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Family strategies, wage labour and the family life cycle in the Groningen countryside, c. 1850-1910

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Introduction

The second half of the nineteenth century was a period of rapid economic and social change in the Netherlands. In this respect the Groningen countryside was no exception. On the one hand the production per capita began to rise structurally, which resulted in a steady increase in real wages, in economic well-being and eventually in a fall in the death rate.¹ On the other hand bourgeois ideas about the role of married men and women, and also to some extent of adolescent children, began to penetrate all parts of society. Lower class political and social movements became important.² Partly as a reaction, the different religious denominations began increasingly to organise their members from both the lower and middle classes in strictly segmented pillars, with their own schools, clubs and societies. All these more or less interrelated developments make the second half of the nineteenth century an extremely interesting period to study.

This chapter concentrates on agricultural labourer families and the ways they tried to earn a living using the labour of the different family members in this dynamic period. The data mainly relates to Nieuw-Scheemda, a small village in the eastern part of the Groningen clay area. The different family strategies labourers developed were strongly influenced by the phase in the family life cycle in which they lived. In the first instance, the increase in the number of mouths to feed after marriage created problems which lasted until children

¹ R.F.J. Paping and G.A. Collenteur, 'The economic development of the clay area of Groningen 1770-1910: Income and socio-economic groups', in: P. Kooij (ed.), *Where the twain meet. Dutch and Russian regional demographic development in a comparative perspective 1800-1917* (Groningen/Wageningen 1998) 43; R.F.J. Paping, 'Groeï of stagnatie. De bevolkingsontwikkeling van Groningen', *Gronings Historisch Jaarboek*, 7 (2000) 44-48; G.A. Collenteur and R.F.J. Paping, 'De arbeidsmarkt voor inwonend boerenpersoneel in het Groningse kleigebied 1830-1920', *NEHA-Jaarboek voor economische, bedrijfs- en techniekgeschiedenis*, 60 (1997) 119-120.

² G. Bruintjes, *Socialisme in Groningen 1881-1894* (Amsterdam 1981); V.C. Sleebe, *In tennen van fatsoen. Sociale controle in het Groningse kleigebied 1770-1914* (Groningen 1994).

started to leave the parental home. After some years of marriage the rising age of children also shaped economic chances for the family by augmenting the possibilities of the children going out to work and also of the mother who needed less time to care for the children than before. However, the economic and social developments sketched in the introduction also played a major role in determining the strategies of labourer families, changing their goals and their possibilities.

Recently the term strategy has become quite popular in scientific social-historic research. Choices made by people and even social developments are explained by referring to strategic behaviour. Nonetheless, family strategy is a rather problematic and complicated concept in empirical research. Two problems will be touched on briefly.³

Firstly, the term strategy is not easy to operationalise in historical research. This becomes clear if *the conscious use of means to reach a certain goal* is used as a definition of strategy. However, historical databanks normally only provide insight into the behaviour of people, their actual actions, but not into the considerations they had for acting in that way. So, in most instances something is known only about the means used to fulfil the strategy but nothing is known about the exact purposes the people had in mind. Because of this, the relation between means and goals is not known either. In other words, it is relatively easy to reconstruct what happened but very difficult to find out why it happened in each case. A great deal can be discovered about the outcomes of decision-making processes, but it is difficult to reconstruct the underlying conscious strategies of the people.

Secondly, the problems become even greater if the notion of strategy is connected to the entity of the family. Family strategy means that there is not one decision-maker, but that there is some kind of joint whole-family strategy. How such a joint strategy comes into being is not easy to imagine. A weighting between the different interests of the different members of the family has to take place. It will be clear that not all members of the same family have the same goals, although the family acts as a single unit most of the time.

These two theoretical notions suggest that in the practice of historical research the actual reconstruction of family strategies will be very difficult, and it

³ See also T. Engelen, J. Kok, A. Knotter and R. Paping, 'Labour strategies of families: an introduction', and T. Engelen, J. Kok and R. Paping, 'The family strategy concept. An evaluation of our empirical case studies', both in *The History of the Family. An International Quarterly*, 9 (2004); R. Paping, 'Gezinnen en cohorten: arbeidsstrategieën in een marktgerichte agrarische economie: de Groningse kleigebieden 1830-1920', in: J. Kok et al., *Levensloop en levenslot. Arbeidsstrategieën van gezinnen in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw* (Groningen/Wageningen 1999) 17-19; P.P. Viazzo and K.A. Lynch, 'Anthropology, family history and the concept of strategy', *International Review of Social History*, 47 (2002) 423-452; J. Kok, 'The challenge of strategy: A comment', *International Review of Social History*, 47 (2002) 465-485.

is only possible to make hypotheses about these strategies. However, it seems a safe proposition that most human behaviour will have been purposeful, aiming at certain goals. For this reason it is not possible to do without the concept of (family) strategy, if human behaviour is to be explained, although it has to be accepted that it is difficult to get a complete and clear picture of these strategies.

The municipality of Scheemda (province of Groningen)

Nieuw-Scheemda is one of five villages in the municipality of Scheemda, situated in the eastern part of the Groningen clay area. The working class, or more accurately the labourers, were the single largest occupational group in the Groningen clay area (Table 1). Their share in the population rose in the second half of the nineteenth century. Most of the labourers were active in agriculture. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, some employment arose in large agriculture-related factories as a result of the hesitant industrialisation of the Netherlands. Around 1900 two large strawboard factories were established in the village of Midwolda, very near to Nieuw-Scheemda, and these employed 155 people, mainly unskilled labourers, in 1911.

Table 1 Estimated occupational structure of heads of households in the Groningen clay area, 1850-1910 (percentages)

	farmers	labourers	'middle class'
1850	17%	41%	42%
1870	18%	45%	37%
1890	15%	48%	37%
1910	13%	53%	34%

Note: Labourers also comprises unskilled and skilled labourers in services and industry. 'Middle class' comprises all other occupations, including civil servants and preachers. Heads of households without occupation were not taken into account.

Source: R.F.J. Paping and G.A. Collenteur, 'The economic development of the clay soil area of Groningen 1770-1910: income and socio-economic groups', in: Kooij (ed.), *Where the twain meet*, 39.

In 1850 the municipality of Scheemda numbered 3,733 inhabitants, rising to 6,215 in 1910.⁴ During the whole period far more people left than settled in the municipality. In the period 1900-1910 the total net loss due to departure was as high as 14% of the population. In most parts of the Groningen clay area this outmigration was stimulated by the agricultural depression which started around

⁴ CD-ROM, CBS and NIWI, *Publicaties Volkstellingen 1795-1971*.

1877 with falling prices of cereals and accompanying rising unemployment. However, in the municipality of Scheemda leaving was already a much older phenomenon, dating from the eighteen-fifties. Nevertheless, despite the migration losses, the population of Scheemda grew, as is clear from Table 2. The high and rising natural population growth in the period 1870-1910 signifies that Scheemda had entered the first phase of the demographic transition with a steady or even rising number of births combined with steeply falling death rates.⁵

Table 2 Average annual population development of the municipality of Scheemda, 1850-1910 (numbers per 1000 inhabitants)

	annual migration surplus	natural population growth	real population growth
1850-1860	-3	+12	+9
1860-1870	-8	+13	+5
1870-1880	-7	+16	+9
1880-1890	-6	+17	+11
1890-1900	-7	+19	+12
1900-1910	-14	+19	+5

Sources: Groninger Archieven, Provincieverslagen Groningen; CD-ROM, CBS and NIWI, *Publicaties Volkstellingen 1795-1971*.

In the agricultural census of 1862 Scheemda numbered around 842 families, among them 389 families of agricultural labourers (46%) and 118 families of farmers (14%).⁶ On average, every farmer employed three to four labourer families. Around 1910 there were still 118 farmers but the number of labourer's families had risen to at least 463, but probably to considerably more.⁷ The village of Nieuw-Scheemda had more or less the same occupational pattern as the municipality of Scheemda as a whole, although it is possible that the percentage of labourers and farmers combined was a little higher.

Farm labourers and agricultural wage work in Groningen

As has already been mentioned, the group of unskilled labourers comprised mainly farm labourers.⁸ Although farm work formed their most important

⁵ Paping, 'Groei of stagnatie'.

⁶ *Bijdragen tot de kennis van den tegenwoordigen staat der provincie Groningen vijfde deel: Landbouw-statistiek*, 2 parts (Groningen 1870).

⁷ *Uitkomsten der telling in zake het grondgebruik en den veestapel gehouden 20 mei - 20 juni 1910* (s-Gravenhage 1912).

⁸ For agricultural wage work see also P.R. Priester and H. De Raad, 'De iezeren kette van d'armoude'. *Aspecten van de sociaal-economische geschiedenis van Beerta, 1800-1870* (Groningen 1982); P.R. Priester, 'Agrarische produktie en werkgelegenheid in een Groninger gemeente: Beerta 1800-1870', *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis*, 11 (1985) 51-86; P.R. Priester, *De economische ontwikkeling van de landbouw in Groningen, 1800-1910. Een kwalitatieve en*

activity, labourers sometimes also did other physical work, for example digging canals, dikes and roads. While the head of the family depended on wage for his income, the other members of the family had only limited possibilities of earning an income or of performing economic labour within the household. Most of the labourer families in the Groningen clay area had only very small plots of land at their disposal, mainly for growing potatoes and vegetables. The area around Scheemda was in that respect somewhat exceptional because most of the labourers also cultivated relatively large plots of land on their own account. In 1862, 55% of all the families in the municipality of Scheemda owned one or more cows, 52% had some poultry, 63% fattened one or more pigs, and as many as 68% bred sheep.⁹ The percentages are high enough to suggest that some of the labourers must also have owned some livestock. Therefore it is not surprising that in 1910 nearly three hundred labourers in Scheemda cultivated more than one quarter of a hectare. This was made possible by the short working days in the Oldambt region of which Nieuw-Scheemda was a part.¹⁰ When it was not harvest time, the working day of the labourers on the farm ended at around one or two o'clock in the afternoon and afterwards the labourers worked in their own gardens and fields. So labourers in Scheemda combined their wage income with the home production of food, part of which, for example some potatoes and also some of the bacon from a fattened pig, could even be sold. In a sense farm labourers in Scheemda resembled cottagers. However, wage income remained their most important source of income. They needed money to pay house and land rents and also to buy bread, flour, peat, soap, tobacco and other grocery products.

Because the pieces of land and the wage income of the male family head were not sufficient to allow a reasonable standard of living, other members of the labourer families also had to go out to work for wages. The unskilled nature of the work of the labourers resulted in quite low wages for the family heads. The profession of labourer offered almost no perspectives for the future and occupational mobility was a quite rare phenomenon. It could be said that anybody who was once a labourer had a high chance of remaining a labourer all his life. Most of the labourers were also children of labourers (Table 3). During the second half of the nineteenth century it seems that the labouring class in the Groningen clay area became even more closed. The percentage of labourers

kwantitatieve analyse (Wageningen 1991) 135–206; R.F.J. Paping, *Voor een handvol stuivers. Werken, verdienen en besteden: de levensstandaard van boeren, arbeiders en middenstanders op de Groninger klei, 1770–1860* (Groningen 1995) 99–117.

⁹ *Bijdragen tot de kennis: Landbouw-statistiek*.

¹⁰ O.S. Knottnerus, 'Het Land Kanaän aan de Noordzee: een vergeten hoofdstuk', in: J.H.N. Elerie and P.C.M. Hoppenbrouwers (eds.), *Het Oldambt, deel 2. Nieuwe visies op geschiedenis en actuele problemen* (Groningen 1991) 48–52.

with parents from other occupational groups fell significantly.

Table 3 Social origin of unskilled labourers (cohort members born 1830, 1850 and 1870 in the Groningen clay area)

	born 1830	born 1850	born 1870
Unskilled labourers	64 %	73 %	78 %
Farmers	8 %	3 %	4 %
Middle class	23 %	15 %	15 %
Other occupations and none	6 %	9 %	4 %
Total N	226	188	130

Source: Cohort analysis Integral History project Groningen. Occupations of parents as stated by the birth of the cohort member, and occupations of the cohort members after marriage (males and females).

Around 1850, the labour strategies were presumably still mainly aimed at generating enough income to survive in the short term and in the future. However, other motives could also have already been of importance for labour market choices made by labourers in this period, for example the preservation of a social network (a reason not to migrate to unknown places). Another motive could have been the creation of pleasant domestic circumstances by keeping the children at home. The rise in real wages after 1860 seems to have made such new goals more and more attainable.¹¹

For most children staying at home it was only possible to find paid work during the summer half of the year, when the demand for labour on the farms was very high (see also later on). Even for the family heads it was difficult to find work the whole year through. Taking this into account the Groningen labourers can be split into three groups.¹² Group 1 consisted of regular workers who had concluded a fixed contract with a farmer, and who were assured of work the whole year through (regular labourers). Group 2 consisted of so-called 'semi-regular' labourers, who just as group 1 always worked for the same farmer, but who were dismissed for part of the year. This was especially the case in winter when there was not so much to do on the farms. The third group comprised casual labourers who continuously changed employer, working for several different farmers and also for other kinds of employers in the same year. They were heavily hit by winter unemployment. Casual labourers also participated in the seasonal labour-migration movement. Some of them went to Friesland to harvest the hay or to the Dutch peat districts to dig peat, and also to

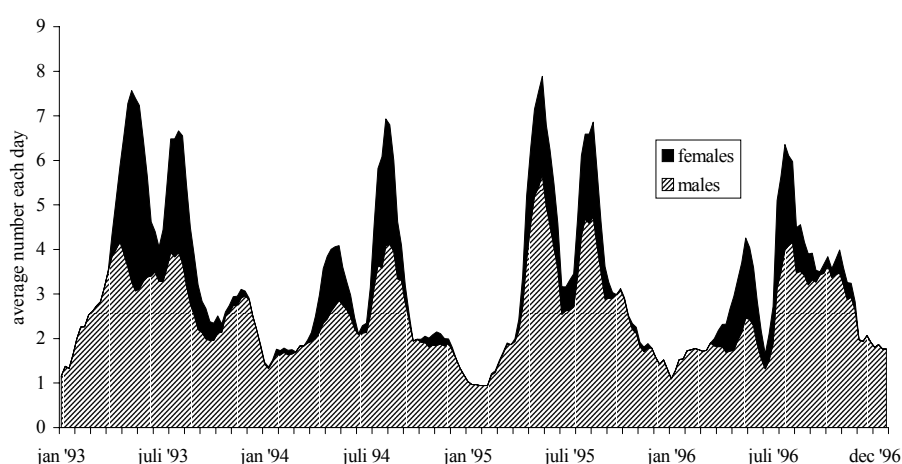
¹¹ Collenteur and Paping, 'De arbeidsmarkt voor inwonend boerenpersoneel', 127-131.

¹² R.F.J. Paping, 'Vaste en losse arbeiders en de werkloosheid op de Groninger klei, 1760-1820' *NEHA-Jaarboek voor economische, bedrijfs- en techniekgeschiedenis*, 57 (1994) 126-127, 151-153.

Germany to do all kinds of unskilled labour (particularly in the period between 1895 and 1914).¹³

As is clear from Figure 1, winter unemployment was a very serious problem in agriculture. In the summer half year, Farmer Dallinga hired around twice as many male labourers as during the winter. Seen in this light it is not strange that many casual labourers searched for supplementary job opportunities outside agriculture. The working class families which are studied here are mainly those of regular and semi-regular labourers (groups 1 and 2) who always worked for the same farmer. For female labourers the situation was even more severe than for casual labourers, because in winter Farmer Dallinga did not need the labour of any external female workers at all. This meant that female labourers could only find agricultural wage work between April and October. They mainly weeded and helped at harvest time.

*Figure 1 Male and female labourers working on the Dallinga farm in Nieuw-Scheemda, 1893-1896*¹⁴



In addition to these wage workers living outside the farm, farmers also employed farm servants who lived inside their household.¹⁵ These farm hands and

¹³ Groninger Archieven, Provinciaal Archief, Gemeenteverlagen Scheemda.

¹⁴ Groninger Archieven, familiearchief Dallinga, inv. no. 4: farm accounts.

¹⁵ Collenteur and Paping, 'De arbeidsmarkt voor inwonend boerenpersoneel'.

maids were young unmarried boys and girls, mainly sons and daughters of labourers, who were usually contracted for one year, from May to May. This contract could be lengthened by another year if both parties agreed to this. While the servants were still relatively young, their parents negotiated the contracts. After some years (probably around the age of 18) it seems that the servants became more or less autonomous, taking the decisions themselves. This arrangement with live-in farm servants was attractive for both farmer and labourer. The farmer had young servants at his disposal six or even seven days a week, who were familiar with the horses, cows and the rest of the farm, while the maids could also do some of the housekeeping. The labourers saved on the costs of food, and their children could already earn money at the age of 13-14. At least until around the age of 17 or 18 their wages were handed over to the parents.¹⁶ Children living at home could also earn money, but as has been noted it was difficult for them to find work the whole year through, and the parents then had to pay for their food expenses instead of the farmers.

The life cycle of the family

Fortunately, four farmer accounts concerning hired labour in the village of Nieuw-Scheemda have survived.¹⁷ These accounts are in general very rare because they were normally thrown away after some years.¹⁸ Two of the accounts, Dallinga and Barlagen, are very detailed. The account of Van Cingel registers only a few annual contracts and the last one, from Knottnerus, reports the annual earnings of each worker on the farm. Although the number of labourers in the accounts is limited, the information given is very detailed. The Dallinga and Barlagen accounts in particular provide very precise information about some of the families of mainly regular labourers. Over a long period, the farmer noted which of the family members worked and on which days. This means that it is possible to relate the wage-earning of specific family members to the family life cycle.

The nuclear family was the dominant household structure in Groningen, and this was also the case for the Nieuw-Scheemda labourers. Nevertheless,

¹⁶ In farm accounts, interference by the parents is stated explicitly only for the younger servants, and payments to parents are mentioned only for them. For example, Farmer Glas of Loppersum, Wage book servants 1880-1913 (owned by the Glas family of Huizinge).

¹⁷ Groninger Archieven, familiearchief Dallinga, inv. no. 4; Groninger Archieven, Familiearchief Barlagen and De Groot, inv. no. 12-13; Wage book Barlagen 1869-1881 (owned by the Westers family of Warffum); Servants book Van Cingel 1869-1935 (owned by the Van Cingel family of Haren); Loonboek Knottnerus (owned by O.S. Knottnerus of Zuidbroek, copy owned by the Nederlands Agronomisch-Historisch Instituut).

¹⁸ For an English case see: J. Burnette, 'Labourers at the Oakes: Changes in the demand for female day-laborers at a farm near Sheffield during the Agricultural Revolution', *Journal of Economic History*, 59 (1999) 41-67.

quite a lot of the families were extended for a few years, but if the circumstances are investigated this was mainly for forced reasons such as a daughter giving birth to illegitimate children and living temporarily in the house of the grandparents until the daughter married, or a son making a girl pregnant at the age of 19 and being forced to marry immediately without having a house of his own. Afterwards the young family left the parental household as soon as possible. There was also a daughter who was widowed very young and returned to her parents with two little children.

Table 4 Forced first marriages of cohort members (unskilled labourers) born around 1830, 1850 and 1870 in the Groningen clay area (percentages)

	1830	1850	1870
First child born before marriage	11%	13%	10%
First child born before 6½ months of marriage	41%	42%	50%
First child born after 6½ months of marriage	48%	46%	40%
N	205	174	121

Source: Cohort analysis Integral History project Groningen.

As Table 4 shows, forced marriages were very common for labourers in the Groningen clay area. In this sense bourgeois ideas on family life do not seem to have made much impact on this occupational group in the second half of the nineteenth century. The practice of letting the female partner become pregnant before marrying even seems to have increased. Forced marriages of course also signified that new couples were suddenly confronted with the problem of starting a household of their own. For the first months these problems were often solved by staying in one of the parental households or returning to these households. Because the bride as well as the bridegroom were often working as live-in servants on annual contracts, it was financially beneficial to remain so for as long as possible. Sometimes the husband even kept working as a live-in farm hand for a short period after marriages and birth of the first child. Although this practice of forced marriage would seem to have created much uncertainty it was not completely irrational. Married women could earn less money (and emoluments) as day labourers than unmarried women as live-in maids. So it was attractive to keep on working as a farm maid for as long as possible and postpone marriage until this event was nearly inevitable.

The practice of forced marriages presumably also stimulated young marriages. It is remarkable that the age at marriage of female labourers was at first (cohort born 1830) higher than that for other occupational groups.¹⁹

¹⁹ Compared with P. Kooij and A. Mennens-van Zeijst, 'Demographic behaviour in the Groningen clay area. The results of cohort analysis', in: Kooij (ed.), *Where the twain meet*, 190.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, however, the marriage age of female labourers fell swiftly, so that later on female labourers married relatively young. During the whole period, male labourers were relatively young when marrying compared with other groups in the Groningen clay area. However, their average age at marriage also fell slightly more during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Table 5 Average age at marriage of cohort members born 1830, 1850 and 1870 in the Groningen clay area who became labourers after marriage

	males	N	females	N
1830	27.7	98	27.6	128
1850	26.6	82	24.9	103
1870	24.9	58	24.5	71

Source: Collenteur and Paping, 'De arbeidsmarkt voor inwonend boeren-personeel', 115.

A theoretical family life cycle can be sketched for working class families.²⁰ We must remember that most of the couples started a household of their own as soon as possible after the wedding and stayed independent during the whole period of their marriage. In the first years of marriage the labourer families were still quite small with no children, or only one young child, and this can be seen as the first phase of the family life cycle. The number of children increased in the following years and particularly between 5 and 15–20 years of marriage, many young children incapable of earning much money themselves were living in the household (the second phase of the family life cycle).

However, after about 15 years most of the children became capable of working and in most of the families no new children were born anymore. In this third period of the family life cycle, which lasted until 25–30 years after marriage, the number of non-working children fell steadily, while the number of children working increased. However, it has already been remarked that many of these children left the parental household to become live-in farm servants so that in this period the size of many labourer families began to decrease. This fall in size took place quite early for the families with few children, and much later for large families such as the Snitjers. In the fourth phase in the family life cycle, after 25–30 years of marriage, the two old parents, if still alive, remained alone or sometimes with only one or two children in the household.

²⁰ A. Knotter, 'Gezinsarmoede-gezinsarbeid: De invloed van de gezinscyclus op de inkomsten van gezinnen van losse (haven)arbeiders in Amsterdam in de eerste helft van deze eeuw', in: Kok et al., *Levensloop en levenslot*, 209–210.

Figure 2 Average household size and duration of marriage for several labourers in Nieuw-Scheemda in the second half of the nineteenth century

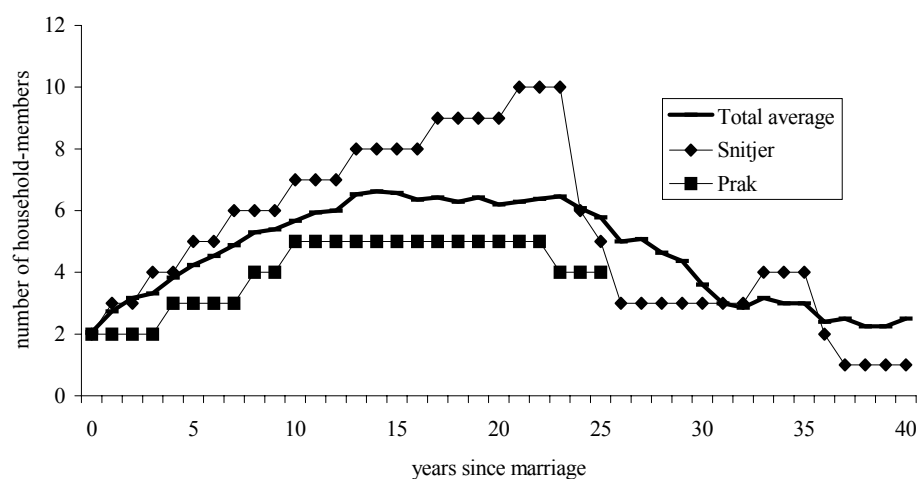
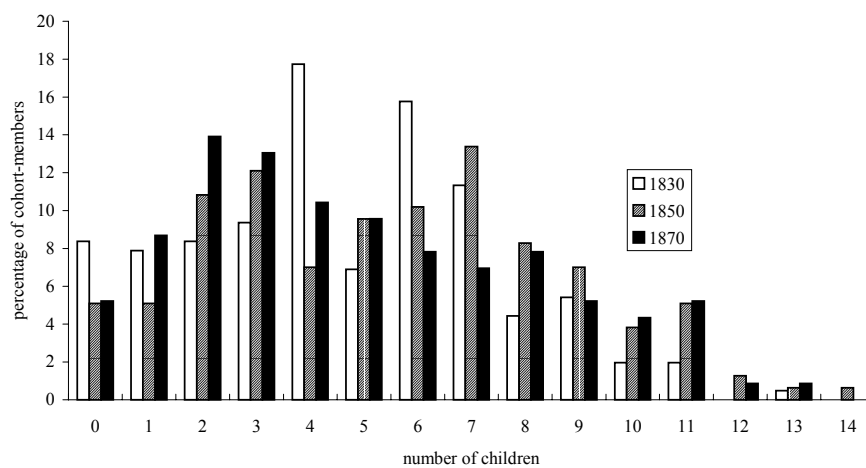


Figure 3 Number of children of married cohort members (labourers born 1830, 1850 and 1870)



It is clear that the family life cycle is just a model and that the differences between the families could be enormous. One important reason is the large difference in the number of children labourer couples produced, as shown in Figure 3. Having two or three children was just as normal as having six or seven children. During the second half of the nineteenth century the number of very large, but also of quite small families (two or three children) increased so that the differences within the group of labourer families also increased. Of the labourers marrying around 1855-1860 (cohort members born in 1830) some 40% had four to six children, while for the labourers marrying around 1875-1880 and 1895-1900 this was the case for only 25%.

Table 6 Average household composition and household size in Scheemda in 1862

	labourer households	farmer households
Married men	0.9	0.9
Married women	0.9	0.8
Children younger than 15	2.0	1.4
Sons older than 15	0.2	0.5
Daughters older than 15	0.2	0.4
Male servants younger than 15	0.0	0.3
Female servants younger than 15	0.0	0.3
Male servants older than 15	-	1.1
Female servants older than 15	-	1.0
Total household size	4.2	6.8
Total relatives in household	4.2	4.1
Number of families	389	118

Source: *Bijdragen tot de kennis: Landbouw-statistiek*.

The departure of at least some of the children aged 15 years and older becomes clear if we compare the composition of farmer and labourer families in the agricultural statistics of 1862 (Table 6). In the farmer households more sons and daughters older than fifteen were present, the number of children younger than fifteen, however, was much less. Some of the labourer children of 15 years and older had become farm hands or farm maids and many children younger than 14 years had also become farm servants. Every farm housed on average more than two and a half servants and because of this labourer households numbered fewer children over the age of 15.

Wage work and the life cycle of the family

From Table 6 it is clear that labourer families in general had the strategy of sending their children to work as servants living in the households of other families, especially farmers. The reason for this would have been related to the family life cycle. Letting the children become servants elsewhere was a way of

letting them generate income and of lowering the costs of consumption within the labourer households.

In this first phase of the family life cycle it was relatively easy for married women to perform wage work since they only had a few children to take care of. However, in this first period it was less necessary for women to work as the small family could relatively easily survive on the wages of the father. Economically, the first phase was in general a favourable period.

After some years the household started to grow further and further as more and more children were born and the need for money and food to maintain the family increased rapidly. However, for the mothers it became much more difficult to do wage work because they had to take care of the children. When the oldest labourer children became 9 years old they were sometimes not allowed to go to school in summer anymore as they had to keep an eye on their little brothers and sisters while mother was with father at work on the farm. In this way it was possible for married women to combine farm work during summer with having a large number of young children.

The third phase started when the oldest children reached the age at which they could earn income. For the labourer family it was very attractive to let them earn as much as possible for in this way the family could escape from the difficult second phase when the parents were troubled with too many dependent children. Leaving home to become a servant meant at least a reduction in costs for the labourer family, not to mention the wage they could give to the parents. For most of the children, by the time they reached the age of 14 the family was in a very difficult period. For the older children in the larger families the parents at that time still had to take care of numerous younger brothers and sisters, while for the last children in the labourer family it was also necessary to earn as much money as possible because the earning capacities of the parents had begun to fall. The family was entering the dangerous phase four of the family life cycle. Work in agriculture was very strenuous and many labourers were not capable of working after the age of 50 to 60. The period between 20 and 25 years after marriage was in general quite favourable for the labourer families, but this was only the case if the family succeeded in finding well-paid jobs for the children.

Some specific labourer families will be discussed in the next section to see how much income was earned during the family life cycle. One problem is that it is not known how much money was brought home by the children who worked elsewhere. For the Snitjer family, phase three, with many children capable of working, can clearly be seen (Table 7). Eighteen to twenty years after marriage, the income earned by people in the household was very high.

Table 7 The earnings in Dutch guilders of the Snitjer family, 1877-1879, 1885-1891, (regular) labourers for farmer Dallinga in Nieuw-Scheemda

	birth	1877	1878	1879	1886	1887	1888	1889	1890	1891
Klaas S.	*1834	310.71	287.19	251.59	252.26	265.05	250.40	232.51	68.91	12.10
Trijntje O.	*1836	36.20	23.20	29.63	27.84	40.66	37.46	19.43	4.55	-
Geessien S.	*1859	28.25	52.73	63.97	left					
Hindrik S.	*1861	196.40	224.05	215.00	left					
Koert S.	*1864	12.81	13.57	f. h.	left					
Harm S.	*1866	-	0.90	6.80	f. h.	61.41	married			
Frouwke S.	*1869	-	-	-	10.70	-	19.85	1.20	-	8.43
Aaltje S.	*1871	-	-	-	16.50	35.50	maid	maid	maid	16.88
Fenje S.	*1875	deceased	1884							
Luppo S.	*1878	deceased	1878							
Poor relief										46.00
Total		584.37	601.64	566.99	307.30	402.62	307.71	253.14	73.46	83.41
Years after marriage		(18)	(19)	(20)	(27)	(28)	(29)	(30)	(31)	(32)
Number of children		7	7	6	2	3	1	1	1	2

Source: Groninger Archieven, familiearchief Dallinga, inv. no. 4; f.h. means farm hand.

This was mainly due to the son, Hindrik Snitjer, who left the household for the city of Groningen in 1885. Some 25–30 years after marriage the family income was already much lower, but in this period the costs were also low because only a few children were still living at home. In 1889, father Klaas Snitjer's wage was first lowered, but by the next year, at the early age of 55, Klaas had become totally incapable of working. Afterwards Klaas Snitjer and his wife received poor relief each week, totalling 104 guilders a year. The Snitjer family had clearly arrived in the very unfavourable phase four of the family life cycle, no longer being capable of earning enough money for a living.

Table 8 Income composition of the household of the Prak family, regular labourer for farmer Barlagen in Nieuw-Scheemda

Years after marriage	Total income	Lodewijk *1850	Grietje *1851	Thomas *1879	Maria *1881	Hendrikje *1883
1878 (3)	304.27	90%	10%			
1879 (4)	288.48	90%	10%			
1880 (5)	331.25	85%	15%			
1881 (6)	315.08	84%	16%			
1882 (7)	318.60	87%	13%			
1883 (8)	287.57	87%	13%			
1884 (9)	317.61	77%	23%			
1885 (10)	301.01	75%	25%			
1886 (11)	283.37	85%	15%			
1887 (12)	277.72	86%	14%			
1888 (13)	260.98	86%	13%	1%		
1889 (14)	282.45	87%	12%	1%		
1890 (15)	325.48	83%	16%	1%		
1891 (16)	330.72	85%	14%	1%		
1892 (17)	332.39	83%	10%	7%		
1893 (18)	350.67	76%	10%	13%	1%	0%
1894 (19)	396.17	66%	8%	21%	4%	
1895 (20)	454.10	56%	8%	29%	7%	
1896 (21)	385.01	65%	10%	16%	10%	
1897 (22)	326.38	76%	12%	farm hand	13%	
1898 (23)	328.66	76%	7%	elsewhere	17%	

Source: Groninger Archieven, Familiearchief Barlagen and De Groot, inv. no. 12-13; Wage book Barlagen 1869-1881.

The family life cycle is also clearly present in the wage-earning development of the Prak family (Table 8). From a few years after the beginning of the marriage until fifteen years after, the amount of money earned did not change much, although the number of children rose from zero to three. The father earned some 85–90% of the family income, while mother Grietje Kramer only worked

in the summer and had a share of 10-15% of the family income. Strangely enough, it was exactly in the period that there were three very young children at home, 1884-1885, that the mother worked substantially longer in order to compensate for the declining income of her husband. When the son Thomas began to work regularly while still staying at home there was a steep rise in the family income. After Thomas had left to become a farm hand elsewhere this role was taken over by his sister, Maria Prak. Extraordinary was the presence at home of Hindriktje Prak, who never did any farm work. Although the population register records no special occupation for Hindriktje, it is probable that she had a different way of contributing to the family income. Possibly the Prak family tried to protect the youngest daughter from a not very promising future in agriculture, which would correspond with the findings that children in the Groningen countryside who did not become a live-in servant had a greater chance of upward social mobility.²¹

In the short term it was economically attractive for labourer families to ensure that their young children earned money as fast as possible. This was especially the case if the family was in the second phase of the family life cycle.

Table 9 Annual days work for wage of labourer sons and daughters still living at home with their parents, Nieuw-Scheemda 1870-1900

Sons:										
Age:	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
Hendrik S.	?	?	?	?	?	?	292	293	294	
Koert S.	?	?	?	?	23	31	(farm hand at age 14)			
Harm S.	0	0	3	20	?	?	(farm hand later)			
Koert G.	0	0	10	110	88	(farm hand at age 13)				
Harm G.	3	1	0	44	29	52	144	36	(f.h. at age 16)	
Thomas P.	9	8	15	5	57	89	149	143	110	(f.h. at 17)
Stinus B.	?	?	?	0	0	49	61	118	102	
Daughters:										
Age:	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
Trientje A.	0	1	0	0	51	(maid at 13)				
Engeltje A.	0	0	3	0	57	(maid at 13)				
Aaltje S.	?	?	?	?	?	39	86	(maid at 16)		
Maria P.	0	0	0	9	29	36	50	59	64	

Source: Groninger Archieven, familiearchief Dallinga, inv. no. 4; Groninger Archieven, Familiearchief Barlagen and De Groot, inv. no. 12-13; Loonboek Barlagen 1869-1881; f.h. means farm hand.

²¹ R. Paping, 'Family strategies concerning migration and occupations of children in a market-oriented agricultural economy', *The History of the Family. An International Quarterly*, 9 (2004) Tables 6 and 7.

Table 9 shows how many days each year some of the children worked on the farm for daily wages. With the exception of Hindrik Snitjer, it was impossible for children of labourers living with their parents to find full-time work. This was even more difficult for girls than for boys. At a maximum they could find 60 to 90 days of paid labour per year so it was very attractive for the families of labourers to let the girls become a maid as soon as possible. The problems seem to have been a little less for boys. However, neither Thomas Prak nor Stinus Bos managed to find paid labour for more than half of the year, although they were already 16 or 17 years old.

It is also clear from Table 9 that the number of paid working days of children younger than 12 years on the farm was negligible. Boys and girls of 13 or 14 worked only some 2 to 3 months each year, although there were exceptions like the sons in the Greven family, Koert and Harm, who were both relatively active when they were only 12 or 13 years old. The reasons for this are not clear. For the parents, the wages of their only two sons would not seem to have been crucial, because of the small family size and the very active mother. Perhaps this family regarded wage work as very important for children.

Most of the children did indeed become live-in farm servants, some when they were only 13 years old; others stayed at home until they were 16 and a minority always stayed at home. At the end of the nineteenth century the number of farm servants fell steeply because of the proliferation of this practice.²² Because the standard of living of labourer families had increased quite a lot – a result of rising real wages – labourer families became more inclined to keep their children at home. This must have been socially attractive with family life remaining intact in this way, not being affected by absent children. Also, the children probably had more freedom in their parental home than in the houses of the farmers, where they had to make very long working days, and sometimes also had to work on Sundays. Possibly the most important reason for this development, however, is that the future prospects of labourer children staying at home were better than for those who became live-in servants.²³ Significantly more children of labourers who stayed at home managed in the long run to escape from the dismal life of an unskilled farm labourer. Families around 1900 must have been aware of the success of the children who did not become live-in servants, because this phenomenon can already be seen quite significantly around 1850. Around 1900 the strategy of keeping children at home can in this way be seen as an investment in their future and in the quality of life.²⁴

²² Collenteur en Paping, 'De arbeidsmarkt voor inwonend boerenpersoneel'.

²³ Paping, 'Gezinnen en cohorten', 68–70.

²⁴ T. Engelen, 'Labour strategies of families: A critical assessment of an appealing concept', *International Review of*

However, in the short term it meant that costs rose, because of expenditure on food, and perhaps also wage income decreased because the children could not easily find work the whole year round.

The difficult period in the second phase of the family life cycle forced most of the labourer families to let their children become live-in servants as soon as possible. The more favourable third phase was easier to reach when the older children were consuming elsewhere and were working the whole year round. Another question concerning this family life cycle is whether it influenced the decision of the female marriage partner to work, and particularly whether it influenced the number of working days since nearly all the wives of labourers worked at least a few days each year for wages. Ad Knotter has suggested that the wives of labourers only worked if their husbands did not earn enough.²⁵ However, if the children were old enough they replaced their mother as wage earners. This has to mean that the number of working days of mothers should be closely related to the phases in the family life cycle.

Information is available on the number of days the wife worked for wages for some fifteen regular labourer families in Nieuw-Scheemda in the period 1870–1902. For some families the information stretches over a long period. This information will be analysed considering each year as a separate piece of information. The annual number of days worked by married women (WORKWOMAN) is explained with the help of regression analysis. First, the children born of this woman and still alive are split into three groups – 0–8 years (CHILDY), 9–13 years (CHILDM), 14 and older (CHILDO). The number of years (MARDUR) since the date of marriage is also used as an explanatory variable (Marriage duration). Because it is possible that there were general changes in the number of days the woman worked during the period under research the variable YEAR has been used, which ranges from 0 for 1870 to 32 for 1902. In total there were 89 observations suitable for this analysis ($R^2 = 0.22$):

$$\begin{array}{rcccc} \text{WORKWOMAN} = & 81.08 & + & 0.46.\text{MARDUR} & + & 2.96.\text{CHILDY} & - & 5.12.\text{CHILDM} \\ & \text{t-value} & & (0.81) & & (1.25) & & (-1.41) \\ & & & & & & & \\ & & & & & - & 5.93.\text{CHILDO} & - & 1.43.\text{YEAR} \\ & & & & & \text{t-value} & (2.24\star) & & (-4.36\star) \end{array}$$

★ significant at a 5% level

Social History, 47 (2002) 459–460, suggests that to send out children as servants does not necessarily imply a rational and conscious choice but also could be a tradition. However, he does not take into account that some of the children, even of the poor labourers, were already kept at home around 1850, which clearly points to the ability to choose.

²⁵ Knotter, 'Gezinsarmoede-gezinsarbeid'.

The result is perhaps a little disappointing because only 22% of the differences are explained by the regression equation. The most important explanatory variable is not the family life cycle but the specific year. Wives of labourers decreased their number of working days significantly during the period 1870–1902. The explanation must be partly sought in the rising real wages of their husbands and also partly in the development that paid labour of married women with children became socially less acceptable. However, the number of children older than 14 years also had a significant influence. In accordance with Knotter's findings it appears that the earnings of these older children partly replaced the earnings of their mothers. As the children became older the income of the wives of the labourers became less necessary. The presence of children between the ages of 9 and 13, who could take care of the younger children and in this way make it easier for their mothers to work, did not promote working by the women. On the contrary, it even seems that these children also earned enough to allow their mother to stop working, although this influence was not statistically significant.

The family life cycle was modelled in a second regression equation with the help of a dummy variable ($R^2 = 0.17$). This showed that it was only in the third phase that the wives of labourers significantly decreased their number of working days, which is in accordance with the earlier result that older children partly replaced their mother in earning income. The mothers already reduced their number of working days in the second phase because of the large number of children to take care of, but this influence was very insignificant. In the dummy, PHASE1, families with up to two children younger than 14 years, and fewer children older than 14 years than younger than 14 years, was set at zero. PHASE2 comprises families with more than two children younger than 14, and fewer children older than 14 years than younger than 14 years. PHASE3 comprises families with more or just as many children over the age of 14 years as under.

$$\text{WORKWOMAN} = 85.10 - 3.95.\text{PHASE2} - 17.86.\text{PHASE3} - 1.25.\text{YEAR}$$

t-value	(0.57)	(2.32★)	(3.76★)
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★ significant at a 5% level.

The equation which models the three phases results in only 17% explained deviations, which is less than the equation with the number of children, leaving 83% unexplained deviations. It is clear that other factors next to the family life cycle were of importance when married female labourers made decisions on whether to go to work or not. It is possible that social opinions and the ambi

tion level of the family also played an important role.

Conclusions

Just as elsewhere, labourer families in Nieuw-Scheemda in Groningen in the second half of the nineteenth century went through a family life cycle. Because of the growing number of young children who did not earn any money, the economic position of the labourer family became more difficult after some 5 years of marriage. After some 15 or 20 years the situation became better when older children began to contribute to the family income. The number of household members began to decrease during this period, because most children left home to go work and live on farms between the ages of 13 to 16. However, children began to do farm work as early as age 12-13, although not very regularly, earning only small amounts of money. Children living at home were confronted with high seasonal unemployment. Only as a live-in servant they could be sure of finding work the whole year round. Working as a live-in servant was economically attractive because the farmer paid for the daily food, and the wages were generally higher than could be earned by irregular farm labour when the children stayed at home. However, by the end of the nineteenth century farm labourers increasingly kept their children at home, even when the children reached the age of 16. Although unattractive in the short term this strategy was preferred, presumably because staying at home was better for the future of the children and also more pleasant.

Female farm labourers only worked during the summer half year. The farmers were not in need of much labour in the winter and female labourers were dismissed during this period. Some wives of labourers worked more and others worked less. The family life cycle caused some problems if women wanted to work. If there were young children someone had to take care of them. However, especially in the period when there were many young children, the extra money earned by the mother was needed the most. From the number of days female labourers worked it is clear that they chose to work when the children were young. Their number of working days declined somewhat when the children began to grow older, but never stopped altogether, so it may be presumed that females worked partly because it was necessary. However even when it was not absolutely necessary female labourers remained working for some days in order to supplement their husband's income.

During the period 1870-1902 the number of days worked by married female labourers fell. The probable reasons are that female labour became less accepted and the labourer families could afford the mother working less, because the real wages of the males were increasing fast during this period. The decreasing number of days worked by female labourers in Nieuw-Scheemda is

in agreement with the emergence of the normal pattern of family labour in the Netherlands during the twentieth century until 1975: the man worked and earned the money while the wife stayed at home and took care of the children and the household.