



Why people enter and stay in public service careers: the role of parental socialization and an interest in politics

International Review of Administrative
Sciences

0(0) 1–17

© The Author(s) 2020

Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/0020852319886913

journals.sagepub.com/home/ras**Caroline Fischer** 

University of Potsdam, Germany

Carina Schott

Utrecht University, The Netherlands

Abstract

This article examines the effect of parental socialization and interest in politics on entering and staying in public service careers. We incorporate two related explanations, yet commonly used in different fields of literature, to explain public sector choice. First, following social learning theory, we hypothesize that parents serve as role models and thereby affect their children's sector choice. Additionally, we test the hypothesis that parental socialization leads to a longer stay in public sector jobs while assuming that it serves as a buffer against turnover. Second, following public service motivation process theory, we expect that 'interest in politics' is influenced by parental socialization and that this concept, in turn, leads to a public sector career. A representative set of longitudinal data from the Swiss household panel (1999–2014) was used to analyse these hypotheses ($n = 2,933$, $N = 37,328$). The results indicate that parental socialization serves as a stronger predictor of public sector choice than an interest in politics. Furthermore, people with parents working in the public sector tend to stay longer in their public sector jobs.

Points for practitioners

For practitioners, the results of this study are relevant as they highlight the limited usefulness of addressing job applicants' interest in politics in the recruitment process.

Corresponding author:

Caroline Fischer, University of Potsdam, Social Sciences, August-Bebel-Straße 89, Potsdam 14482, Germany.

Email: Caroline.fischer.ii@uni-potsdam.de

Human resources managers who want to ensure a public-service-motivated workforce are therefore advised to focus on human resources activities that stimulate public service motivation after job entry. We also advise close interaction between universities and public organizations so that students develop a realistic picture of the government as a future employer and do not experience a 'reality shock' after job entry.

Keywords

human resources management, panel analysis, public sector choice, public service motivation, socialization

Introduction

The question 'What causes individuals to choose public service careers?' is a classic question in research focusing on sector preferences. However, due to the predicted public sector labour shortage in many European countries (e.g. in Switzerland) (Wunsch et al., 2014), this question and the question why individuals stay in public sector jobs seem to be as topical as ever, as suggested by a recently published meta-analysis and systematic literature review on this topic (Asseburg and Homberg, 2018; Korac et al., 2018).

Psychologists commonly agree that *parental influences* have an impact on the careers of their children (Watson and McMahon, 2005). In particular, fathers who are close to their children are likely to inculcate particular values related to occupational choice and career aspirations (Johnson, 2002). A theoretical explanation for this relationship is provided by Bandura's social learning theory, in which one of the prime mechanisms of socialization is observational learning (Bandura and Walters, 1977). By observing that working for the government is valuable, children may develop positive perceptions of public service careers, which influence their career decisions later in life. In the field of public management, a commonly held assumption is that *public service motivation* (PSM) affects individuals' attraction to the government as an employer of choice (e.g. Christensen and Wright, 2011; Perry and Wise, 1990; Vandenamee, 2008). This assumption is based on the idea that individuals with high PSM levels are more attracted to organizations with consistent values (person-organization fit hypothesis).

This study aims to incorporate these two streams of supplementary research in order to generate a better understanding of why individuals *decide to enter a public service career* and why they *stay with the government as an employer*. On the basis of Perry's (2000) PSM process theory, it has been argued that an 'individual's desire to serve the public is influenced by extra-organizational factors prior to their entry to public organizations[, which occur] throughout a person's childhood and early adult life' (Gould-Williams, 2016: 766). This suggests that PSM could present an important link that helps explain how parents both directly and

indirectly influence the career decisions of their children. Additionally, we claim that parental socialization also helps to explain why certain individuals stay within government while others switch sectors. Particularly, we argue that individuals who have parents working in the public sector are better prepared for the – sometimes demanding – working reality. In contrast, individuals who are less familiar with public sector work are more likely to experience a so-called ‘reality shock’ (Hughes, 1958) and to leave the public sector.

Liu et al. (2011) have already indicated the significant influence of parental occupations on public sector choice. Stritch and Christensen (2016) investigated the effects of parental socialization on career aspirations through PSM. To our knowledge, no research exists examining whether parental socialization influences people’s likelihood to leave public sector jobs. We contribute to this line of research by using individual-level data from the Swiss Household Panel (SHP) (1999–2014),¹ which enables us to overcome two limitations of the study conducted by Stritch and Christensen (2016). First, we are able to measure actual career choices rather than relying on undergraduate students’ desired careers, which may change as time goes by. Second, we base our analysis on a representative sample of the Swiss population (rather than students), thereby including non-academics who also represent an essential proportion of public employees. Unfortunately, these advantages come at the expense of not being able to measure PSM using a validated measurement instrument. Instead, we rely on a proxy of the PSM dimension: ‘interest in politics and policies’. Finally, we also aim to make a methodological contribution by demonstrating several ways in which to calculate mediation effects with binary longitudinal data and discussing the drawbacks of each approach.

The remainder of the article is structured as followed. First, a theoretical framework is presented and hypotheses are put forward. Second, the data and methodological approach are described. Subsequently, results are presented and discussed. In the concluding section, we point out theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretical framework

Causes for entering the government

There are many factors that help explain people’s careers. We are born with some career inheritances such as our gender and genetic make-up. Other career inheritances, such as our education, motivation and values, develop in childhood largely as a result of parental influences (Inkson et al., 2014). How can these parental influences on career choices be explained? Put differently, what are the transmission mechanisms that lead from parental socialization to children’s career choices later in life? Useful insights are provided by Bandura and Walter’s (1977) social learning theory. A prime socialization mechanism of this theory is *observational learning* (Brehm et al., 2005), which can be described as the ‘natural tendency for humans to imitate what they see others do’ (Hergenhahn and Olson, 1997: 326). In other words, parents shape the behaviour of their children by engaging in

certain behaviours themselves, thereby exemplifying and stressing certain values and norms above others.

Following Stritch and Christensen (2016), we argue that by observing their parents, the children of civil servants learn that working for the government is something valuable and this information serves as a guide for career-related actions later in life. Put differently, by demonstrating to children that working for the government is worthwhile, children's own perceptions towards government careers are modelled in a positive way. On the basis of this, we put forward our first hypothesis:

H1: Individuals with parents working in the public sector are more likely to enter a public service career.

Public management scholars use a related approach to explain career choices. They argue that the cause of choosing the government as an employer is grounded in a specific kind of motivation: PSM (e.g. Christensen and Wright, 2011; Vandenabeele, 2008), which is a multidimensional concept (e.g. Kim et al., 2013). On the basis of the results of a recently conducted meta-analysis, Asseburg and Homberg (2018) conclude that the aggregated concept and dimensions of PSM are important drivers of public sector attraction. The accuracy of the results is strengthened by the systematic literature review of Korac et al. (2018) on factors affecting people's preferences for public sector employment at the pre-entry level. The authors conclude that 'PSM (total) and the dimension of attraction to policymaking (APM) yield clear-cut positive results' (Korac et al., 2018: 18).

In this study, we focus on the PSM dimension of APM, which has also been referred to as 'interest in politics and policies' (Vandenabeele, 2008). This dimension reflects the rational aspect of PSM. More recently it has been labelled 'attraction to public service' (APS), stressing a 'disposition to serve the public, to work for the common good, and to participate in public policy processes' (Kim et al., 2013: 90). The primary reason for focusing on this specific aspect of the PSM dimension of 'interest in politics and policies' relates to the fact that it was measured across all waves of data collection (1999–2014). However, while assuming that people who are driven to serve society are also politically interested (Vogel and Kroll, 2015), we argue that lessons from the general literature on PSM may be drawn for the PSM dimension of 'interest in politics and policies', and vice versa.

Empirical research provides evidence for the notion that PSM helps explain why people enter public service careers (e.g. Ritz and Waldner, 2011; Vandenabeele, 2011). A theoretical explanation for the link between PSM and public service careers is provided by the person–organization fit theory (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), which leans strongly on Schneider's (1987) attraction–selection–attrition framework. Central to Schneider's framework is the idea that individuals are attracted by organizations because of the 'implicit estimate of the congruence of their own personal characteristics and the attributes of the potential work organizations' (Schneider et al., 1995: 749). While assuming that the goals of public sector organizations are related to the goals of public-service-motivated individuals

in general, and the goal of pursuing their interest in politics in particular, we put forward our second hypothesis:

H2: Individuals with high levels of interest in politics are more likely to enter a public service career.

Incorporating insights from PSM research and social learning theory

Perry's (2000) process theory of PSM suggests that PSM is affected by both intra-organizational and socio-historical forces. In other words, PSM seems to be shaped throughout a person's childhood and by significant life events, and organizational forces will further influence PSM once individuals have entered the labour market (e.g. Giauque et al., 2013). Besides socio-demographical antecedents of PSM, such as religion and education (Ritz et al., 2016), several empirical studies have found parental socialization to be a driver of PSM. For example, Vandenabeele (2011) found that having parents who are employed in the public sector increases an individual's PSM. Similar results were found by Perry et al. (2008), who measured family socialization through respondents' experiences within the family, such as the extent to which parents were involved in volunteering and the discussion of moral values.

This suggests that PSM could present an important link that helps explain how parents influence the career decisions of their children. They might not only model the decision to enter public service careers directly (H1), but also cultivate their children's interest in politics through the mechanism of modelling, which, in turn, is positively related to public sector career decisions (H2). Due to the nature of their work, we assume civil servants to more frequently communicate about politics than parents working in the private sector. From watching their parents being engaged in politics, children may develop a sense that politics matters themselves. They may become interested in politics through the process of social learning and this interest may ultimately attract them to work for the government to fulfil their interest in politics. Based on this argument, we put forward our third and fourth hypotheses:

H3: Having parents working in the public sector is positively associated with an interest in politics.

H4: An interest in politics mediates the relationship between the career of the parents and the career of their child.

Parental influences as a buffer against turnover

In order to counteract the predicted labour shortage in the public sector, it is important to increase our understanding of not only why people enter the public

sector, but also why they stay within the public sector. High levels of employee turnover can not only impose significant costs on organizations in terms of the recruitment processes and training of new employees, but also lead to a loss of crucial knowledge (Llorens and Stazyk, 2011).

A predictor of turnover is the so-called ‘reality shock’, which can be described as the discrepancy between how individuals understand their profession on the basis of their training and the working reality that they are confronted with when entering a job (Kramer, 1974). For example, Ward’s (2014) longitudinal study suggests that PSM may decline upon entry into a public service career. We argue that parental socialization may be a factor that reduces turnover by mitigating the experiences of a reality shock. Individuals with parents working in the public sector may have a clearer picture of what working for the government entails and are therefore less likely to experience a strong discrepancy between the working reality and their initial work expectations, which makes them less likely to quit working for the government. Due to their parents’ working experiences, they know which challenges and dark sides to expect, such as high levels of red tape or negative attitudes from clients. Beyond this, they benefit from their parents’ advice and knowledge when faced with difficulties. In a recent study among Dutch veterinary inspectors, the authors found that ‘important preconditions for being able to deal with this sometimes harsh [working] reality are clear organizational and work-related expectations’ (Schott et al., 2019: 9). On this basis, we put forward our final hypothesis:

H5: Individuals with parents working in the public sector stay longer in public sector jobs than individuals with parents not working in the public sector.

Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of the five hypotheses discussed earlier.

Data, measurements and sample

To test the five hypotheses, we use data from the SHP. The SHP is an indefinite life panel with irregular refreshments and consists of three samples selected in 1999, 2004 and 2013 as stratified random samples of private households in Switzerland. We use items from the individual questionnaire to assess the concepts that interest us in this study. Since 2009, topics are surveyed in rotating modules. Accordingly, not every item is available in all waves.

Since the 2000s, many public employees have been employed by private contract in Switzerland. Before this flexibilization, public servants held lifelong tenure and special duties and rights as ‘*Beamte*’.² However, in spite of this development, a large share of Swiss public employees have worked for the government for more than 10 years (Koller, 2013: 516). Careers in the public sector are still more stable than in the private sector and people remain employed by the government for longer compared to private-sector employees (Koller, 2013: 517). This means

that sector switching is not very common in Switzerland. Research by Ritz and Waldner (2011: 302) suggests that students consider the public sector to be an attractive employer. They are especially attracted by safety, promotion opportunities and meaningful work.

Measurements used in this study

To measure the *dependent and mediating variable of 'interest in politics'*, we use the single-item: 'Generally, how interested are you in politics, if 0 means "not at all interested" and 10 "very interested"?' Our *dependent variable of 'public sector choice'* is measured by a single-item dummy variable. This item reads as: 'Are you employed by a private company or a state organization?' The *dependent variable of 'ratio of years in public sector'* is constructed on the basis of this item by calculating the ratio of all waves in which a person worked in the public sector in relation to all waves in which the question on sector choice was answered.

The *independent variable of 'parents in public sector'* is constructed as a dummy variable on the basis of three dummies referring to either the biological father ('father in public sector'), the biological mother ('mother in public sector') or another person with a strong educational role in the household ('other related person in public sector'). The used items read as: 'When you were about 15 years old. ... Was 1) he [father], 2) she [mother], 3) he/she [other related person] employed by a private company or a state organization?' We control for respondents' educational level, gender, task satisfaction and age because these variables have been found to have an effect on values related to PSM, and hence political interest, in previous research (e.g. Ritz et al., 2016).³

Sample characteristics and descriptive statistics

To prepare our data set, we merged the data files for every individual (individual file and social origin file) over all waves from 1999 to 2014. Table A (in the online appendix) provides an overview of the descriptive statistics of the variables of interest. The merged data set contains 49,486 observations from 3240 units, with slightly more women than men and a mean age of 43 years. Differences between the standard deviations within a person and between units show, for example, that political interest is a rather stable value (within-SD = 1.27; between-SD = 2.39). A correlation table of the used items can be found in Table B (in the online appendix).

Statistical analyses and results

Due to the variety and complexity of the statistical techniques needed to test our suggested hypotheses, we discuss our applied analyses for each hypothesis separately.⁴

Hypothesis 1

To test our hypothesis that individuals with parents working in the public sector are more likely to enter a public service career (H1), we conducted a logistic panel regression analysis with population-averaged (PA) effects using generalized estimating equations (GEEs) (Szmaragd et al., 2013). In longitudinal logistic regression analysis, 'PA effects' are used to analyse the effects between persons (Neuhaus, 1991), which is appropriate as 'parents in public sector' is measured only once, thereby being fixed for every individual in the data set. Next to unstandardized regression coefficients, we report odds ratios (ORs) for easier interpretation. In a second step, we performed a cross-sectional logistic regression by a collapsed version of the data set, which is generated by collapsing the data to the *maximum value* for each individual. Accordingly, a person who works for the public sector in at least one wave is treated as a public employee. In contrast, in models with PA effects, the values of the items are *averaged* over all waves, which makes it possible to take into account how many years a person stayed in the public sector.

As shown in Table 1⁵ all PA models are significant (Wald χ^2 statistics). Additionally, the quasi-likelihood under independence model criterion (QIC) is presented as a goodness-of-fit statistic (Pan, 2001). This measure works analogously to Akaike's information criterion (AIC), which is based on a likelihood-ratio test and therefore inappropriate to use with PA models that are based on GEEs (Cui, 2007; Szmaragd et al., 2013).

The models demonstrate that the regression coefficients of 'father in public sector' (model 1) and 'parents in public sector' (model 3) are positive and significant (father: $b = 0.47$; parents: $b = 0.41$). This means that the probability of choosing a job in the public sector is higher for an *averaged* person with a relative in the public sector compared to an *averaged* person without such an imprint. When looking at the ORs, the results suggest that a father working in the public sector increases the chance of choosing a job in the public sector by the factor of 1.6 (model 1). When at least one relative works in the public sector, the chance of choosing a job in the public sector increases by 1.5 (model 3). The effects remain significant when controlling for education, gender and age (models 2 and 4). We also tested the effect of 'mother in public sector' and 'other relative in public sector' but have not found any significant results.⁶

As a robustness check, we compare these models with a collapsed version of the data set (Appendix C). The data suggest that the odds of choosing a job in the public sector if one had parents working in this sector are higher in the collapsed data model (54%) than in the PA model (46%). Thus, 'parents in public sector' influences the chance of working in the public sector slightly stronger if compared to models in which the period of working in the public sector is taken into account.

Hypothesis 2

To test our hypothesis that individuals with high levels of interest in politics are more likely to enter a public service career (H2), we conducted a logistic panel

regression analysis with PA effects (PA models) and compare these effects with random effect (RE) models. The reason for running both types of analysis is the result of the Hausman specification test, which suggests that there seems to be both within- and between-variance in the variable of 'interest in politics'. For this reason, PA models and RE models are compared in order to reveal whether the observed effects derive purely from a variance between persons (PA models) or if they also have a share of within-person effects (RE models).

As shown in Table 2, all calculated models are significant (Wald χ^2 statistics). The models demonstrate that the regression coefficients of 'interest in politics' are significant and slightly positive in all PA models (e.g. model 1: $b = 0.02$). The ORs of this variable suggest that if political interest increases by one point (on a scale from 0 to 10), the chance of having a public sector job is 1.02 – or 2% – higher (model 1). Interestingly, the coefficients of interest in politics increase when controlling for education, gender, age and 'parents in public sector' (models 3 and 6).

By comparing the PA and RE models of the relationship between political interest and public sector choice (Table 2), we found that the influence of political interest is slightly higher in the RE models compared to the PA models (10% higher probability of choosing a public sector career (model 6) versus 3% (model 3)). This means that the effect does not stem purely from a between-variance; rather, changes in a person's political interest also slightly influence the probability of having a public sector job.

Hypothesis 3

To test whether individuals with parents working in the public sector have a higher interest in politics (H3), linear panel regression analysis is used and between-effects models are analysed. These models are appropriate because the continuous independent variable of 'parents in public sector' is fixed for an individual over time. All calculated models are significant; however, the explained variance is rather low (ranging between $R^2 = 0.0021$ and 0.157).

Our results (Table 3) suggest that the sectorial choice of the father (model 1: $b = 0.22$) and at least one relative working in the public sector (model 3: $b = 0.23$) have a significant and positive influence on an individual's political interest. Again, we tested the effect of 'mother in public service' and 'other relative in public service' on an individual's political interest separately but found no significant results. The observed effects remain significant and even increase slightly when control variables are included (model 2: $b = 0.24$; model 4: $b = 0.28$).

Hypothesis 4

To test our hypothesis that an interest in politics mediates the relationship between the career of the parents and the career of their child (H4), we performed a mediation analysis. The suggested model is summarized in Figure 2. To our knowledge, there is no established strategy to analyze mediation with data that is both binary

and longitudinal. We therefore offer different possibilities to calculate the mediation model – each having its own advantages and disadvantages – and compare their results.

The ‘causal-steps approach’ (Baron and Kenny, 1986), as well as the ‘product of coefficients approach’ (MacKinnon, 2013), are often used to test mediation models. However, because both approaches rely on linear regression models and our dependent variable is *binary*, they could not be used in this study (Kenny, 2013). A solution to this problem is the standardization of the coefficients by standard deviations and taking the binomial distribution variance into account (Newsom, 2016). To calculate such a mediation model, the stata program *binary_mediation* by Phil Ender is used, in which the indirect effect (path b) is computed according to the ‘product of coefficients approach’ ($a * b = c - c'$).

However, a remaining problem is that *logistic mediation analysis* cannot be applied to longitudinal data, and is it also not possible to cluster standard errors to take this longitudinal structure into account. For this reason, mediation analysis using the ‘product of coefficients approach’ treats each observation as a single unit, which may produce biased results. In order to counteract this bias, we run the *mediation analysis again with the cross-sectionalized data set* described earlier (values for each unit collapsed to the maximum). This approach also comes along with a problem: possible within-effects cannot be observed. This drawback can, in turn, be solved by analysing the data by *multilevel mediation*, whereby a predictor variable may be mediated by a variable on the same level or lower (Krull and MacKinnon, 2001). However, this approach is not suitable for binary data: it results in heteroscedastic residuals of the model, meaning that standard errors, confidence levels and significance tests can therefore be biased (Kohler and Kreuter, 2012: 329).

To use as much information in our data as possible and to overcome the limitations of each of the approaches described earlier, we calculated three different models according to the ‘product of coefficients approach’: (1) a binary mediation, ignoring that our data are longitudinal; (2) a binary mediation of the collapsed data set, ignoring possible within-effects; and (3) a multilevel mediation, ignoring that our dependent variable is binary. All models suggest that there is a small yet significant mediation effect of the variable political interest in the relationship between parents’ and child’s sector choice. In the cross-sectional analysis, only 2.8% of the parental effect on their child’s sector choice is mediated by political interest (Table 4, model 2). Calculated with panel data but without clustered standard errors, the mediation effect (model 1) is slightly higher (4.8%). Using the multilevel approach (longitudinal data structure) but possibly biasing standard errors (model 3), the proportion of the mediated effect is very similar to the effect on the cross-sectional data (model 2). As the comparison of these approaches shows only small differences in the calculated mediation effect, the results can be seen as fairly robust, though each calculation approach has its drawbacks.

Hypothesis 5

To test our hypothesis that individuals with parents working in the public sector stay longer in public sector jobs than individuals with parents not working in the public sector (H5), we use a linear panel regression because the constructed item of 'ratio of years in public sector' is a continuous dependent variable. Parents' career choices have a significant and positive effect on the number of years that an individual continues to work in the public sector (Table 5, model 1). However, the explained variance is low (model 1: $R^2 = 0.01$). The influence of parents remains significant and slightly increases when control variables are included (model 2). At least one relative working in the public sector increases the number of years that a child continues working in the public sector by about 9% (model 1: $b = 10.01$; model 2: $b = 9.21$). Put differently, an individual with a public sector family tradition stays 1.44 waves (not to say years) longer in the public sector on average than individuals without this family tradition. Thus, we may conclude that the data support our fifth hypothesis but the effect size is rather small.

Discussion and conclusion

The question of why people enter and stay in public service careers is as topical as ever due to the predicted public sector labour shortage across many European countries (Asseburg and Homberg, 2018; Korac et al., 2018). This study contributes to this question by incorporating two complementary streams of literature: psychological research on parental socialization; and public management research on a specific aspect of PSM – interest in politics. The analysis is based on a large and representative set of data and tells basically two main stories. First, individuals with parents working in the public sector – in particular, individuals with a father working in the public sector – are more likely to enter into a public sector career than individuals without this socialization through parents' work experience. They also tend to stay within the government for a longer period. Second, the PSM dimension of 'interest in politics' also seems to play a significant, yet smaller, role. This corroborates with previous results. Several studies that measure PSM as a global concept and/or its separate dimensions find PSM to be a solid predictor of sector choice (e.g. Carpenter et al., 2012; Christensen and Wright, 2011; Pedersen, 2013; Vandenabeele, 2008; Wright and Grant, 2010).

Contributions and practical implications

Building on existing literature, this study offers several contributions. First, we contribute to the literature on the behavioural effects of PSM by studying the direct effect of an interest in politics on public sector choice (Christensen and Wright, 2011; Vandenabeele, 2008) and the mediating role of an interest in politics in the relationship between parental socialization and public sector choice (Stritch and Christensen, 2016). According to Jensen and Vestergaard (2017), solid empirical evidence of the relationship between PSM and behaviour is still limited. We

found that persons with higher levels of political interest are more likely to choose a public sector career (H2) and that an interest in politics significantly mediates the relationship between the career of the parents and the career of their child (H4). However, we also need to point out that both effects were rather small. The small direct effect of 'interest in politics' may be explained by the fact that this aspect of PSM is primarily important for jobs associated with political authority. In this study, all public sector jobs – as well as jobs linked to the executive branch – were included. The significant but small mediation effect suggests that parents function as a role model as such but only weakly influence their child's political interest by their occupational choice. Future research should analyse more precisely how PSM as an overarching concept and the commonly studied dimensions of PSM ('compassion', 'attraction to public service', 'self-sacrifice' and 'commitment to public values' (Kim et al., 2013)) interact with parental socialization, thereby causing public sector choice. For the emerging literature on employer branding and PSM (Asseburg et al., 2018; Weske et al., 2019), these results suggest that although studies frequently recommend the use of PSM in the context of human resources (HR) marketing (Ritz et al., 2016), the usefulness of addressing interest in politics as an aspect of PSM in the recruitment process can at least be questioned. We therefore advise HR managers to focus on HR activities that stimulate PSM after job entry if they want to ensure a public-service-motivated workforce. Moreover, the significant – yet small – effect of interest in politics found in this study is interesting as it provides an indirect answer to the question of how 'relevant the fulfillment of the need for public service motivation is in relation to other motives' (Leisink and Steijn, 2008: 131) when it comes to the attractiveness of an employer. At least when it comes to the rational aspects of PSM, the relevance of PSM compared to other motives seems to be small.

Next to this, the result that parental socialization – especially socialization through fathers – is a strong predictor of sector choice (H1) corroborates with the dominant view in the psychological literature (Inkson et al., 2014). In this study, we not only show that parental socialization influences students' public career aspirations, as recently demonstrated by Stritch and Christensen (2016), but were also able to study actual career choices of a representative sample of the Swiss population. For future research, it remains an open question whether the slowly increasing number of part-time working fathers and full-time working mothers will weaken today's dominant role of fathers in influencing their children's career and strengthen socializing effects through mothers. Third, as far as we know, we are the first to have empirically investigated the hypothesis that individuals with parents working in the public sector stay longer in public sector jobs than individuals with parents not working in the public sector (H5). Our results show that individuals with a public sector family tradition stay longer in the public sector on average than individuals without this family tradition. We have argued that these individuals have a more realistic picture of what it means to be a public servant and are therefore better prepared to deal with the challenges and negative aspects often associated with public sector jobs (see, e.g., Steen and Schott, 2018).

We hope that future studies will continue this line of research by measuring the concept of coping strategies directly so that stronger conclusions can be drawn. For practice, these results suggest that it may be beneficial for other socializing institutions to cultivate a buffer against turnover for these people too. For example, we advise universities to invest in practical projects bringing students together with public organizations, to invite lecturers from public organizations and to stimulate internships so that students develop a realistic impression of the government as a future employer.

A final contribution of this study is methodological in nature. To our knowledge, there is no established strategy to analyse mediation with data that is both binary and longitudinal. We therefore offered three different approaches to calculate the mediation model for these kinds of data: binary mediation of longitudinal data, binary mediation of cross-sectionalized data and multilevel mediation. Our analysis showed that the results did not significantly differ. This not only illustrates the robustness of our findings, but also informs the methodological discussion on longitudinal mediation analyses when researchers need to rely on imperfect data.

Limitations

A major strength of this study is that it makes use of a large, longitudinal and representative sample of the Swiss population, which enables us to generalize our research findings. Unfortunately, this data set also has its downsides. It does not include items measuring the multidimensional concept of PSM (only interest in politics is measured) and the question about the parents' employment situation is only surveyed in the first wave of each panellist. We therefore cannot control for the possibility that parents switched from sectors throughout a respondent's childhood. As the age of 15 is a period in someone's life when parental influence is still strong and first ideas about career aspirations are formed, we do believe that we used a valid item to measure the concept of parental influence. Beyond that, sector switching is not that common in Switzerland (Koller, 2013). Another limitation of this study is the low explained variance of the regression models, suggesting that the independent variables ('interest in politics' and 'parental socialization') only partly explain why people enter and stay in public sector jobs. We therefore encourage scholars to replicate this type of research so that stronger conclusions may be drawn. We also suggest including additional variables in further research (e.g. pro-social motivation and PSM as a global concept) so that a more complete picture of the antecedents of public sector career choice and public sector loyalty can be gained.


Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Caroline Fischer  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5870-4498>

Supplementary material

Please see supplementary material online at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/ras>

Notes

1. This study has been realized using the data collected by the SHP, which is based at the Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences (FORS). The project is financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation.
2. However, in this article, the terms ‘public servant’ or ‘public employee’ mean both employees by private contract as well as ‘*Beamte*’.
3. We also controlled for the variables ‘religion’, ‘private or public school’ and ‘membership in a political party, environmental or charity organization’. In these models the effects of the independent variable remain stable but the model quality decreases due to the smaller sample size.
4. Due to the fact that significance is highly influenced by sample size, we also tested hypotheses 1–4 cross-sectionally in three exemplary years (2010, 2014 and 2015). The results remain stable compared to the longitudinal analysis. Results are provided on request.
5. All the tables, figures and appendices are published online at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/ras>
6. Results are provided on request.

References

- Asseburg J and Homberg F (2018) Public service motivation or sector rewards? Two studies on the determinants of sector attraction. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 6 June 2018. Doi: 10.1177/0734371X18778334
- Asseburg J, Homberg F and Vogel R (2018) Recruitment messaging, environmental fit and public service motivation. *International Journal of Public Sector Management* 31(6): 689–709.
- Bandura A and Walters RH (1977) *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Baron RM and Kenny DA (1986) The moderator–mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 51(6): 1173–1182.
- Brehm SS, Kassin S and Fein S (2005) *Social Psychology*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Carpenter J, Doverspike D and Miguel RF (2012) Public service motivation as a predictor of attraction to the public sector. *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 80(2): 509–523.
- Christensen RK and Wright BE (2011) The effects of public service motivation on job choice decisions: Disentangling the contributions of person–organization fit and person–job fit. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 21(4): 723–743.

- Cui J (2007) QIC program and model selection in GEE analyses. *The Stata Journal* 7(2): 209–220.
- Giauque D, Anderfuhren-Biget S and Varone F (2013) HRM practices, intrinsic motivators, and organizational performance in the public sector. *Public Personnel Management* 42(2): 123–150.
- Gould-Williams JS (2016) Managers' motives for investing in HR practices and their implications for public service motivation. *International Journal of Manpower* 37(5): 764–776.
- Hergenhahn BR and Olson MH (1997) *An Introduction to Theories of Learning*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Hughes EC (1958) *Men and Their Work*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Inkson K, Dries N and Arnold J (2014) *Understanding Careers: Metaphors of Working Lives*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Jensen UT and Vestergaard CF (2017) Public service motivation and public service behaviors: Testing the moderating effect of tenure. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 27(1): 52–67.
- Johnson MK (2002) Social origins, adolescent experiences, and work value trajectories during the transition to adulthood. *Social Forces* 80(4): 1307–1340.
- Kenny DA (2013) Mediation with dichotomous outcomes. Available at: <http://davidakenny.net/doc/dichmed.pdf>
- Kim S, Vandenabeele W, Wright BE et al. (2013) Investigating the structure and meaning of public service motivation across populations: Developing an international instrument and addressing issues of measurement invariance. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 23(1): 79–102.
- Kohler U and Kreuter F (2012) *Datenanalyse mit stata: Allgemeine Konzepte der Datenanalyse und ihre praktische Anwendung*. München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag.
- Koller C (2013) Profil des Personals der öffentlichen Hand. In: Ladner A, Chappelet J-L, Emery Y et al. (eds) *Handbuch der öffentlichen Verwaltung in der Schweiz*. Zürich: Verl. Neue Zürcher Zeitung, pp. 499–520.
- Korac S, Saliterer I and Weigand B (2018) Factors affecting the preference for public sector employment at the pre-entry level: A systematic review. *International Public Management Journal* 5(3): 1–44.
- Kramer M (1974) *Reality Shock: Why Nurses Leave Nursing*. St. Louis: Mosby.
- Kristof-Brown A, Zimmerman RD and Johnson EC (2005) Consequences of individuals' fit at work: A meta-analysis of person–job, person–organization, person–group, and person–supervisor fit. *Personnel Psychology* 58(2): 281–342.
- Krull JL and MacKinnon DP (2001) Multilevel modeling of individual and group level mediated effects. *Multivariate Behavioral Research* 36(2): 249–277.
- Leisink P and Steijn B (2008) Recruitment, attraction, and selection. In: Hondeghem A and Perry JL (eds) *Motivation in Public Management: The Call of Public Service*. Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Liu B, Hui C, Hu J et al. (2011) How well can public service motivation connect with occupational intention? *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 77(1): 191–211.
- Llorens JJ and Stazyk EC (2011) How important are competitive wages? Exploring the impact of relative wage rates on employee turnover in state government. *Review of Public Personnel Administration* 31(2): 111–127.
- MacKinnon DP (2013) *Introduction to Statistical Mediation Analysis*. New York, NY: Routledge.

- Neuhaus JM (1991) A comparison of cluster-specific and population-averaged approaches for analyzing correlated binary data. *International Statistical Review* 59: 25–35.
- Newsom JT (2016) Mediation analysis with logistic regression. Available at: http://web.pdx.edu/~newsomj/cdaclass/ho_mediation.pdf (accessed 26 May 2017).
- Pan W (2001) Akaike's information criterion in generalized estimating equations. *Biometrics* 57(1): 120–125.
- Pedersen MJ (2013) Public service motivation and attraction to public versus private sector employment: Academic field of study as moderator? *International Public Management Journal* 16(3): 357–385.
- Perry JL (2000) Bringing society in: Toward a theory of public-service motivation. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 10(2): 471–488.
- Perry JL and Wise LR (1990) The motivational bases of public service. *Public Administration Review* 50(3): 367.
- Perry JL, Brudney JL, Coursey D et al. (2008) What drives morally committed citizens? A study of the antecedents of public service motivation. *Public Administration Review* 68(3): 445–458.
- Ritz A and Waldner C (2011) Competing for future leaders. *Review of Public Personnel Administration* 31(3): 291–316.
- Ritz A, Brewer GA and Neumann O (2016) Public service motivation: A systematic literature review and outlook. *Public Administration Review* 76(3): 414–426.
- Schneider B (1987) The people make the place. *Personnel Psychology* 40(3): 437–453.
- Schneider B, Goldstein HW and Smith DB (1995) The ASA framework: An update. *Personnel Psychology* 48(4): 747–773.
- Schott C, Van Kleef DD and Steen TPS (2018) The combined impact of professional role identity and public service motivation on decision-making in dilemma situations. *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 84(1): 21–41.
- Steen T and Schott C (2018) Public sector employees in a challenging work environment. *Public Administration* 97(1): 3–10.
- Stritch JM and Christensen RK (2016) Raising the next generation of public servants? Parental influence on volunteering behavior and public service career aspirations. *International Journal of Manpower* 37(5): 840–858.
- Szmaragd C, Clarke P and Steele F (2013) Subject specific and population average models for binary longitudinal data: A tutorial. *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies* 4(2): 147–165.
- Vandenabeele W (2008) Government calling: Public service motivation as an element in selecting government as an employer of choice. *Public Administration* 75(2): 1089–1105.
- Vandenabeele W (2011) Who wants to deliver public service? Do institutional antecedents of public service motivation provide an answer? *Review of Public Personnel Administration* 31(1): 87–107.
- Vogel D and Kroll A (2015) The stability and change of PSM-related values across time: Testing theoretical expectations against panel data. *International Public Management Journal* 19(1): 53–77.
- Ward KD (2014) Cultivating public service motivation through AmeriCorps service: A longitudinal study. *Public Administration Review* 74(1): 114–125.
- Watson M and McMahon M (2005) Children's career development: A research review from a learning perspective. *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 67(2): 119–132.
- Weske U, Ritz A, Schott C et al. (2019) Attracting future civil servants with public values? An experimental study on employer branding. *International Public Management Journal* 1989(1): 1–26.

- Wright BE and Grant AM (2010) Unanswered questions about public service motivation: Designing research to address key issues of emergence and effects. *Public Administration Review* 70(5): 691–700.
- Wunsch C, Buchmann M and Wedel S (2014) *Arbeits- und Fachkräftebedarf der Schweiz bis 2060*. Abschlussbericht: Universität Basel.

Caroline Fischer is a research and teaching associate at the University of Potsdam, Germany. In her research, she focuses on human resource management and knowledge management in the public sector (Twitter: @openpuma).

Carina Schott is an Assistant Professor at the Utrecht University School of Governance, The Netherlands. Her research concerns the motivation and decision-making processes of public servants and the implications of a changing work environment on the nature of their work.