Trends in joint retirement have altered significantly as the Baby Boom generation has reached retirement compared to the phenomenon when it was first studied (e.g. Blau, 1996). The dynamic within married couples has changed over time and across cohorts as married women’s LFP has changed. There has been a consistent increase, starting in 2000, of joint work when the husband is close to retirement age, crowding out households where only the husband works and households where both are not working [e.g. joint retirement]. But this rise of joint work was hindered after the Great Recession.

This study examines broad joint retirement trends in tandem with how joint retirement plans evolve through economic cycles and over the life cycle. The Current Population Survey allows for a broad examination of general labor force patterns at the household level, and the Survey of Consumer Finances allows one to track the evolution of cohorts’ retirement expectations and how retirement plans coordinate between spouses. With a synthetic cohort-based framework, we can use both the SCF and the CPS to document how these plans contrast with actual retirement behavior once cohorts reach retirement age.

This is the first examination of how joint retirement plans evolve over the life cycle, with particular attention on how husbands and wives views differ on this planning front. The SCF also allows one to disentangle differing views between husbands and wives depending on which spouse completes the interview (i.e. did the husband or wife report the wife’s retirement plan?). There is little difference in retirement plans for husbands by which spouse reports expectations. However, there are significant differences in the wives’ retirement expectations by respondent. Women are more likely to report significantly longer career than their husbands report for them. ] In terms of retirement coordination, men and women are similarly likely to report joint retirement when the respondent reports both their plans and their spouse’s plan, but when each spouse reports their retirement plans independently, there is much less observed coordination.
The rise in joint work occurred during the economic downturn and recovery, allowing for examination of differential response of spouses to wealth shocks, driven by local changes in house prices. In a regression framework, husbands’ retirement expectations do not respond to house price shocks, even though their wives’ plans for them do. In contrast, husbands adjust their wives’ retirement plans in response to house price shocks (unlike their own plans), but wives adjust their retirement expectations more than their husbands do [for them