A DISAGGREGATE ANALYSIS OF THE EVOLUTION OF JOB TENURE IN BRITAIN, 1975–93

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ABSTRACT

A Disaggregate Analysis of the Evolution of Job Tenure in Britain, 1975–93*

There continues to be much debate about whether the widescale adoption of new technologies, and the increasing intensity of competition through globalization of product markets have lead to significant changes in job tenure distributions. Our previous work showed that this was not the case at the level of the economy as a whole. To be precise, we found a slight fall for men, and no change for women. This paper extends that work by taking the individual data and investigating changes in the determinants of job tenure. We first look at the age-tenure profile for different birth cohorts of workers, ranging from those born before 1925 to those born in the 1960s. There appears to be little change in this profile for men; for women, one noticeable feature is the increasing likelihood of holding a long-term job in the 25–35 age range. We then estimate probability models for two different cuts of the tenure distribution on the 200,000 observations in our dataset. We find that, controlling for a set of age, demographic, educational, industrial and occupational characteristics, the proportion of workers in short jobs and longer jobs has about the same path as in the aggregate (unconditional) analysis. Further, allowing for the effect of all these characteristics to vary with time does not uncover any evidence of deterioration for particular groups.

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Submitted 13 June 1997

NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The possibility of secular changes in job tenure remains a major topic of policy debate, both in the United Kingdom and the United States. Reports of the end of 'jobs for life' and increased perceptions of job insecurity are commonplace. In our previous work, we examined average elapsed job tenure in Britain from 1975 to 1991, and showed that it had barely changed over that period. To be precise, we found a slight fall for men, and no change for women. This paper extends that work by taking the individual data and investigating changes in the determinants of job tenure.

We use the General Household Survey (GHS), which is a continuous multi-purpose survey running since 1971. Every year some 10,000 households are sampled giving a total annual sample of some 30,000 individuals. The questionnaire has good coverage of socio-economic characteristics dealing with education, employment, health, housing, family composition etc.. A core set of questions under these categories are asked each year to give an extremely rich source of information on the changing characteristics of Great Britain. For this study we used the GHS data for 1975–93 and extracted data on working males and females between the ages of 18 and 70. The key question which gives information on the length of job tenure is *'How long have you been with your current employer?'* and the answer is recorded in bands, which have varied over the years. There are only a limited number that can be made consistent over the whole period, and of these we focus on the number in jobs for one year or less, and the number in jobs for five years or more. Unfortunately, there is no consistent measure of longer jobs available for the whole period.

We first look at job tenure for different birth cohorts of workers, ranging from workers born before 1925, to those born in the 1960s. We compare the relationship between age and job tenure for these cohorts, and find that there appears to be little change in this for men. That is, the likelihood that a person of a particular age group holds a job for less than one year (or more than five years) is no different for workers born in the 1960s than for workers born in the 1940s. For women, one noticeable feature is the increasing likelihood of holding a long-term job in the 25–35 age range.

We then look in more detail at the chance of workers having particular job durations using the 200,000 observations in our dataset. To allow for differences between different groups of people, we allow the chance of having a short job (elapsed tenure less than one year) or a longer job (elapsed tenure

greater than five years) to depend on a set of personal characteristics. These include age, education, industry, occupation, region, household status and the like. We include these variables in a very flexible way, allowing their effects on tenure to vary through time.

We show that with or without these control variables, either pooling the cross-sections or estimating separately year-by-year, there is no strong tendency for shorter job tenures. Thus, this largely confirms our previous findings. It also fits well with findings for the United States. Farber (1995) and Diebold et al (1994) have similarly shown that the job tenure distribution has been remarkably stable.

While our main focus of interest is the possibility of change in the tenure distribution *over time*, our results also tell us something about differences in job tenure between people. Age is clearly one of the most important factors: the chance of being found in a short job is strongly decreasing in age for both men and women: a 50-year old only has about 20% of the chance of a 20-year old of being found in a job that began less than a year ago. Post compulsory educational qualifications are associated with shorter job tenures, again for both men and women. This emphasizes the point that job tenure is determined by both quits and layoffs. The implication is that, relative to individuals with no qualifications, people with 'A' levels and degrees tend to move between jobs more frequently. There is a strong and well-known pattern of job tenure differences by industry. Relative to engineering, there are a lot of short jobs in construction and services, with more long jobs in energy and agriculture. Turning to occupational differences, managers clearly are the least likely to be found in jobs that have only been in progress for a year or less. For both men and women, semi- and unskilled manual jobs are likely to be short, as are personal service occupations. Unlike most of the variables discussed so far, the presence of children has very different effects for men and women. For women, the presence of children, particularly young children, makes a short job duration much more likely; a woman with a pre-schooler is twice as likely as a woman with no children to have held her present job for less than a year. For men, there is a negligible effect.

1. Introduction

The possibility of secular changes in job tenure remains a major topic of policy debate, both in the UK and the US. Reports of the end of 'jobs for life' and increased perceptions of job insecurity are commonplace. In our previous work (Burgess and Rees, 1996) we examined average elapsed job tenure in Britain from 1975 to 1991, and showed that it had barely changed over that period. To be precise, we found a slight fall for men, and no change for women. This paper extends that work by taking the individual data and investigating changes in the determinants of job tenure. We first look at the age-tenure profile for different birth cohorts of workers, ranging from workers born before 1925, to those born in the 1960s. There appears to be little change in this profile for men. For women, one noticeable feature is the increasing likelihood of holding a long-term job in the 25 - 35 age range. We then estimate probability models for two different cuts of the tenure distribution on the 200,000 observations in our dataset. We show that with or without controls, either pooling the cross-sections or estimating separately year-by-year, there is no strong tendency for shorter job tenures.

This extends our previous findings and fits well with findings for the US. Farber (1995) and Diebold et al (1994) have similarly shown that the job tenure distribution has been remarkably stable. In the UK, Gregg and Wadsworth (1995) have shown that fears of job loss may arise from a worsening position for the newly unemployed. Booth et al (1996) have argued that individuals starting jobs earlier in this century

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enjoyed somewhat longer job tenure than those in recent years, though this is based on long-range retrospective data and so may be subject to measurement error.

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows: in section 2 we sketch some of the issues involved in modelling job tenure, and in the following section we describe the data source. Section 4 presents the results and the final section concludes.

2. Modelling the Tenure Distribution

In this paper we look at job tenure data that is derived from people in work, and so necessarily represents only the time they have spent in the job *so far*, elapsed tenure rather than completed tenure. There are a number of ways of modelling this. In a companion paper (Burgess and Rees, 1997) we adopt the conditional probability approach, modelling the job separation hazard. This is in many ways the best approach statistically, but is complicated by two factors. First, as just noted, all spells are right censored, since we cannot observe the completed job tenure of people still part way through their job. Second, relative to models of the unemployment hazard, there is an enormous time span covered by job duration: anything from 4 weeks to over 40 years. Both of these make the modelling difficult though not impossible. This is further exacerbated by data problems, which mean that we can only compare the hazard for a relatively limited number of years.

So in this paper we adopt a complementary line, modelling job tenure in a simpler way, based on the unconditional probability. This allows us to evaluate trends in job tenure over a longer time span. Specifically, we look at changes over the past two decades in the likelihood that a person has held a job for less than a year, and in the likelihood that a person has held a job for at least 5 years[1]. This benefit is bought at a cost. The unconditional probability that a worker has a particular job tenure depends on the recent history of hiring activity. For example, a recent employment expansion is bound to lead to more people of short duration. However, we feel that over a period of twenty years and a number of macro cycles, this effect should even out. Also, the estimates in our companion paper which do control for this give much the same results as this one.

A simple statistical model can be set out as follows: let π_{1it} be the probability that individual i has a tenure of less than 1 year at date t. Similarly, let π_{5it} be the probability that individual i has a tenure greater than 5 years at date t. We model these as depending on individual i's characteristics, X_i, and time, t:

$$\pi_{kit} = f(X_i, t) \quad k = 1, 5.$$

Below we adopt the logit form for f(). Our previous paper investigated the evolution of the means of π_{kit} (among other statistics of the tenure distribution) for particular groups. This, however, leaves open the possibility that there has been some change in

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[1] Note that we are explicitly studying the job tenure of people in work; so a selection correction of the form used for wage studies for example is not appropriate.

the underlying separation behaviour, masked by off-setting changes in the composition of the labour force. Conditioning the probabilities π_{kit} on a set of personal characteristics addresses this issue.

3. Data

The GHS is a continuous multi-purpose survey which has been running since 1971. Every year some 10000 households are sampled giving a total annual sample of some 30000 individuals. The questionnaire has good coverage of socio-economic characteristics dealing with education, employment, health, housing, family composition etc.. A core set of questions under these categories are asked each year to give an extremely rich source of information on the changing characteristics of Great Britain. For this study we used the GHS data for 1975 - 1993, and extracted data on working males and females between the ages of 18 and 70. The key question which gives information on the length of job tenure is *"How long have you been with your current employer?"* and the answer is recorded in bands, which have varied over the years. There are only a limited number that can be made consistent over the whole period, and of these we focus on the number in jobs for one year or less, and the number in jobs for 5 years or more. Unfortunately, there is no consistent measure of longer jobs available for the whole period.

The information collected on the individual covers age, sex, region of residence, highest educational qualification and length of education (in years). We also use

information on the employment characteristics such as employment status (employed or self-employed), the industry the individual works in, together with the type of job (managerial, non-manual, manual-skilled etc.).

4. Results

The aim of this paper is not to provide a structural model of an individual's job separation probability. Rather we examine whether the facts support the view that job tenure has changed significantly over the past twenty years or so. First we organise our data on tenure by birth cohort and age, and compare the experiences of different generations over this period. Second, we estimate probability models for our two cuts of the tenure distribution.

(a) Cohort Analysis

We allocate individuals to the following birth cohorts: born before 1925, between 1926 - 1940, in the 1940s, the 1950s and the 1960s. We then calculate the proportion with job tenure less than one year by gender, birth cohort and age. These are plotted out in Figure 1. Movement along any line therefore represents the lifecycle evolution of this part of the tenure distribution over the near-twenty year period considered, and the averaged effect of the business cycle.

Figure 1 shows two things. First, age is an important influence on the chance of being found in a job less than one year old. Second, by and large there appears to be little difference in the incidence of such jobs between these five cohorts. The only apparent exceptions to this for men are the youngest group of the most recent cohort and the 50 - 55 year old group in the cohort born in the 1940s. The former of these is a relatively small sample, but the difference between it and the previous cohort could indicate a real divergence. Otherwise, the similarity between these evolutions is more striking than the differences.

Figure 2 repeats the exercise for the cut of the tenure distribution above 5 years. Again one of the most noteworthy features of the figure is the constancy of the age/tenure profile over these cohorts. Clearly, workers aged 25 - 30 have only about half the chance of being in a job that has lasted five years as a worker over the age of fifty. But this appears to have been true for all the generations covered by our window of data. The other strong feature is the increasing likelihood of young women holding a job for over five years. This is evident over the ages 25 - 35, the main child-bearing ages, but not so much for older groups.

The stability in the tenure distribution evidenced by figures 1 and 2 is remarkable in the light of the dramatic macroeconomic events in UK labour markets, and the developments in technology and international competition that have been cited by a number of commentators. These results give a high level aggregate picture; we now turn to the individual-level results.

(b) Individual Analysis

We adopt a logit form for the probability model outlined in section 2 above. We pool observations across all the years, yielding 113710 observations on men and 84756 on women. Simply using a set of year dummies reproduces the aggregate results in our previous paper (Burgess and Rees, 1996), shown here in Figures 3 and 4, as the curves labelled "No Controls".

We now include the range of individual controls for tenure, outlined above. This approach assumes that, conditional on the aggregate effects summarised by the year dummies, the relationship between elapsed tenure and the characteristics does not change. Below, we relax this assumption, allowing the effect of these characteristics to change over time. We estimate models for π_{1it} and π_{sit} separately for men and women. The results are in Tables 1 and 2, given in the form of odds ratios, ie. the change in the relative chance of the event happening for a unit change in the independent variable.

Table 1 shows the chance of being found in a short job is strongly decreasing in age for both men and women: a fifty year old only has about 20% of the chance of a twenty year old of being found in a job that began less than a year ago. Post compulsory educational qualifications are associated with shorter job tenures, again for both men and women. This emphasises the point that job tenure is determined by both quits and layoffs. The implication is that, relative to individuals with no qualifications, people with 'A' levels and degrees tend to move between jobs more

frequently. The strong coefficient on 'other higher qualifications' for women may reflect a preponderance of short jobs in nursing. There is a strong and well-known pattern of job tenure differences by industry. Relative to engineering, there are a lot of short jobs in construction and services, with more long jobs in energy and agriculture. Turning to occupational differences, managers clearly are the least likely to be found in jobs that have only been in progress for a year or less[2]. For both men and women, semi- and unskilled manual jobs are likely to be short, as are personal service occupations. Unlike most of the variables discussed so far, the presence of children has very different effects for men and women. For women, the presence of children, particularly young children, makes a short job duration much more likely: a woman with a pre-schooler is twice as likely as a woman with no children to have held her present job for less than a year. For men, there is a negligible effect (the effect is statistically significant, but with over 100,000 observations that is not particularly meaningful). Among the remaining variables, the correlation of home ownership with employment stability is confirmed; having a working spouse is associated with longer job tenures; non-white women are less likely than white women to be in short jobs, whereas the reverse applies for men.

These results are reflected in Table 2 modelling the chance of being in a job for at least five years.

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[2] Recall that 'job' here means remaining with the same employer, and is independent of the task the individual is doing.

But our main point of interest is to consider whether the inclusion of these controls alters our estimate of the common component of the evolution of job tenure. These are graphed in figures 3 and 4, labelled "With Controls". It is clear that either with or without individual controls, these particular cuts of the tenure distribution are influenced by the macroeconomic environment. They do not however betray any noticeable secular trend. There are no more men and women in jobs for less than a year in 1993 than there were in 1975. This conclusion holds after controlling for any changes in the composition of the working population by age, educational attainment, housing tenure, family formation and other factors.

(c) Individual Analysis with time-varying effects

Finally, we adopt a more flexible approach, running a separate logit for each year. This allows the effect of each individual characteristic to vary over time, as well as the common intercept. This is the most general way of searching for changes in job tenure over our data set.

There are too many coefficients to report, so for this approach we present the results in graphical form. We can trace out changes in the effect of each characteristic on job tenure by plotting out the estimated coefficient year-by-year or compute fitted probabilities π_{1it} and π_{5it} for a particular constellation of characteristics. The former exercise reveals no evidence of significant monotonic changes in the important variables. Figures 5 through 8 provide some illustrations of the latter approach. These graph against time the probability of having tenure of at least five years, or no more

than one year, for men and women of three age groups and four sets of characteristics. Obviously, there are many such figures that can be drawn, and these give only a sample of the evolution of tenure for a few groups. We will not discuss each picture in detail, but note that the figures as a group show no obvious tendency to shorter job durations. The greater sensitivity of the young to the macroeconomic cycle is evident in the proportions in short jobs.

5. Conclusions

There continues to be much debate about whether the widescale adoption of new technologies, and the increasing intensity of competition through globalisation of product markets have lead to significant changes in job tenure distributions. Our previous work showed that this was not the case at the level of the economy as a whole. This was, however, open to the criticisms that off-setting demographic shifts masked the underlying changes in these overall averages, or that there were significant changes for some well-defined groups. This paper addresses these issues, using observations on around 200,000 individuals to examine whether there is evidence for changes for particular sub-groups defined by their characteristics. In fact, we find that disaggregating in this way largely serves to confirm our earlier findings. We find that, controlling for a set of age, demographic, educational, industrial and occupational characteristics, the proportion of workers in short jobs and longer jobs has about the same path as in the aggregate (unconditional) analysis. Further, allowing for the effect of all these characteristics to vary with time does not uncover any evidence of deterioration for particular groups.

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Swinnerton, K. and Wial, H. (1995) 'Is Job Stability Declining in the US Economy?' Industrial and Labor Relations Review vol. 48 pp. 293 - 304

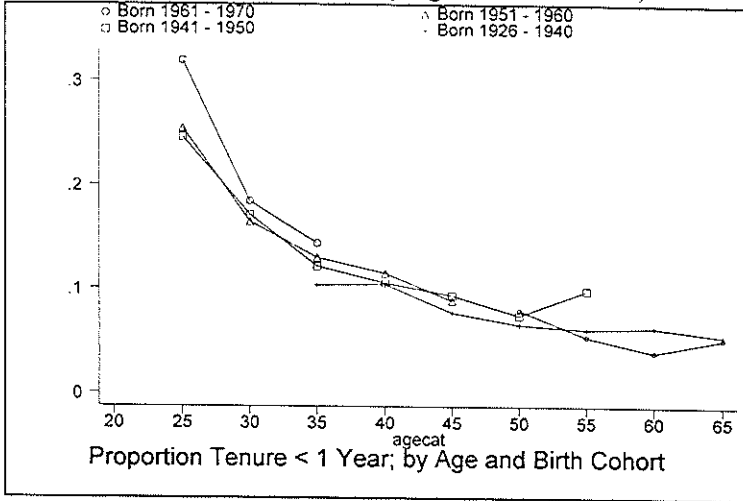Figure 1a: Tenure less than 1 Year by Age and Birth Cohort, Men
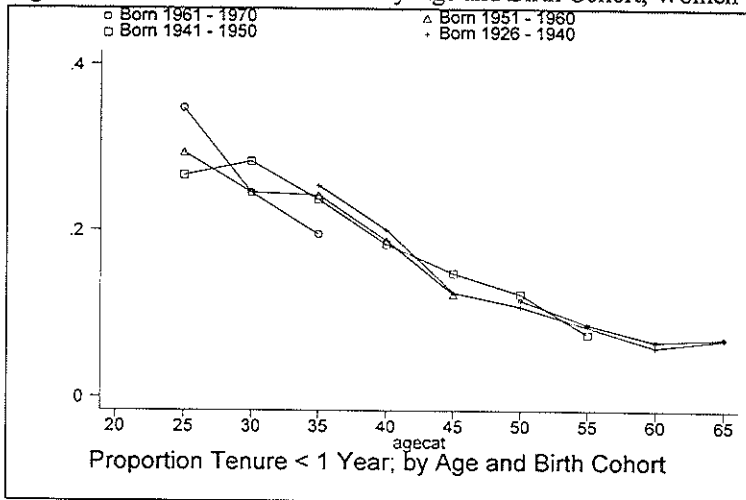

Proportion Tenure < 1 Year; by Age and Birth Cohort

Figure 1b: Tenure less than 1 Year by Age and Birth Cohort, Women

Proportion Tenure < 1 Year; by Age and Birth Cohort

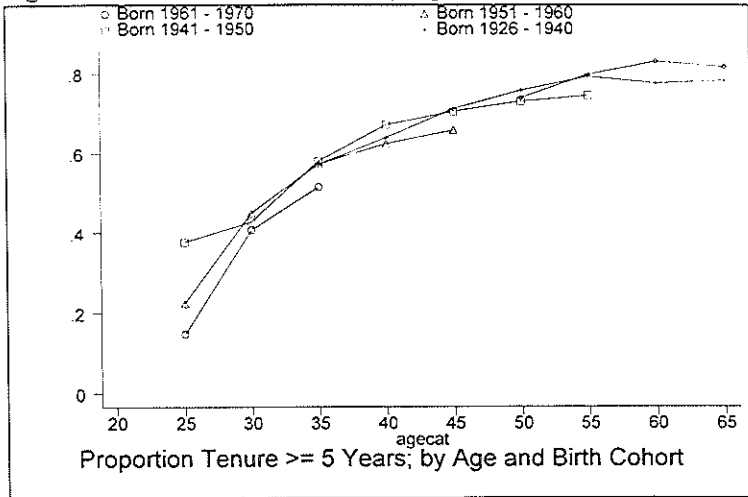Figure 2a: Tenure 5 Years or more by Age and Birth Cohort, Men

Proportion Tenure >= 5 Years; by Age and Birth Cohort

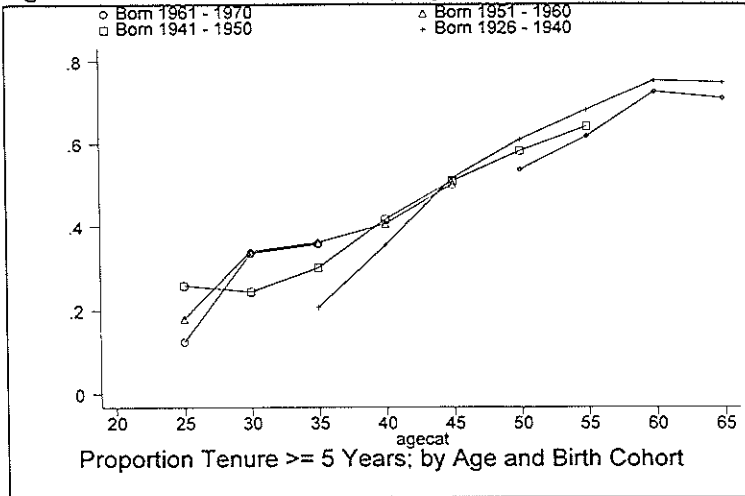Figure 2b: Tenure 5 Years or more by Age and Birth Cohort, Women

Proportion Tenure >= 5 Years; by Age and Birth Cohort

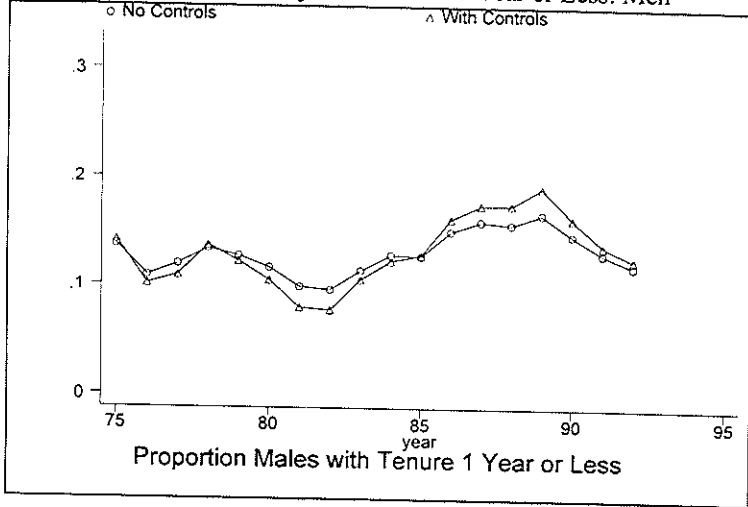Figure 3a: Fitted Probability of Tenure of 1 Year or Less: Men

Proportion Males with Tenure 1 Year or Less

Figure 3b: Fitted Probability of Tenure of 1 Year or Less: Women

Proportion Females with Tenure 1 Year or Less
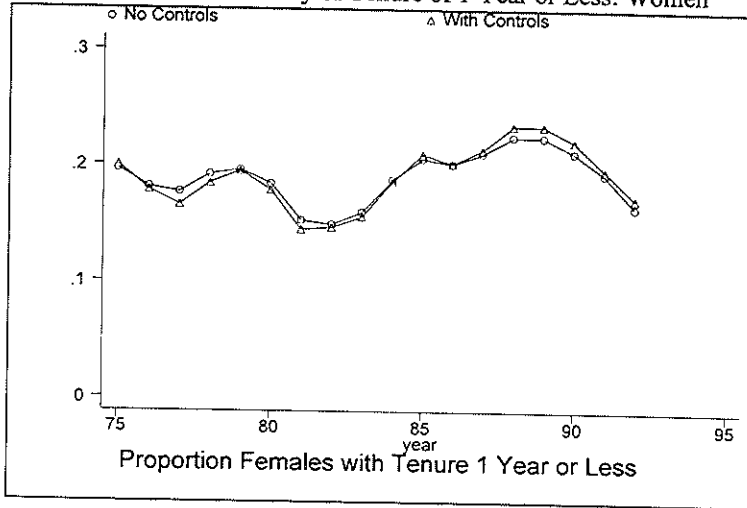
Figure 4a: Fitted Probability of Tenure of 5 Years or More: Men

Proportion Males with Tenure 5 Years or More
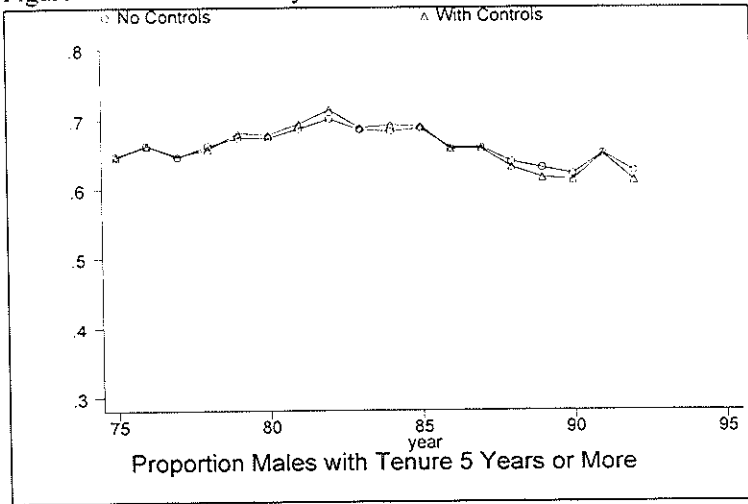
Figure 4b: Fitted Probability of Tenure of 5 Years or More: Women

Proportion Females with Tenure 5 Years or More

Figure 5: Fitted Probability of Tenure 5 years or more, Women
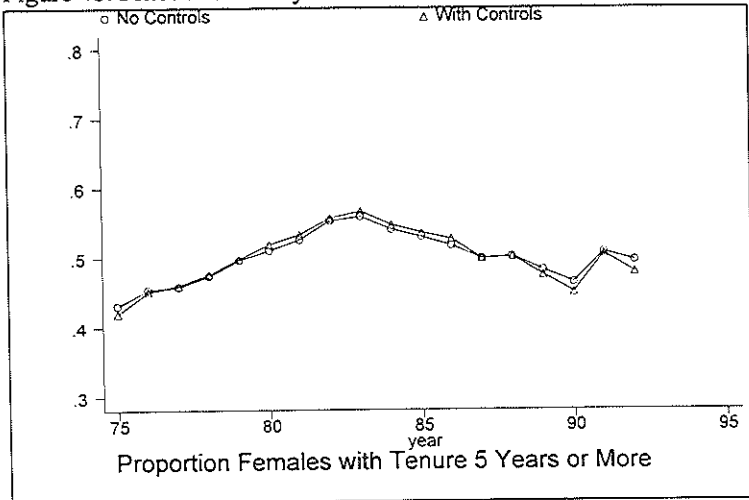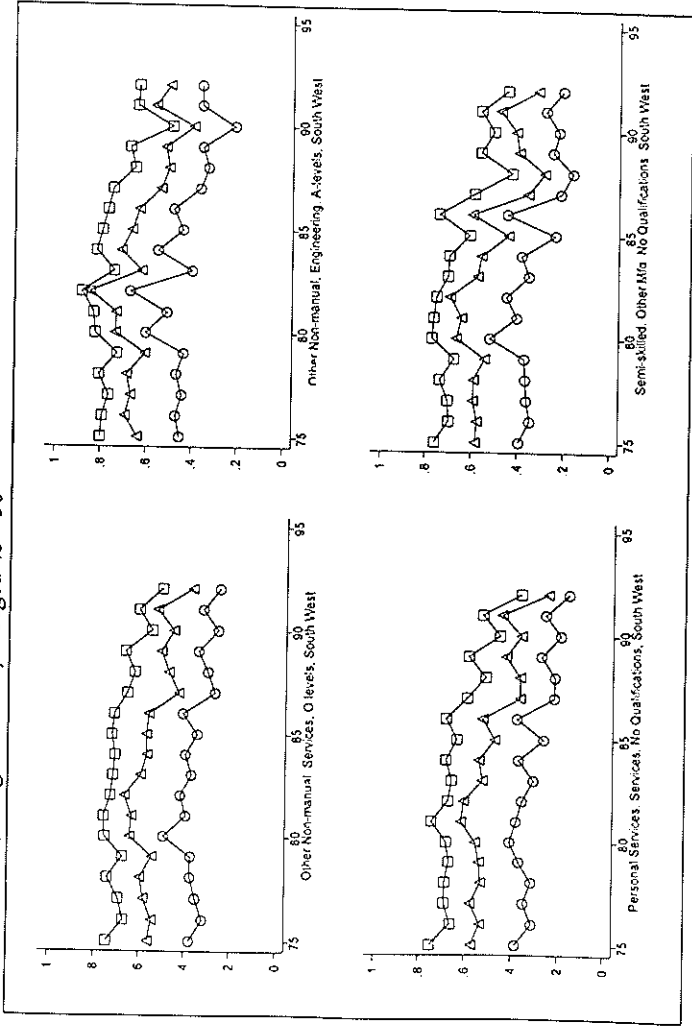
O Aged 25 - 30; Δ Aged 35 - 40;   Aged 45 - 50

Figure 6: Fitted Probability of Tenure 5 years or more, Men
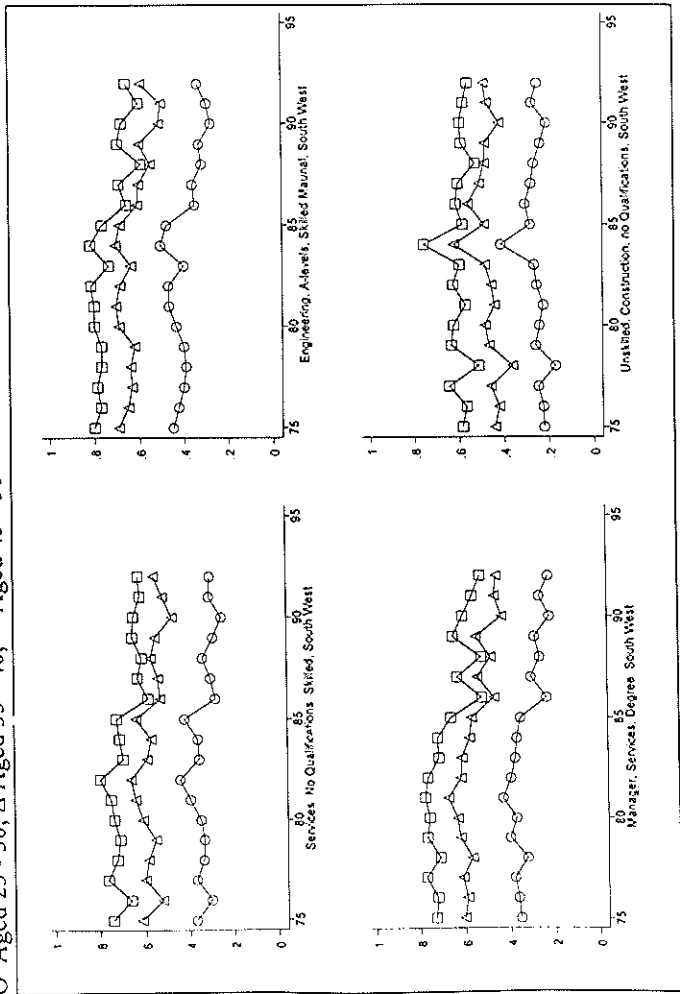O Aged 25 - 30; Δ Aged 35 - 40;   Aged 45 - 50

Figure 7: Fitted Probability of Tenure 1 year or less, Women
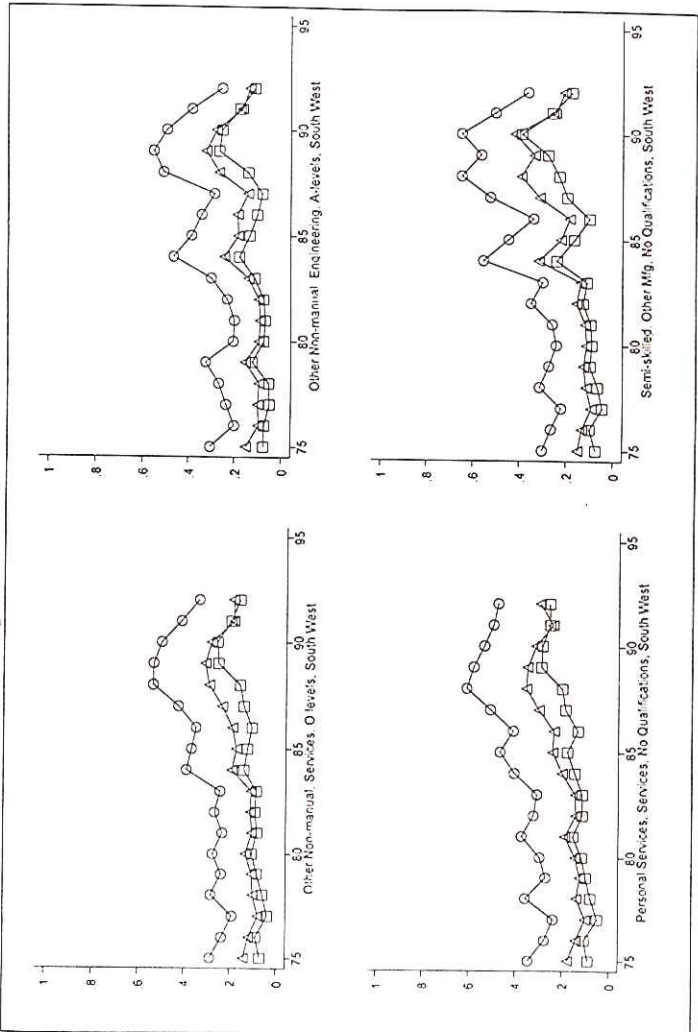O Aged 25 - 30; △ Aged 35 - 40;   Aged 45 - 50

Figure 8: Fitted Probability of Tenure 1 year or less, Men
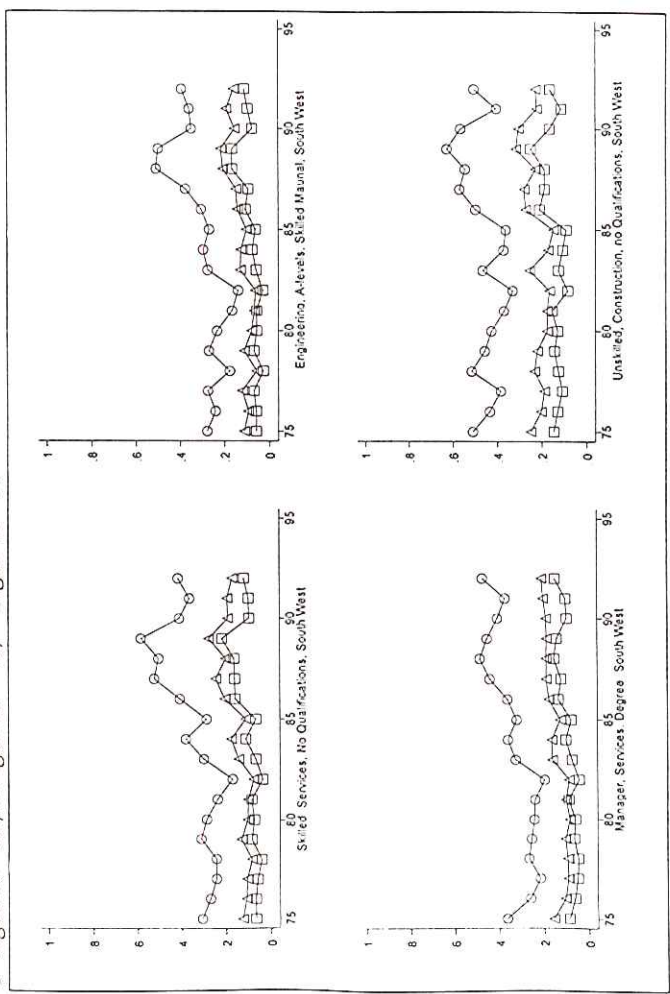O Aged 25 - 30; Δ Aged 35 - 40;   □ Aged 45 - 50

Table 1: Logit Analysis of Probability of job tenure of one year or less

	Men		Women	
	Odds Ratio	z stat	Odds Ratio	z stat
Degree	1.338	7.23	1.288	5.39
A' Levels	1.135	3.79	1.244	5.42
Other Higher	1.030	0.77	0.811	5.29
O' Levels	0.980	0.75	1.009	0.37
Apprentice	1.185	4.32	1.147	1.70
25 < Age ≤ 30	0.556	18.77	0.578	16.43
30 < Age ≤ 35	0.400	25.96	0.484	20.45
35 < Age ≤ 40	0.330	28.67	0.381	25.53
40 < Age ≤ 45	0.249	32.43	0.288	31.04
45 < Age ≤ 50	0.192	35.05	0.254	32.38
50 < Age ≤ 55	0.171	35.52	0.192	34.19
55 < Age ≤ 60	0.136	35.37	0.140	33.00
60 < Age ≤ 65	0.158	31.77	0.131	26.51
Agriculture	0.623	6.53	-	
Energy	0.702	7.81	0.910	1.34
Other mfg	1.229	5.45	1.179	3.43
Construction	1.690	14.75	1.365	3.61
Services	1.446	12.18	1.257	5.44
Transport & Comms	1.068	1.59	1.012	0.17
Other nonmanual	1.376	9.99	1.415	8.53
Personal Services	3.765	17.60	1.923	13.56
Skilled Manual	1.401	10.90	1.574	8.49
Semi-skilled Manual	2.117	19.83	1.942	12.99
Unskilled Manual	2.928	22.28	2.641	19.02
Children under 5	0.932	2.40	2.206	26.16
Children over 5	1.106	4.65	1.469	17.43
Longstanding Illness	0.992	0.38	1.114	4.97
Owns house	0.671	18.78	0.800	10.43
Spouse works	0.906	4.81	0.880	4.05
Self employed	1.074	2.28	1.060	1.19
Non-white	1.171	3.12	0.837	3.23
Married	0.996	0.14	1.081	2.33
Widowed/Separated/ Divorced	1.050	0.89	1.265	5.50
Observations	111261		83562	

Omitted categories are: no qualifications, age ≤ 25, engineering, manager, no children, never married.

Year and region dummies also included.

Table 2: Logit Analysis of Probability of job tenure of 5 years or more

	Men		Women	
	Odds Ratio	z stat	Odds Ratio	z stat
Degree	0.710	11.75	0.821	4.75
A' Levels	0.972	0.99	1.088	1.92
Other Higher	0.933	2.46	1.491	12.70
O' Levels	1.000	0.01	1.003	0.13
Apprentice	0.924	2.96	0.965	0.52
$30 < \text{Age} \leq 35$	1.894	26.01	1.536	13.35
$35 < \text{Age} \leq 40$	2.642	36.37	2.236	24.59
$40 < \text{Age} \leq 45$	3.489	43.65	3.218	35.99
$45 < \text{Age} \leq 50$	4.433	50.00	3.969	41.81
$50 < \text{Age} \leq 55$	5.713	55.56	4.599	43.76
$55 < \text{Age} \leq 60$	6.544	55.52	6.328	46.79
$60 < \text{Age} \leq 70$	5.450	47.36	6.112	37.65
Agriculture	2.418	15.42	2.018	8.25
Energy	1.735	17.37	1.102	1.64
Other mfg	0.856	5.45	0.854	3.71
Construction	0.663	14.66	0.722	4.29
Services	0.753	12.52	0.747	7.99
Transport & Comms	1.135	4.15	0.995	0.08
Other nonmanual	0.890	4.97	0.715	10.70
Personal Services	0.359	11.46	0.581	13.71
Skilled Manual	0.746	13.45	0.706	8.14
Semi-skilled Manual	0.554	20.23	0.574	13.12
Unskilled Manual	0.423	20.60	0.406	21.52
Children under 5	1.043	1.89	0.576	15.45
Children over 5	1.032	1.79	0.485	35.22
Longstanding Illness	1.057	3.34	0.949	2.77
Owns house	1.535	24.46	1.224	10.12
Spouse works	1.059	3.47	1.404	7.47
Self employed	0.947	2.39	0.900	2.62
Non-white	0.731	7.33	1.287	4.78
Married	0.787	8.77	0.496	14.10
Widowed/Separated/ Divorced	0.788	5.94	0.577	13.94
Observations	94808		69166	

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