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Standardizing sequence lengths by using the relative duration of episodes

In Germany, trajectories of doctoral candidates are diverse and often consist of different stations. For example, doctoral candidates start with their PhD within a graduate school or scholarship, but later change into gainful employment inside or outside academia. Subsequently, sequences can take from a few months up to several years. The aim of our analyses is to identify patterns of doctorates, e.g. constant courses in a single institution or very complex courses in many different ones. This can help to identify typical doctoral trajectories in different subject areas, to identify problematic processes and to help optimizing doctoral conditions.

Sequence analysis is a very useful method for investigating types of patterns, including the timing of events or transitions, the duration and the order of life course episodes. However, analyses are complicated if the sequences have large gaps or different lengths. In order to make the doctoral candidates' trajectories comparable, we use an innovative method for standardizing the sequence lengths by using the relative duration of episodes. For this, the percentages of single elements are calculated on the total length.

Analyses are based on longitudinal data from the DZHW PhD panel study. This representative sample comprises around 5400 doctorate holders of all disciplines who received their degree from a German University in 2014.

First analyses show that using the relative durations of episodes can be a helpful method to compare sequences of different length.

Keywords: sequence analysis, doctorate, PhD panel Survey