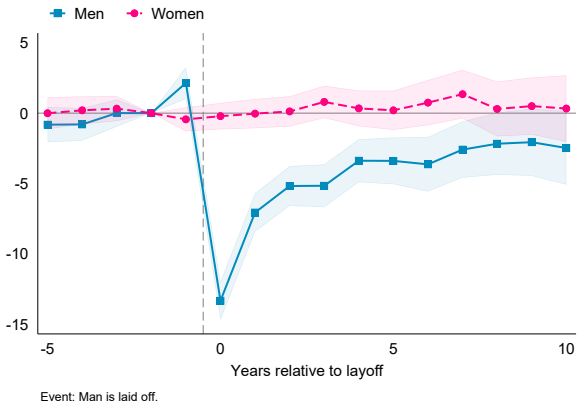
(c) Fraction of household tasks I am mainly responsible for



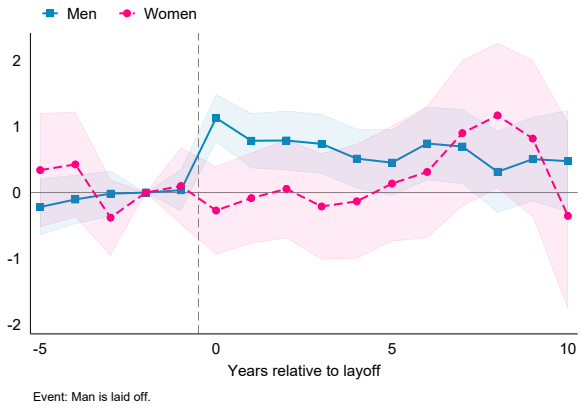
(d) I am mainly responsible for childcare

Notes: The figure shows estimated coefficients on relative-time dummies from the event-study specification in (1), where the event is the layoff of the woman in a couple. Specification (1) is estimated with the interaction-weighted estimator of Sun and Abraham (2021) using never-laid-off individuals as the control cohort. The circles in pink (connected by the solid line) correspond to the estimates for the woman, the squares in blue (connected by the dashed line) correspond to the estimates for her male partner. The outcomes are: in panel (a), the number of weekly hours spent in paid employment; in panel (b), the number of weekly hours spent doing housework; in panel (c), "fraction of household tasks I am mainly responsible for", constructed as the average of four dummies for responding "mostly me" to the questions "who is responsible for doing the groceries/cooking/cleaning/washing?"; in panel (d), a dummy for answering "mostly me" to the question "who is responsible for childcare". Data: United Kingdom's *Understanding Society*, 1991-2019. The sample includes individuals aged 15-65. The estimation includes individual, time, and age fixed effects.

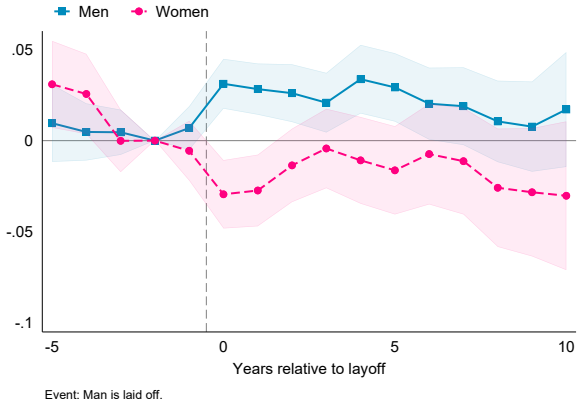
Figure 2: Responses To Man's Layoff



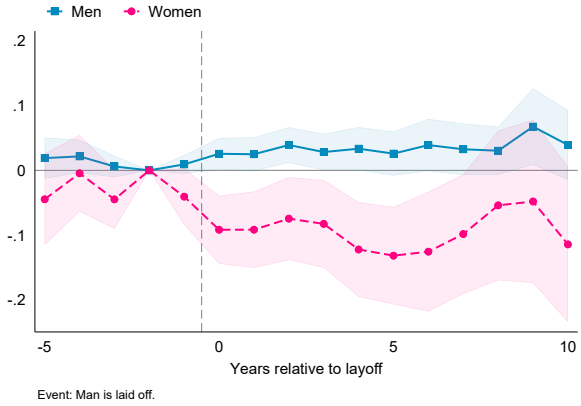
(a) Weekly hours in paid employment



(b) Weekly hours in housework



(c) Fraction of household tasks I am mainly responsible for

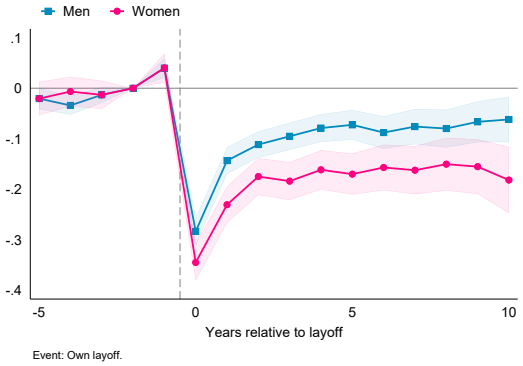


(d) I am mainly responsible for childcare

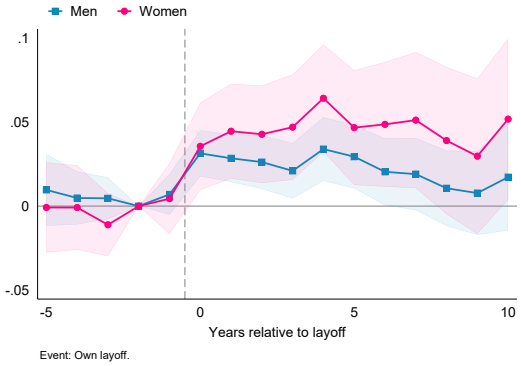
Notes: The figure shows estimated coefficients on relative-time dummies from the event-study specification in (1), where the event is the layoff of the man in a couple. The circles in blue (connected by a solid line) correspond to the estimates for the man, the squares in pink (connected by a dashed line) correspond to the estimates for the female partner. Further details are in the note of Figure 1.

Figure 3: Comparing Men's and Women's Responses to Own and Partner's Layoff

Own Layoff

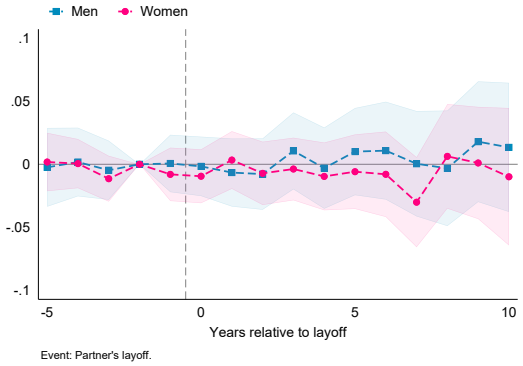


(a) Employment (Own layoff)

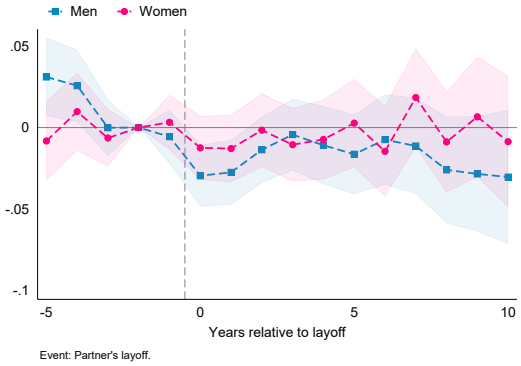


(b) Housework (Own layoff)

Partner's Layoff

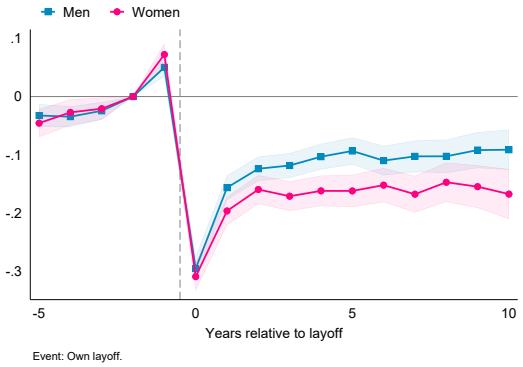


(c) Employment (Partner's layoff)

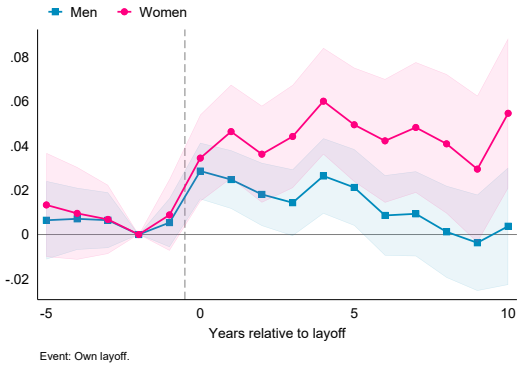


(d) Housework (Partner's layoff)

Own Layoff - Full Sample



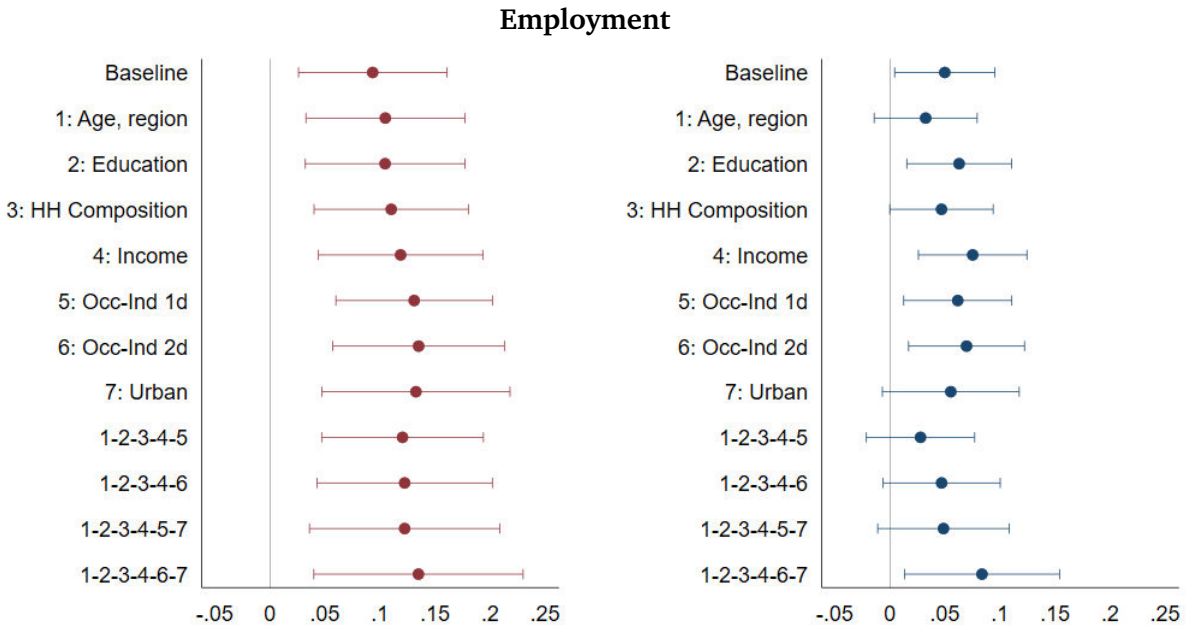
(e) Employment (Own layoff)



(f) Housework (Own layoff)

Notes: The figure shows estimated coefficients on relative-time dummies from the event-study specification in (1), estimated with the interaction-weighted estimator of Sun and Abraham (2021) using never-laid-off individuals as the control cohort. In panels (a) and (b) the event is own layoff; in panels (c) and (d) the event is partner's layoff. The squares in blue correspond to the estimates for men, the circles in pink correspond to the estimates for women; solid lines (in panels a and b) indicate responses to own layoff, while dashed lines (in panels c and d) indicate responses to partner's layoff. Panels (e) and (f) replicate panels (a) and (b) but in the sample that does not restrict to couples. Data: United Kingdom's *Understanding Society*, 1991-2019. The sample includes individuals aged 15-65. The estimation includes individual, time, and age fixed effects.

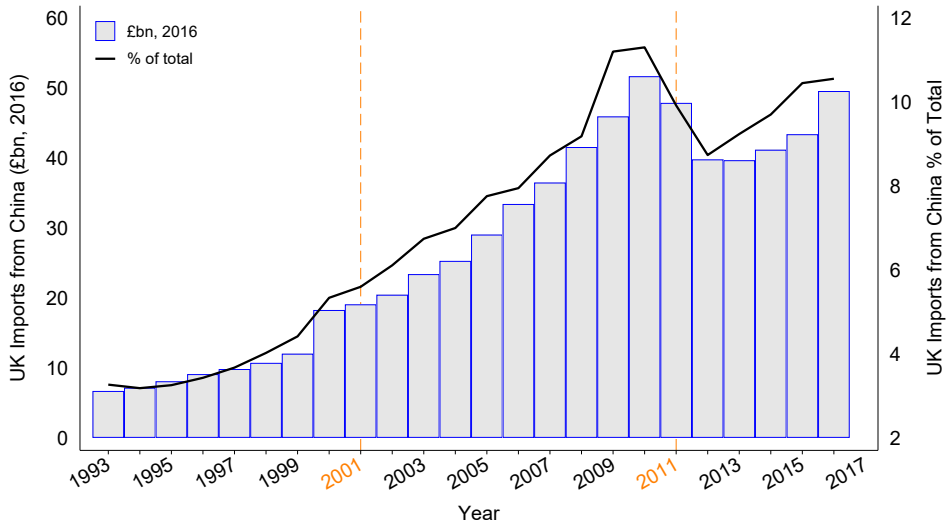
Figure 4: Differential Response to Layoff for Gender-Progressives (relative to Gender-Traditionals), including Interacted Controls



(a) Women (b) Men

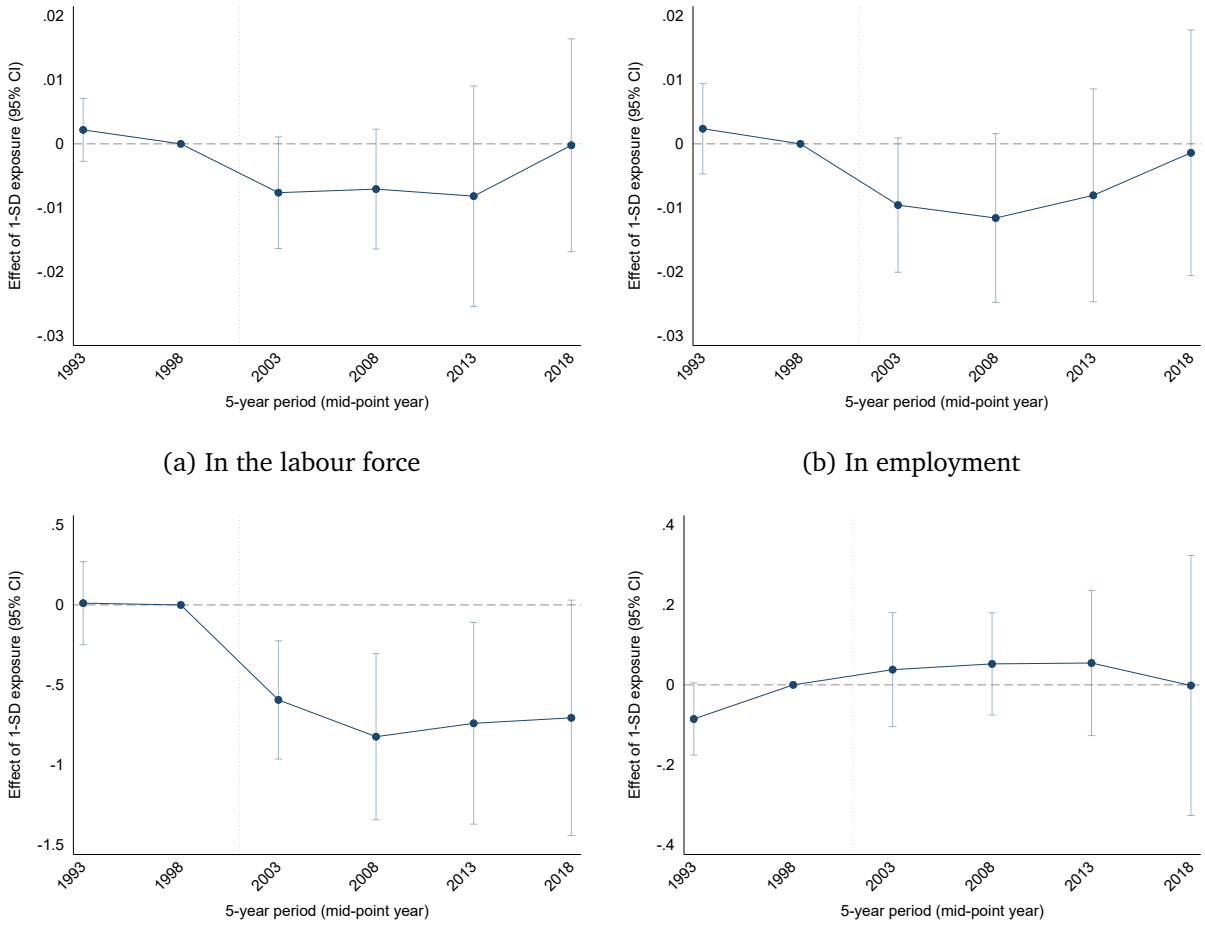
Notes: The figure shows estimated coefficients on the interaction between $Post^{LR}$ and the progressive dummy in regressions with different sets of controls. The outcome variable is employment. See text for details. Data: United Kingdom *Understanding Society*, 1991-2019. The sample includes individuals aged 15-65. All estimations include individual, time, and age fixed effects.

Figure 5: Change in UK imports from China



Notes: Replicated from Irastorza-Fadrique et al. (2025).

Figure 6: Main Effect: Own Exposure to China Shock



(a) In the labour force

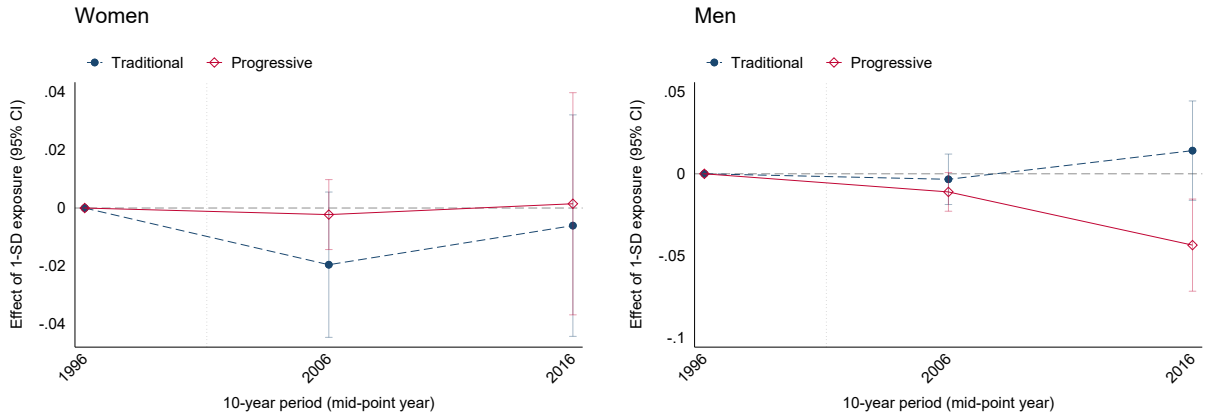
(b) In employment

(c) Weekly hours in paid employment

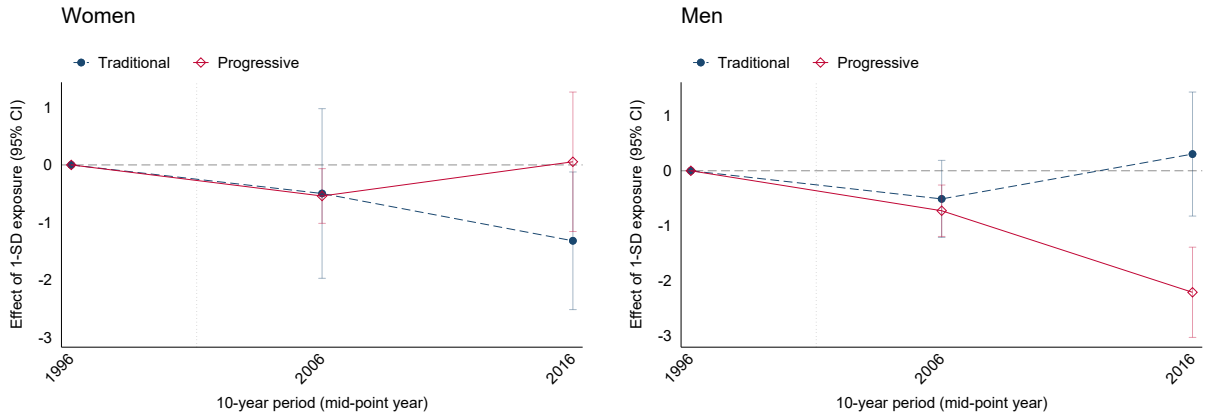
(d) Weekly hours in housework

Notes: The figure shows the impact of the China shock on individual-level outcomes: the panels display the estimated β_b from Specification (3). See details in the text. The sample is all individuals aged 18-59 in employment in 2001, and exposure is defined based on their industry of employment in 2001. Observations are weighted by the baseline (2001) cross-sectional interview weight, and standard errors are clustered on the baseline 3-digit SIC92 industry. Kleibergen–Paap first-stage F statistics are 7.5 for labour force participation and employment, 7.8 for hours worked, and 5.7 for housework hours.

Figure 7: Own Exposure to China Shock: Heterogeneity by Gender Norms



(a) In the labour force



(b) Weekly hours in paid employment

Notes: The figure shows the impact of the China shock on individual-level outcomes: the panels display the estimated β_b from Specification (3). See details in the text. Separate regressions are run for each of the four gender-by-norms subsamples. The sample is all individuals aged 18-59 in employment in 2001, and exposure is defined based on their industry of employment in 2001. Observations are weighted by the baseline (2001) cross-sectional interview weight, and standard errors are clustered on the baseline 3-digit SIC92 industry. Kleibergen–Paap first-stage F statistics for the subsample regressions shown range between 9.7 and 61.4.

Tables

Table 1: Intensive Margin Responses To Woman's Layoff

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Own		Partner	
	Hours worked per week	Hours per week spent on housework	Hours worked per week	Hours per week spent on housework
Post-Layoff SR	-10.27***	1.208***	-0.756	-0.307
	(0.613)	(0.309)	(0.581)	(0.217)
Post-Layoff LR	-5.659***	1.038**	0.170	-0.581*
	(0.665)	(0.352)	(0.666)	(0.237)
Pre-layoff mean	29.61	14.03	38.90	6.217
N	148602	129710	131222	113989
N (Individuals)	20053	17187	18349	15493

Standard errors in parentheses

$^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Notes: Outcomes are measured in hours per week. Short-run (SR) indicates the year of the layoff and the following; Long-run (LR) indicates years 2 through 10 after the layoff. All regressions include individual, year, and age fixed effects. Errors are clustered at the individual level.

Table 2: Intensive Margin Responses To Man's Layoff

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Own		Partner	
	Hours worked per week	Hours per week spent on housework	Hours worked per week	Hours per week spent on housework
Post-Layoff SR	-10.45***	1.083***	-0.323	-0.547^{+}
	(0.585)	(0.169)	(0.416)	(0.280)
Post-Layoff LR	-3.967***	0.752***	0.292	-0.447
	(0.612)	(0.186)	(0.496)	(0.310)
Pre-layoff mean	41.37	5.420	23.70	15.79
N	123170	106211	142214	123692
N (Individuals)	17772	14856	19738	16899

Standard errors in parentheses

$^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Notes: Outcomes are measured in hours per week. Short-run (SR) indicates the year of the layoff and the following; Long-run (LR) indicates years 2 through 10 after the layoff. All regressions include individual, year, and age fixed effects. Errors are clustered at the individual level.

Table 3: Extensive Margin Responses To Woman's Layoff, interacted with Gender-Progressiveness

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Own		Partner	
	Employed	Fraction of housework tasks I am mainly responsible for	Employed	Fraction of housework tasks I am mainly responsible for
Post-Layoff SR	-0.335***	0.0423**	-0.0170	-0.0194+
	(0.0268)	(0.0152)	(0.0160)	(0.0106)
Post-Layoff LR	-0.197***	0.0549**	-0.0170	-0.0144
	(0.0277)	(0.0175)	(0.0205)	(0.0136)
Post-Layoff SR	0.101**	0.00801	0.0150	0.00507
× Progressive	(0.0342)	(0.0204)	(0.0210)	(0.0158)
Post-Layoff LR	0.0930**	-0.00397	-0.000190	0.0119
× Progressive	(0.0344)	(0.0233)	(0.0260)	(0.0195)
Pre-layoff mean	0.896	0.611	0.902	0.133
Pre-layoff mean (het=0)	0.876	0.679	0.908	0.103
Pre-layoff mean (het=1)	0.912	0.561	0.898	0.154
N	121215	99494	111865	85415
N (Individuals)	13149	11928	12743	10517

Standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Notes: The event is a woman's layoff. Columns (1) and (2) report own outcomes, while columns (3) and (4) report partner's outcomes. The outcomes are: in columns (1) and (3), a dummy for being in paid employment; in columns (2) and (4) "fraction of household tasks I am mainly responsible for", constructed as the average of four dummies for responding "mostly me" to the questions "who is responsible for doing the groceries/cooking/cleaning/washing?". Short-run (SR) indicates the year of the layoff and the following; Long-run (LR) indicates years 2 through 10 after the layoff. "Progressive" is a dummy for individuals with above-median progressiveness, as defined in the text. All regressions include individual, year, and age fixed effects. Errors are clustered at the individual level.

Table 4: Extensive Margin Responses To Man's Layoff, interacted with Gender-Progressiveness

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Own		Partner	
	Employed	Fraction of housework tasks I am mainly responsible for	Employed	Fraction of housework tasks I am mainly responsible for
Post-Layoff SR	-0.239***	0.0214**	0.00839	-0.0568***
	(0.0177)	(0.00826)	(0.0160)	(0.0118)
Post-Layoff LR	-0.0907***	0.0104	0.0112	-0.0476***
	(0.0180)	(0.00912)	(0.0203)	(0.0128)
Post-Layoff SR	0.0608*	-0.000106	0.00746	0.0274
× Progressive	(0.0245)	(0.0135)	(0.0224)	(0.0193)
Post-Layoff LR	0.0495*	0.00398	0.00627	0.0342+
× Progressive	(0.0232)	(0.0148)	(0.0279)	(0.0206)
Pre-layoff mean	0.942	0.0940	0.710	0.663
Pre-layoff mean (het=0)	0.935	0.0793	0.634	0.723
Pre-layoff mean (het=1)	0.951	0.115	0.821	0.578
N	100851	80522	102374	83278
N (Individuals)	11340	10107	11246	10041

Standard errors in parentheses

$^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Notes: The event is a man's layoff. Columns (1) and (2) report own outcomes, while columns (3) and (4) report partner's outcomes. The outcomes are: in columns (1) and (3), a dummy for being in paid employment; in columns (2) and (4) "fraction of household tasks I am mainly responsible for", constructed as the average of four dummies for responding "mostly me" to the questions "who is responsible for doing the groceries/cooking/cleaning/washing?". Short-run (SR) indicates the year of the layoff and the following; Long-run (LR) indicates years 2 through 10 after the layoff. "Progressive" is a dummy for individuals with above-median progressiveness, as defined in the text. All regressions include individual, year, and age fixed effects. Errors are clustered at the individual level.

Table 5: Responses To Own Layoff, interacted with Gender-Progressiveness - **Full Sample**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Woman (Own)		Man (Own)	
	Employed	Fraction of housework tasks I am mainly responsible for	Employed	Fraction of housework tasks I am mainly responsible for
Post-Layoff SR	-0.291***	0.0380**	-0.239***	0.0169*
	(0.0179)	(0.0119)	(0.0130)	(0.00721)
Post-Layoff LR	-0.195***	0.0282*	-0.100***	0.00482
	(0.0181)	(0.0139)	(0.0133)	(0.00797)
Post-Layoff SR	0.0923***	-0.00647	0.0410*	0.00633
× Progressive	(0.0226)	(0.0164)	(0.0192)	(0.0118)
Post-Layoff LR	0.0964***	0.00749	0.0292	0.00802
× Progressive)	(0.0224)	(0.0183)	(0.0186)	(0.0128)
Pre-layoff mean	0.823	0.609	0.852	0.101
Pre-layoff mean (het=0)	0.826	0.660	0.858	0.0847
Pre-layoff mean (het=1)	0.820	0.573	0.844	0.124
N	207714	114002	154697	86429
N (Individuals)	20953	13528	16713	10816

Standard errors in parentheses

$^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Notes: The event is a woman's layoff in columns (1) and (2) and a man's layoff in columns (3) and (4). Short-run (SR) indicates the year of the layoff and the following; Long-run (LR) indicates years 2 through 10 after the layoff. "Progressive" is a dummy for individuals with above-median progressiveness, as defined in the text. All regressions include individual, year, and age fixed effects. Errors are clustered at the individual level.

A Appendix Figures

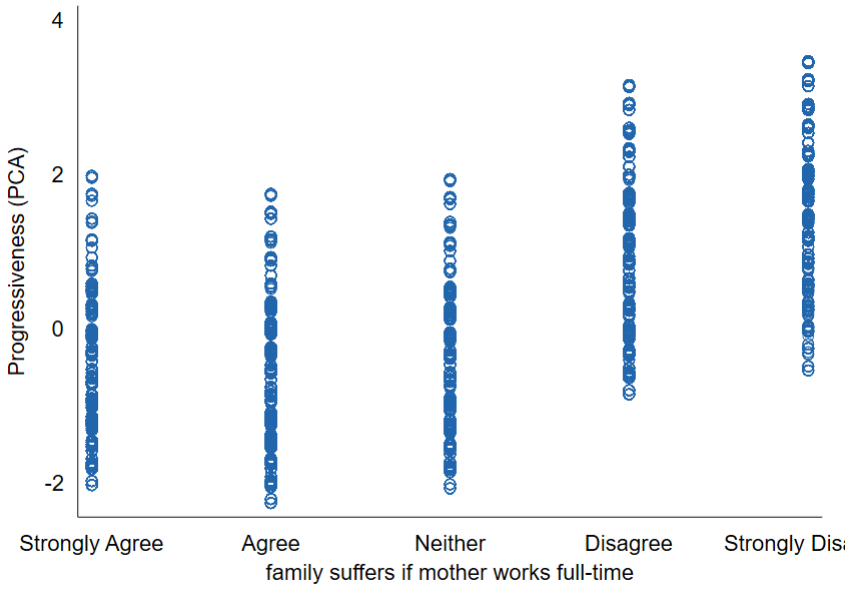


Figure A.1: Scatterplot of the progressiveness index against agreement with "family suffers if woman works full-time"

Notes: The figure shows the progressiveness index, as constructed via principal component analysis, against the level of agreement with the statement "All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job."