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Confident, cautiously confident or concerned? Working life profiles, capabilities, and expectations for work-family reconciliation among young Finnish women

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ABSTRACT

The uncertainties and growing social inequality young adults face in the labour market call for research on the link between young women's expectations about working life and the real options they have in seeking to combine work with care. Drawing on Sen's capabilities approach, this study contributes to filling this gap in the literature by examining how women in emerging adulthood in Finland foresee their future career and working life, and how these expectations are associated with socioeconomic and partnership characteristics and their expectations for work-family reconciliation. Survey data obtained from 527 young women aged 18–29 were analysed using latent profile analysis. Three distinct career/working life profiles were identified: confident (43%), cautiously confident (37%) and concerned (20%). The young women in the confident profile were the most advantaged and those in the concerned profile the most disadvantaged with regard to level of education, main activity, financial situation and region. Furthermore, the concerned women foresaw their options in their future career and in combining work with care as limited. The findings underline the importance of viewing individual decision-making processes related to work-family transitions within broader institutional and societal contexts.

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Young women; expectations; working life; work-family reconciliation; capabilities

Introduction

During recent decades, young adults have faced increasing labour market risks and economic uncertainty (Buchholz & Blossfeld, 2012; Kalleberg & Vallas, 2017), forcing them to adapt their behaviour. The rise in the age of entry into parenthood and the lengthening of higher education (Mills & Blossfeld, 2013; Sobotka, 2017) reflect the development of a new phase in the life course of young people in the industrialised world. This phase of emerging adulthood starts in the late teens and ends in the late twenties, when several important work and family-related life choices need to be considered (Arnett,

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2004, pp. 3–8). However, higher levels of uncertainty generate insecurity and potential conflict and make it increasingly difficult for young adults to make these choices (Mills & Blossfeld, 2013). Furthermore, owing to the gendered expectations related to work and care (Fernández-Cornejo et al., 2016; Savela & O'Brien, 2016), young women in particular are more likely to expect conflict in reconciling work and family, and thus find work-family reconciliation challenging (Rotkirch et al., 2017, pp. 96–97).

A growing body of research has assessed young women's expectations of their future working lives (Lechner et al., 2017; Sortheix et al., 2015) and their need to strike a balance between different life domains (e.g. Fernández-Cornejo et al., 2016; Savela & O'Brien, 2016). Furthermore, studies on the working careers of women have identified various associations between these and socioeconomic background, partnership status and career/family prospects (e.g. Brauner-Otto & Geist, 2018; Damaske & Frech, 2016), indicating that these factors shape young women's choices in future transitions. However, knowledge on young women's individual decision-making on future work-family transitions as embedded in institutional and societal contexts remains limited. Accordingly, we utilised data gathered by a cross-sectional survey (Finnish Youth Barometer, 2019; Haikkola & Myllyniemi, 2020) to examine how Finnish women in emerging adulthood foresee their future career/working life, and how these expectations are associated with socioeconomic and partnership characteristics and work-family expectations. Applying Amartya Sen's (1995, 1999) capabilities approach, we were able to move beyond the abstract concept of 'free choice' to focus more on which options are perceived to be feasible or 'genuinely possible' (Norman, 2020) for young Finnish women when making plans about paid and unpaid work in a modern welfare state that supports the dual-earner/dual-carer model but where gender-unequal practices remain highly prevalent (e.g. see Gender Equality Barometer, 2018).

Young women's expectations on their future career and working life and work-family reconciliation

Sen's (1995, 1999) capabilities approach focuses on individuals' real opportunities to live the life they value, or in other words 'what people are effectively able to do and be' (Robeyns, 2005). The approach concerns human well-being and social justice and aims at promoting a person's *capability* to choose between certain *functionings*, i.e. ways of doing things, or the 'real options' open to them. As the capabilities approach has been criticised for focusing excessively on the individual, we also draw on the work of scholars (Hobson, 2014; Hvinden & Halvorsen, 2018; Yerkes et al., 2020) who view individual capabilities as embedded in varying individual, institutional and societal contexts (*conversion factors;* see Figure 1). These are not intrinsically distinct from each other; rather, they interplay with each other (Hobson, 2014, p. 14). Conversion factors shape the ways individuals translate *means,* understood as the social and economic resources they have at their disposal, including work-family policy instruments, into capabilities by enabling or constraining *valued functionings* (Hvinden & Halvorsen, 2018). Because of variation in their situated agency (Hobson, 2014), individuals can be expected to differ in their expectations about their future career/working life. Empirical research supports this notion. For example, a study of young adults in Germany and Finland revealed three different work-value priorities during the transition to adulthood: extrinsic values, referring to the importance of job

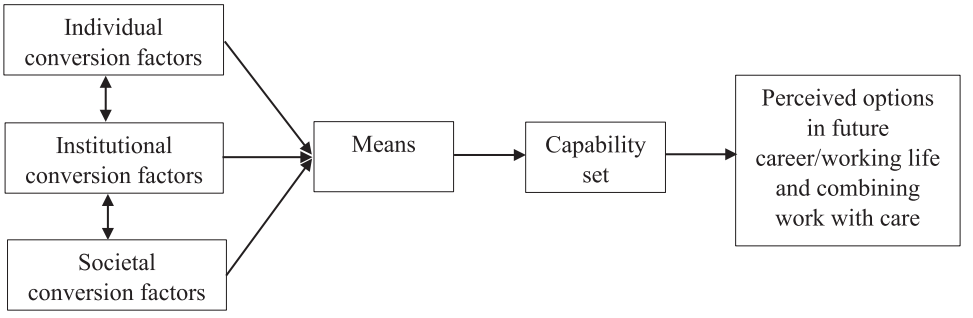

Figure 1. The theoretical model of the study.

security and material rewards; intrinsic values, referring to the priority of having an interesting, varied and valuable job; and autonomy values, referring to the importance of working independently (Lechner et al., 2017). In addition, Sortheix and colleagues (2015), using data on Finnish young adults, found that intrinsic work values (i.e. the perceived importance of having a job that is interesting and matches one's personal competences) predicted a higher degree of person-job fit two years later. Reward-related work values, such as a good salary and high prospects for promotion, predicted lower chances of being unemployed. Finally, security work values, meaning having a stable job, predicted higher chances of being unemployed later on.

Many studies have also found that young women are concerned about work-family conflict and plan to resolve this according to their own aims and desires (e.g. Cinamon, 2010; Fernández-Cornejo et al., 2016; Rotkirch et al., 2017, p. 72; Savela & O'Brien, 2016). In their US study, Savela and O'Brien (2016) found that young female students expected that high work engagement or holding high leadership aspirations would lead to higher work-family conflict. In contrast, women with a more traditional female career in mind – professions mostly employing women and undervalued in terms of earnings – had lower expectations that work would interfere with their family time. Similar findings were reported by Cinamon (2010). Furthermore, a study comparing Kenya, Iceland and Spain found that to achieve a better work-family balance, young women with traditional gender attitudes were also more disposed to make sacrifices in their future working careers. In contrast, the inclination to sacrifice career opportunities was lower among female students with high leadership aspirations and those who came from an egalitarian household, where their mothers worked 40 hours or more (Fernández-Cornejo et al., 2016).

Perceived capabilities and choices related to work and care

According to the capabilities approach (Sen, 1995, 1999), individual agency, referring to individuals' ability to make choices within their own set of capabilities by perceiving, interpreting, and responding to their personal social situation (Yerkes et al., 2020), is a key factor when assessing young women's expectations about working life and combining work with care. Hence, identifying factors that enable or constrain young women's choices in future transitions is important in seeking to redress the growing inequalities in work and care. For example, educating oneself, having a job, finding a partner and

living in an area with work opportunities are some of the social and economic resources (*means*) shaping young women's options. However, access to resources alone may not increase capabilities equally for all, since individuals are differently embedded in their own environments and social contexts (Yerkes et al., 2020). Women from different socioeconomic backgrounds may utilise work and family policy instruments differently, their social class shaping their agency in different ways. Hence, women's agency, and their ability to make choices about their future working life and work and care is also constrained or 'situated' (Hobson, 2014).

Previous studies support these notions. For example, a US study found that race, poverty, educational attainment, and early family characteristics significantly shaped women's work careers: women on steady pathways, i.e. continuous full-time workforce participation, were more advantaged both during their childhood and throughout young adulthood relative to the majority of their counterparts. Women on overwork pathways also experienced early advantages, including higher education and lower poverty (Damaske & Frech, 2016). Similarly, a better socioeconomic position seems to improve the chances of finding a partner and maintaining a union (Jalovaara, 2012). Moreover, some studies have shown that uncertain future prospects combined with disadvantaged socioeconomic characteristics have a negative influence on family formation, while institutional work-family policies (*means*) may also influence individual choices. In a US study, young adults with lower earnings, less education, and more worries about their future job prospects were more uncertain about whether they would have children. Of the participants expecting to have children, those with more education and more worries reported they would do so later in life (Brauner-Otto & Geist, 2018). Similarly, Miettinen and Jalovaara (2020) showed that unemployment generally delayed entry into parenthood among Finnish adults. However, for young women with no schooling beyond compulsory education (i.e. ISCED level 2; ISCED, 2012), unemployment even accelerated the transition to parenthood, indicating the possible positive effect of *means* such as parental leave benefits and housing support on the family's financial situation and family formation. In contrast, for upper secondary level or highly educated young adults, unemployment appeared to have negative effects, and parenthood was postponed until a more permanent position in the labour market was secured.

Work-family reconciliation in Finland

Given that welfare regime and cultural norms shape women's future career and working life capabilities and hence how they combine work with care, awareness of these *institutional and societal conversion factors* aids understanding of the work-family opportunities open to young women in Finland, the context of this study. Although the Finnish labour market generally treats young women rather favourably, increased instability and growing inequalities also affect their lives. In 2019, 63.4% of young Finnish women aged 18–29 were employed and 8.5% unemployed (OSF, 2019a). Unemployment in Finland has remained at a higher level than in some central European and Nordic countries. The youth unemployment rate for young women aged 15–24 is higher in Finland (15.4%) than the EU mean (13.7%) and the second highest in the Nordic countries (OECD, 2017). Competition for low-paid work has risen, and those who only have compulsory education are more often unemployed than the more educated (Surakka et al., 2017).

In 2020, 30.5% of women aged 18–29 with less than lower secondary education were unemployed while women of same age with tertiary education accounted for 6.4% (Eurostat, 2021a). Furthermore, part-time work has become increasingly common (38.3%) and temporary employment has remained at a high level (36.5%) among young women aged 18–29 (Eurostat, 2021b-2021c). Work-related stress has also shown an upward trend during recent years (Keyriläinen, 2020, p. 113) especially among higher educated women (Sutela & Lehto, 2014, pp. 66–67). However, previous findings on young adults' perceptions of their future employability and coping amid this uncertainty are conflicting. For example, the Finnish Working Life Barometer 2019 found that 94% of the under-35s expected to be employed in the future (Keyriläinen, 2020, p. 27), whereas Haikkola and Myllyniemi (2020, p. 62, 65) found that 35% of young adults expressed concern about not having a job in the future and 46% of young women expected to have coping problems in their future working life.

Studies on work-family reconciliation also indicate that young Finnish women may not realise their choices (*valued functionings*) in work and care. Although one aim of work-family policy in Finland is to support the reconciliation of full-time work and family for both men and women through the provision of family benefits and public childcare, thereby enhancing gender equality (Salmi & Närvi, 2017, p. 8), women continue to assume most of the responsibility for unpaid work and childcare (Gender Equality Barometer, 2018). In 2020, women accounted for 90% and men for 10% of all parental leave allowances (Social Insurance Institution, 2020). Maternal primacy in early care is also supported by Finnish cultural ideals (Närvi, 2012) to which many mothers conform by devoting large amounts of time and energy to their children (Lehto, 2020). As shown by Närvi (2014), dedication to one's work combined with intensive motherhood complicate the childbearing decision, particularly for highly educated young women on temporary job contracts. Furthermore, childless women (aged 20-40) who were low-income, non-employed, unemployed, or expecting to be unemployed in the next two years were more prepared than others to postpone having a child (Miettinen, 2015, p. 70).

Aims and hypotheses

Applying the theoretical framework of capabilities (Sen, 1995, 1999; see also Hobson, 2014; Hvinden & Halvorsen, 2018; Yerkes et al., 2020), we examined how women in emerging adulthood in Finland, a country characterised by an increasingly insecure labour market and gendered care expectations, foresaw their future careers/working lives. Moreover, we investigated the associations of these expectations with their socioeconomic and partnership characteristics and work-family expectations. The following research questions (RQ) and hypothesis (H) were examined:

(RQ1) What kinds of profiles can be identified based on young women's expectations about their future career/working life?

(H1) In line with the capabilities approach and findings showing variations in women's expectations about their future career/working life, we expected to find at least three different profiles: one comprising women with confidence about their future career and expectations of a good salary and promotion (e.g. Keyriläinen, 2020, p. 27; Sortheix et al., 2015); another comprising women expressing confidence in their future career but

also highlighting work-related demands and mental stress (e.g. Keyriläinen, 2020, p. 113; Savela & O'Brien, 2016); and a third comprising women with concerns about their employability and ability to cope in future working life (Haikkola & Myllyniemi, 2020, p. 62, 65).

(RQ2) How are the identified future career/working life profiles associated with socioeconomic and partnership characteristics?

(H2) Given the associations between women's working careers and advantages/disadvantages in social and economic resources indicated by the capabilities approach and previous studies (e.g. Damaske & Frech, 2016; Surakka et al., 2017), we hypothesised that young women's future career capabilities would be linked to their socioeconomic and partnership characteristics. Hence, the profiles were expected to differ by educational level, main activity, financial situation, region, and partnership status. Young women with confidence in their future career would be more likely to have broader access to resources than those in the other profiles. Those expressing confidence in their future career but also highlighting job-related demands would be more likely to have less resources at their disposal than those in the previous profile and more than those with concerns about their employability and coping in working life. Thus, the young women in the third profile would likely have the most limited access to resources than those in the other profiles.

(RQ3) How are the future career/working life profiles associated with expectations on work-family reconciliation?

(H3a) Based on the capabilities approach and previous studies showing links between women's working careers and their future career/family prospects (e.g. Fernández-Cornejo et al., 2016; Savela & O'Brien, 2016), we expected that young women's future career capabilities would be associated with their perceived options in work and care. Thus, the young women with confidence in their future career would be more likely to give up a job opportunity for family reasons than those expressing confidence in their future career but also highlighting work-related demands. The women with confidence and broader access to resources would be likely to favour family over work (Lehto, 2020; Närvi, 2012).

(H3b) We also assumed that the women expressing confidence in their future career but also highlighting work-related demands would be more likely to consider the reconciliation of career and children as impossible than those who only expressing confidence in their future career (Keyriläinen, 2020, p. 113).

(H3c) Furthermore, we expected the young women expressing concerns about their employability and coping ability in future working life would be more likely to postpone family formation for work-related reasons than those expressing confidence in their future career but also highlighting work-related demands. As the most limited in resources, they would be likely to favour working life and financial security before family formation (e.g. Brauner-Otto & Geist, 2018; Miettinen, 2015, p. 70).

Data and methods

Sampling procedure

We utilized survey data from the Finnish Youth Barometer 2019 collected by a collaborative effort between the State Youth Council and the Finnish Youth Research Network

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the studied variables.

	M (*SD*)
Expectations on career/working life (*N* = 513–526)	
I'm worried about whether I will be able to cope in working life in the future	2.43 (0.97)
I'm worried about whether I will have a job in the future	2.20 (1.03)
I will probably get a permanent job	3.20 (0.82)
I will probably be unemployed at some point	2.37 (0.94)
I will probably surpass my parents' standard of living	2.69 (0.97)
Work-family expectations (*N* = 510–519)	
Reconciling a career and children is an impossible equation	1.70 (0.73)
I'm prepared to give up a job opportunity for family reasons	2.89 (0.83)
I'd be prepared to postpone setting up a family for work-related reasons	2.81 (0.92)
Age (range 18–29 years, *N* = 527)	23.89 (3.20)
Financial situation (range 1–10, *N* = 525)	6.31 (2.20)
	***n* (%)**
Educational level (*N* = 525)	
No degree/qualification	34 (6.5)
Upper secondary vocational qualification	156 (29.7)
Upper secondary general qualification	152 (29.0)
Tertiary qualification	183 (34.9)
Main activity (*N* = 527)	
Studying	219 (41.6)
Employed	276 (52.4)
Unemployed/out of labour force	32 (6.1)
Region (*N* = 527)	
Rural/semi-urban areas	80 (15.2)
Urban areas	321 (60.9)
Metropolitan area	126 (23.9)
Partnership status (*N* = 523)	
Single (incl. divorced)	200 (38.2)
Dating	99 (18.9)
Cohabiting/married	224 (42.8)
Parental education (*N* = 517)	
Other	249 (48.2)
Tertiary qualification	268 (51.8)

(Haikkola & Myllyniemi, 2020). The data collection was conducted among Finnish youth aged 15–29 via phone interviews in spring 2019. Quota sampling was based on gender (female/male), age (15–19, 20–24, 25–29) and mother tongue (Finnish, Swedish, other). A total of 1 907 youth participated in the survey (51.2% men, 49.5% women and 0.3% other), yielding a response rate of 17%. The main reason for the relatively low response rate is the number of indirect refusals; about 98% were those who did not answer the phone interview request.

This study used the data collected for young childless women aged 18–29 ($N = 527$, 27.6% of respondents, $M_{age} = 23.89$ years, $SD = 3.20$). Young women living at home were excluded ($n = 130$). Thus, the data comprised women who were living independently, with a partner or spouse, or in a shared flat or had a roommate. In education, main activity and living region, the distribution of the present sample (see Table 1) resembled that of the same-age Finnish female population (OSF, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c). However, cohabiting young women (34.6%) in the sample were over-represented when compared to counterparts in the Finnish female population (23.5%) (OSF, 2019d, 2019e).

Measures and variables

For all measures, response option 99 ('don't know') was coded as a missing value.

Expectations on career and working life

The following statements were used to assess the women's expectations about their future career/working life: (1) 'I'm worried about whether I will be able to cope in working life in the future', (2) 'I'm worried about whether I will have a job in the future', (3) 'I will probably get a permanent job', (4) 'I will probably be unemployed at some point', and (5) 'I will probably surpass my parents' standard of living'. The response scale ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree, and 99 = don't know.

Socioeconomic and partnership characteristics

Level of education, main activity, financial situation and living region were examined as socioeconomic characteristics. *Level of education* was assessed with the question 'Which of the following have you completed?' The response options were (1) matriculation examination (i.e. upper secondary general qualification), (2) upper secondary vocational qualification, (3) university of applied sciences degree, (4) university degree, (5) no degree/qualification, and (99) don't know. Responses were recoded into four categories, each corresponding to one or more ISCED (2012) levels: 1 = no degree/qualification (option 5; ISCED level 2); 2 = upper secondary vocational qualification (2; ISCED level 3.5); 3 = upper secondary general qualification (1; ISCED level 3.4); 4 = tertiary qualification (3, 4; ISCED levels 6–8).

Main activity was asked with the question 'What is your main activity at the moment? Are you … ?', with the following response options: (1) a pupil or student, (2) employed, (3) an entrepreneur, (4) unemployed, (5) on parental leave, (6) in a youth workshop, career start or job-seeker work try-out, (7) other, and (99) don't know. Responses were recoded into three categories: 1 = studying (option 1); 2 = employed (2, 3); and 3 = unemployed/out of labour force (4, 5, 6). Responses to option 7 mainly concerned being employed or unemployed and included situations such as part-time pensioner, coded as employed, and rehabilitation subsidy, coded as unemployed.

Financial situation was elicited by the question: 'What do you estimate is the current income of your household?'. Responses were given on scale from 1-10, where 1 = low-income, 5 = middle-income, 10 = high-income, and 99 = don't know. We utilised subjective evaluation rather than an objective measure as it better reflects how individuals perceive their financial capabilities (Sorgente & Lanz, 2017).

The *region* where the young women lived was elicited by an open-ended question: 'What municipality are you currently living in?' Regions followed the official classification of municipalities and major regions (OSF, 2019f): 1 = rural/semi-urban areas, 2 = urban areas, and 3 = metropolitan area of Helsinki-Uusimaa. Rural and semi-urban areas were combined as the number of participants in each individual area was too small to be analysed separately.

Partnership status was asked by the question 'What is your civil status?' Response options were (1) single, (2) dating, (3) cohabiting, (4) married, (5) registered partnership, (6) separated, (7) other, and (99) don't know. Responses were recoded into three categories: 1 = single, including divorced (1, 6), 2 = dating (2), 3 = cohabiting/married (3, 4, 5). Under response option 7, 'engaged' was coded as cohabiting, and 'complex', the response given by one participant, coded as a missing value. None of the participants was in a registered partnership.

Expectations on work-family reconciliation

Expectations about combining work and family in the future were assessed with the following statements: (1) 'Reconciling a career and children is an impossible equation', (2) 'I'm prepared to give up a job opportunity for family reasons', and (3) 'I'd be prepared to postpone family formation for work-related reasons'. The response scale ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree, and 99 = don't know.

Control variables

Control variables were *age in years* and parental education, as these may influence perceived capabilities for work-family transitions. Life choices related to work and family, such as the transition to parenthood, are more likely to be made when young women approach the end of emerging adulthood around their late twenties (Arnett, 2004). Previous research has also shown that the Finnish children's educational attainment is strongly influenced by their parents' educational level (Kallunki & Purhonen, 2017). In this study, however, the main factors of interest were socioeconomic and partnership characteristics. *Parental education* was measured by asking about each parent's highest level of education separately. Response options were (1) upper secondary vocational qualification, (2) post-secondary vocational qualification or matriculation examination (i.e. upper secondary general qualification), (3) tertiary qualification, (97) no degree/qualification, and (99) don't know. The highest parental education in the family was recoded into two categories: 0 = other (options 1, 2, 97) and 1 = tertiary qualification (3).

Analysis

All analyses were conducted using Mplus version 8.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2020) with the robust maximum likelihood estimator. Missing data (see Table 1 for descriptives) were handled using the full information maximum likelihood procedure, which uses all the information in the data without imputing missing values (Enders, 2010). For this reason, the analyses were performed for 527 women.

First, profiles based on the similarity of the women's expectations about their future career/working life were identified using latent profile analysis (LPA; Wang & Hanges, 2011). The five variables of expectations about career/working life were selected as the profile indicators. We estimated various LPA solutions for up to seven profiles. As recommended (Marsh et al., 2009), the appropriate number of profiles was selected based on the goodness-of-fit of the estimated models and the classification quality and interpretability of the solution. Moreover, as our sample size was fairly large, it presented a risk for identifying very small data-specific profiles with no practical significance. These are unlikely to be replicated in other data sets. Therefore, profile solutions comprising less than 5% of the participants were excluded.

The goodness-of-fit of the LPA models was evaluated with the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC; Schwartz, 1978), sample size adjusted BIC (aBIC; Yang, 2006), Vuong-Lo-Mendell-Rubin Likelihood Ratio (VLMR) test (Lo et al., 2001), and Bootstrap Likelihood Ratio Test (BLRT; Nylund et al., 2007). The lower values of the information criteria indicate better model fit. For VLMR and BLRT, a significant *p* value indicates a better fitting model

than the model with one profile less (Nylund et al., 2007). Furthermore, classification quality was evaluated by entropy, in which values approaching 1 indicated that the classified profiles were distinct (Celeux & Soromenho, 1996).

Second, the associations of the career/working life profiles with the socioeconomic and partnership characteristics and work-family expectations were examined using the Bolck–Croon–Hagenaars (BCH) procedure (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2018; Bakk & Vermunt, 2014). The procedure accounts for measurement error related to the classification of participants into the profiles by using weights that are inversely related to the classification error probabilities obtained from the LPA model (Bakk et al., 2013). We used the manual BCH method (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2018), as we wanted to consider the socioeconomic and partnership characteristics and work-family variables simultaneously, while controlling for age and parental education. For the analyses, all the categorical variables (i.e. level of education, main activity, region, and partnership status) were dummy coded. Following Sen's approach (1995, 1999), we chose the most disadvantaged category from each variable as the reference category (see Table 4).

The overall differences in the means of the continuous variables (i.e. age and work-family variables) and proportions of the categorical variables (i.e. parental education, socioeconomic and partnership characteristics) between the future career/working life profiles were examined using the likelihood ratio (LR) test (Satorra & Bentler, 2010). Wald tests were used to examine pairwise differences between the profiles in the continuous variables, and Cohen's *d* was used as a measure of the effect size of the mean differences between profiles (Cohen, 1988). The results of the analyses are reported as mean differences and their 95% confidence intervals (*CI*). For the categorical variables, pairwise comparisons were based on odds ratios (*OR*) and their 95% *CI*s.

Results

Profiles of women according to their expectations about their future career and working life

The first aim was to identify profiles of young women based on their expectations about their future career/working life (RQ1). Fit statistics for the estimated LPA models showed some support for the two-, three-, and four-profile models (Table 2). The two-profile model was supported only by the BLRT, whereas the three-profile model was supported by the BIC and aBIC and the four-profile model was supported by the aBIC and VLMR. As the three- and four-profile models were supported by more statistical criteria than the two-profile model, they were inspected and compared for interpretability. Three of the four profiles in the four-profile model were nearly identical to those in the three-profile model. The fourth profile in the four-profile model also resembled the biggest profile of the three-profile model in the responses to four of the five statements on future career/working life. However, the women in the fourth profile clearly differed in their response to the statement 'I will probably be unemployed at some point' as, like the women in the smallest profile in the three-profile model, they also expressed concern about their future employment situation. Thus, this fourth profile was theoretically contradictory: while its members mainly expressed trust, they also expressed mistrust in regard to their future career/working life. Hence, the three-profile model was chosen as the final model.

Table 2. Model fit indices for the estimated latent profile solutions.

Model	BIC	aBIC	Entropy	VLMR (*p*)	BLRT (*p*)	Profile proportions (%) based on posterior probabilities
2-profile	6816.74	6734.21	0.89	0.000	0.000	0.59/0.41
3-profile	6301.90	6200.33	0.99	0.000	0.166	0.43/0.37/0.20
4-profile	6299.16	6178.54	0.91	0.000	0.193	0.13/0.30/0.37/0.20
5-profile	6317.75	6178.09	0.88	0.479	0.146	0.12/0.20/0.08/0.23/0.37
6-profile	6335.06	6176.34	0.87	0.080	0.065	0.08/0.20/0.37/0.22/0.06/0.07
7-profile	6358.34	6180.58	0.83	0.628	0.364	0.29/0.08/0.08/0.20/0.08/0.06/0.21

Notes. BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion; aBIC = sample size adjusted BIC; VLMR = Vuong–Lo–Mendell–Rubin Likelihood Ratio; BLRT = Bootstrap Likelihood Ratio Test.

Table 3. Proportions and conditional means of the latent profiles of young women's expectations about their future career/working life.[1]

	Profiles		
Expectations on career/ working life	Confident	Cautiously confident	Concerned
I'm worried about whether I will be able to cope in working life in the future	2.28	2.45	2.71
I'm worried about whether I will have a job in the future	1.76	2.38	2.82
I will probably get a permanent job	4.00	3.00	1.86
I will probably be unemployed at some point	2.09	2.36	2.98
I will probably surpass my parents' standard of living	2.97	2.60	2.26
N	227	195	105
Profile proportions (%)	43	37	20

Notes. [1]Profile proportions are the proportions of women in each profile based on the estimated latent profile model, and conditional means show their distribution across the indicator variables for a given profile.

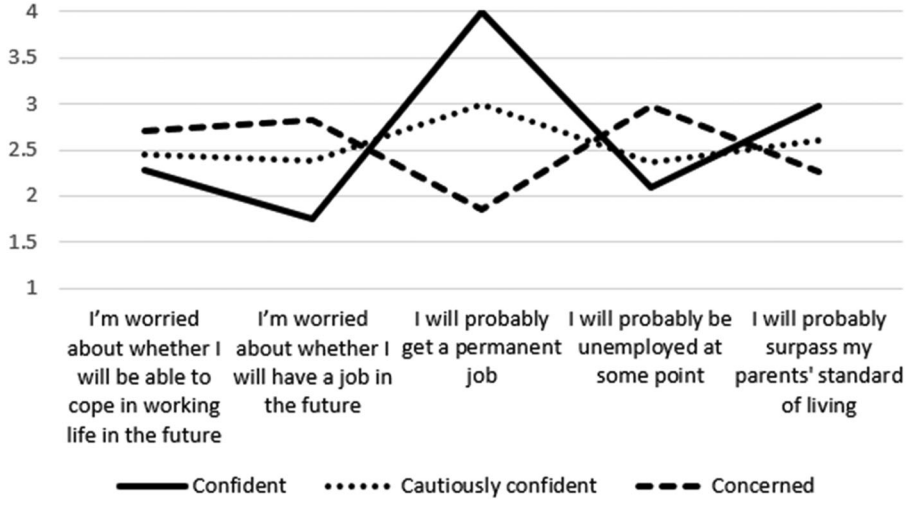

Figure 2. The latent profiles of young women's expectations about their future career/working life.

The three latent profiles of the young women based on their expectations about their future career/working life and the conditional probabilities of the chosen model are shown in Table 3 and depicted graphically in Figure 2. The members of the largest profile, labelled *Confident* (43%), were more confident about their career/working life than those in the other profiles (Figure 2). They had the highest level of trust in finding a permanent job, surpassing their parents' standard of living and not being unemployed. These women were also least concerned about coping and job availability in the labour market.

The members of the second largest profile, labelled *Cautiously confident* (37%; Table 3, Figure 2), were cautiously optimistic about their future career and labour market prospects. All the indicators were in the midrange, unlike in the other profiles, and were in line with those in the *Confident* profile (Figure 2). However, the *Cautiously confident* women did not have the same level of trust about gaining a permanent job, surpassing their parents' standard of living and not being unemployed as the confident women.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of socioeconomic and partnership characteristics, work-family expectations and control variables for the latent profiles of young women's expectations about their future career/working life. Means (M) and standard deviations (SD) are computed for continuous variables and percentages (%) for categorical variables.

Variables		Confident ($n = 227$)	Cautiously confident ($n = 195$)	Concerned ($n = 105$)
		M (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)
Age[a]		24.24 (3.17)	23.53 (3.31)	23.84 (2.98)
Financial situation		6.72 (2.28)	6.14 (2.07)	5.76 (2.10)
Work-family expectations:				
Reconciling a career and children is an impossible equation		1.55 (0.72)	1.86 (0.74)	1.71 (0.67)
I'm prepared to give up a job opportunity for family reasons		2.98 (0.88)	2.81 (0.74)	2.84 (0.87)
I'd be prepared to postpone setting up a family for work-related reasons		2.85 (0.98)	2.70 (0.82)	2.94 (0.94)
		%	%	%
Parental education[a]	Other (ref.)	52.91	52.85	47.52
	Tertiary qualification	47.09	47.15	52.48
Educational level	No qualification/degree (ref.)	4.01	8.17	8.57
	Upper secondary vocational qualification	25.45	32.65	29.52
	Upper secondary general qualification	25.45	32.14	34.29
	Tertiary qualification	45.09	27.04	27.62
Main activity	Unemployed/out of labour force (ref.)	4.00	1.53	18.87
	Studying	34.22	47.45	46.23
	Employed	61.78	51.02	34.90
Region	Rural/semi-urban areas (ref.)	13.33	14.29	20.76
	Urban areas	60.45	59.69	64.15
	Metropolitan area	26.22	26.02	15.09
Partnership status	Single (incl. divorced) (ref.)	34.67	38.46	45.63
	Dating	20.44	17.95	17.48
	Cohabiting/married	44.89	43.59	36.89

Notes. [a]Control variable. ref. = reference category.

Moreover, they were more worried about their future coping and job availability than the confident women.

The women in the smallest profile, labelled *Concerned* (20%; Table 3, Figure 2), were the most concerned and sceptical about their future career/working life. Unlike the C*onfident* and *Cautiously confident* profiles, all the indicators followed a reverse pattern (Figure 2). These women had the lowest level of confidence in finding a permanent job, surpassing their parents' standard of living and not being unemployed in the future. They were also the most worried about their future coping ability and job availability.

Women's future career and working life profiles by socioeconomic and partnership characteristics

Next, we investigated whether the young women's career/working life profiles were associated with their socioeconomic and partnership characteristics (RQ2) and work-family expectations (RQ3). Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics of these variables for the career/working life profiles. The LR test showed that the profiles differed in all variables ($\chi^2(30) = 113.86$, $p < .001$). Although these variables were analysed simultaneously within the same model, we present the results for socioeconomic and partnership characteristics and work-family expectations separately.

Of the socioeconomic and partnership characteristics, level of education, main activity, financial situation, and region were statistically significantly associated with profile

Table 5. Differences between latent profiles in relation to socioeconomic and partnership characteristics, work-family expectations and control variables. Mean differences, their 95% confidence intervals (CI) and effect sizes (Cohen's *d*) are computed for the continuous variables and odds ratio (*OR*) and their 95% CI for the categorical variables.

		Confident vs cautiously confident Mean difference (95% CI)[b], *d*	Confident vs concerned Mean difference (95% CI)[b], *d*	Cautiously confident vs concerned Mean difference (95% CI)[b], *d*
Age[a]		**0.71 (0.08–1.33), −0.22**	0.39 (−0.31–1.10), −0.12	−0.31 (−1.05–0.43), 0.10
Financial situation		**0.59 (0.17–1.00), −0.27**	**0.97 (0.47–1.47), −0.45**	0.38 (−0.12–0.88), −0.18
Work-family expectations:				
Reconciling a career and children is an impossible equation		**−0.31 (−0.45–−0.17), 0.43**	−0.16 (−0.32–0.00), 0.22	0.15 (−0.02–0.32), −0.21
I'm prepared to give up a job opportunity for family reasons		**0.17 (0.01–0.32), −0.20**	0.15 (−0.06–0.35), −0.18	−0.02 (−0.22–0.18), 0.03
I'd be prepared to postpone setting up a family for work-related reasons		0.16 (−0.02–0.33), −0.17	−0.09 (−0.32–0.10), 0.10	**−0.25 (−0.46–−0.03), 0.27**
		OR (95% CI)[c]	*OR* (95% CI)[c]	*OR* (95% CI)[c]
Parental education[a]	Other	ref.	ref.	ref.
	Tertiary qualification	1.00 (0.68–1.47)	1.20 (0.50–1.29)	1.21 (0.50–1.31)
Educational level	No qualification/degree	ref.	ref.	ref.
	Upper secondary vocational qualification	0.70 (0.46–1.08)	0.82 (0.49–1.37)	1.16 (0.69–1.95)
	Upper secondary general qualification	0.72 (0.47–1.10)	0.65 (0.39–1.08)	0.91 (0.55–1.51)
	Tertiary qualification	**2.23 (1.47–3.37)**	**2.16 (1.30–3.58)**	0.97 (0.57–1.66)
Main activity	Unemployed/out of labour force	ref.	ref.	ref.
	Studying	**0.58 (0.39–0.85)**	**0.61 (0.38–0.97)**	1.05 (0.65–1.70)
	Employed	**1.55 (1.05–2.29)**	**3.03 (1.87–4.93)**	**1.96 (1.19–3.21)**
Region	Rural/semi-urban areas	ref.	ref.	ref.
	Urban areas	1.03 (0.70–1.53)	0.85 (0.53–1.38)	0.83 (0.50–1.36)
	Metropolitan area	1.01 (0.65–1.56)	**2.01 (1.09–3.72)**	**2.00 (1.06–3.74)**
Partnership status	Single (incl. divorced)	ref.	ref.	ref.
	Dating	1.18 (0.72–1.92)	1.21 (0.66–2.23)	1.03 (0.55–1.95)
	Cohabiting/married	1.05 (0.71–1.55)	1.40 (0.86–2.26)	1.33 (0.81–2.18)

Notes. [a]Control variable. [b]CI statistically significant if it does not include value 0. [c]CI statistically significant if it does not include value 1. ref. = reference category.

membership (Table 5). Women in the *Confident* profile were more likely to have tertiary education whereas those in the *Cautiously confident* and *Concerned* profiles were more likely to have no degree/qualification. However, no differences were observed between profiles in the other educational levels. Hence, the women in all three profiles were equally likely to have matriculated or gained an upper secondary vocational qualification. For main activity, the young women in the *Confident* and *Cautiously confident* profiles were more likely to be employed than those in the *Concerned* profile, while those in the *Cautiously confident* and *Concerned* profiles were more likely to be studying or unemployed/out of the labour force. Financially, the women in the *Confident* profile were more likely than those in the *Cautiously confident* and *Concerned* profiles to rate their financial situation as good.

Furthermore, the young women in the *Confident* and *Cautiously confident* profiles were more likely to live in the metropolitan area than those in the *Concerned* profile, who were more likely to live in a rural/semi-urban area (Table 5). However, profile membership was not associated with the likelihood of living in an urban area. Thus, the women in all three

profiles were equally likely to live in an urban area. Finally, there was no relationship between profile membership and partnership status.

Women's future career and working life profiles in relation to expectations about work-family reconciliation

All the work-family indicators were related to profile membership (see Table 5). The young women in the *Cautiously confident* profile were more likely to consider career and children as irreconcilable and less likely to relinquish a job opportunity for family reasons than those in the *Confident* profile. The women in the *Concerned* profile were more likely to postpone family formation for work-related reasons than those in the *Cautiously confident* profile. Finally, the women in the *Confident* and *Concerned* profiles did not differ in work-family expectations.

Discussion and conclusions

This study contributes to work-family research by focusing on young women's future expectations and perceived options in the work and care domains in the context of the Finnish labour market, which is currently characterized by increasing instability and social inequality. Applying the capabilities approach (Sen, 1995, 1999; see also Hobson, 2014; Hvinden & Halvorsen, 2018; Yerkes et al., 2020), the findings show that women's expectations on their future career/working life are embedded in their individual, institutional and societal contexts (*conversion factors*), meaning that they foresee both opportunities and constraints regarding their social and economic resources (*means*) for combining work and family life in the future. In support of our first hypothesis, three career/working life profiles were identified: *Confident*, *Cautiously confident* and *Concerned*. Most of the young women (80%) were in the first two profiles, and thus had mostly favourable expectations about their future career/working life. Only the remaining one fifth of the sample expressed concerns about their career/working life prospects. Thus, despite the increasing uncertainties in the labour market, most young women seem to be able to maintain optimism and trust in their capabilities in their future working lives. These results on future employability and coping among young Finnish women are more positive than those of Haikkola and Myllyniemi (2020) and more negative than those reported by Keyriläinen (2020) on future employability.

As we expected and in accordance with capabilities approach and previous studies (e.g. Damaske & Frech, 2016; Surakka et al., 2017), the profiles differed in socioeconomic characteristics (Hypothesis 2). Namely, the women who were confident about their future career/working life were more likely to have more resources than those in the other profiles. In contrast, women who were more cautious about their future prospects were more likely to have fewer socioeconomic resources than the confident women and more socioeconomic resources than the women who were concerned about their future career/working life. Thus, the women with the most concerns were more likely to be the most disadvantaged in resources. However, contrary to our expectations, the profiles were not distinguished by partnership status. Socioeconomic factors such as education, work status, financial situation and living region seem to play a more important role than partnership characteristics among the present young women reflecting on

their future career and working life choices. Moreover, the findings confirm the growing inequality previously observed in Finnish working life as manifested in the accumulation of socioeconomic resources among the more advantaged women, indicating that not all women may realise their choices (*valued functionings*) for their future career.

In line with the capabilities approach and previous studies (e.g. Fernández-Cornejo et al., 2016; Savela & O'Brien, 2016), our results also showed that profile membership was associated with perceived options in work and care. As we expected (Hypothesis 3a), the young women who were confident about their future career and working life were more likely to relinquish a job opportunity for family reasons than the more cautious women. The cultural ideal of the primacy of maternal care in Finland has been shown to steer women's choices in work and care (Lehto, 2020; Närvi, 2012). Confident, higher educated women who subscribe to the traditional culture of intensive parenting may especially find themselves struggling to cope with the double burden of a demanding career and an intensive family life (e.g. Blair-Loy et al., 2015; Närvi, 2014; Savela & O'Brien, 2016). On the other hand, women with higher resources who already have a job may feel they can afford to relinquish a job opportunity for family reasons. This may not be the case for the cautiously confident women in a more precarious labour market position. Having higher resources also enables women to choose (*valued functioning*) to resolve the work-care dilemma by, for example, paying for domestic work services (Eldén & Anving, 2019). Thus, women who are confident about their future work situation may perceive greater freedom to exercise agency in the work-family domain.

As we expected (Hypothesis 3b), the cautiously confident women were more likely than the confident to consider the reconciliation of career and children as impossible. They were also more likely to combine studies and living in the metropolitan area, a situation which may impact on their future transitions. For example, a Finnish study on the reasons behind low fertility found that a child was more often considered an economic burden or a barrier to career development by students than those already in the labour market (Pekkola & Lehtonen, 2015). Moreover, living in the metropolitan area means higher housing costs. As shown by Mills and Blossfeld (2013), due to temporal uncertainties, young adults are less able to make long-term binding commitments. This may, for example, translate into their forgoing partnership and parenthood until they feel sufficiently certain about their future life path. Thus, women who are more cautious in their expectations and less advantaged in resources may be more likely to foresee work-family reconciliation as impossible.

Furthermore, as we expected (Hypothesis 3c), the young women who were concerned about their future career/working life were more likely to postpone family formation for work-related reasons than those who were cautiously confident in their expectations. As shown by Brauner-Otto and Geist (2018) and Miettinen (2015, p. 70), economic strain, caused, for example, by being out of the labour force, erodes childbearing expectations, as it increases uncertainty about becoming a parent and increases the likelihood of postponing the transition to parenthood. Moreover, employment opportunities are lower in rural/semi-urban areas, further weakening the working life options of the women with the most concerns. Although it has been shown that the institutional context may encourage childbearing (Miettinen & Jalovaara, 2020), a higher proportion of young Finnish women foresee their 30s or thereafter as the ideal time for becoming a parent (Miettinen, 2015, p. 34). Rotkirch and colleagues (2017, 52) found that the least educated women

preferred to have their first child somewhat later than on average, indicating that having a child may not be a choice (*valuable functioning*) for women with concerns but instead an alternative to unemployment or a response to poorer labour market prospects (Blair-Loy et al., 2015; Fahlén, 2013). Thus, for the most concerned women, having limited resources seems to constrain their agency over work and care (see Hobson, 2014).

Although this study utilised a large, representative sample, and hence the results are generalizable to young women in Finland, it has its limitations. The first limitation relates to the interpretation of our results. Owing to the over-representation of cohabiting women, partnership status in our sample is fairly homogeneous. It is possible, therefore, that including more singles might have produced more variation in responses and hence potentially statistically significant differences in partnership status between the profiles. Second, our data were cross-sectional in nature, and thus no conclusions on causality between the young women's working life profiles and work-family expectations can be drawn. Women's expectations about working life and work-family reconciliation and how they change reciprocally across time merit further study. A third limitation concerns the validity of the items used to assess expectations about work-family reconciliation. The three items drawn from the Finnish Youth Barometer 2019 survey, which supplied our data on expectations, was confined to exploring young people's views on work and entrepreneurship. Hence, it was not possible to study expectations in greater detail with a higher number of statements. Furthermore, one of the work-family statements used the Finnish word 'ura' (translated here as 'career'), which has multiple connotations in Finnish: for example, it can mean an occupation undertaken for a significant period during the person's life course or having opportunities for advancement at work. Respondents may, therefore, have understood this statement differently. Finally, financial situation was not subjectively assessed in the usual way (for a review, see Sorgente & Lanz, 2017). Therefore, the potential role of financial situation as a resource informing young women's work- and care-related capabilities should be examined using additional, diverse measures.

Practical implications

The present findings highlight the importance when examining the links between young women's expectations regarding their future options in both working life and reconciling work with care of viewing individual decision-making processes in relation to their specific institutional and societal contexts. First, from the policy perspective, more equal parental sharing of unpaid care, greater gender wage equality and family-friendly schedules in organisations should be promoted to remove the double burden experienced by confident women. Extending fathers' individual leave with high compensation for loss of earnings would appear to be the most effective way to balance the take-up of leave (Eerola et al., 2019). Furthermore, mutually agreed flexibility policies in organisations such as telecommuting, flexitime and reduced hours arrangements could improve the coordination of work and family. Second, as young women increasingly face a precarious labour market and economic uncertainty, such as fixed-term contracts and competition for low-paid work, policies enabling women to reconcile stable employment with parenthood are needed (Blair-Loy et al., 2015; Hill et al., 2019). The ability to construct a rational life plan is a key source of subjective well-being (Kalleberg & Vallas, 2017). Therefore,

actions on the societal level are needed to support the agency of cautiously confident women with less resources who encounter difficulties in constructing or following their educational or working life paths. Students' social situation should be bettered by increased financial support for housing and more focused guidance on reconciling studies, work, family and other aspects of life (see also Pekkola & Lehtonen, 2015). Finally, the future working life participation and family formation of concerned, currently unemployed women especially warrant consideration. Personalised guidance, the dissemination of information about career opportunities, and structured labour market entry, including training and rehabilitation, could help them to realise their choices in work and care. Through recognising the obstacles to reconciling working life and family formation, it may be possible to strengthen the agency of young women in various life situations and direct policy support where it is most needed.

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