

Male fertility intentions in Finland

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Introduction

There is a significantly gendered imbalance in the consequences of childbearing, and this is a feature clearly intertwined with fertility intentions. For example, in a study of Swedish postgraduates, while 62% of women and 49% of men strongly agreed that parenthood would imply less time for work and career, a much greater gendered difference was observed (38% to 9% respectively) in respondent who strongly agreed that parenthood would imply poorer status in the labour market (Skoog Svanberg, Lampic et al. 2006).

A number of studies have demonstrated the importance of male fertility intentions in determining the reproductive strategies of couples, with an often complex process of decision-making occurring where a mismatch of desires (frequently) occurs (Thomson, McDonald et al. 1990; Thomson 1997; Thomson and Hoem 1998; Rosina and Testa 2009). Indeed, scholars are now more or less united in the significance of gender in shaping reproductive strategies, be it through power relations within the household (Folbre 1983) or more general notions of gender ideology (Philipov 2008,172).

McDonald (2000) set forth a series of propositions to elaborate the place of gender equity in theories of fertility decline. He proposed that further decline from replacement-level fertility to very low fertility is associated with a combination of high levels of gender equity in individual-oriented institutions, such as education and market employment, and low levels of gender equity in the family and family-oriented institutions. As long as traditional gender attitudes prevail in families and women continue to bear the double burden at home, low levels of fertility will persist.

Gender equity and male fertility intentions

Demographic research has dominantly used information on women in explaining fertility behaviour, and little attention has been paid to male characteristics, or changes in men's value orientations and their relationship with childbearing. Also, results from research conducted so far into gender equity and male intentions have been somewhat contradictory in their nature. Studies derived from the Population Policy Acceptance Study (PPAS) taken in 13 European countries between 2000-2003 generally concluded that men with more egalitarian attitudes toward gender equity have

higher fertility intentions (Puur et al. 2008, 1898). In a more in-depth regional analysis of the PPAS data for Austria, Tazi-Preve et al. found strong evidence of a negative correlation between a traditional division of household labor and a negative wish to have a baby, with the inverse being the case in more egalitarian partnerships (Tazi-Preve et al. 2004). Westoff and Higgins (2009), performing a similar analysis as Puur et al. with data from European Value Surveys, found a clearly negative relationship between egalitarian attitudes of men and the number of children ever born to them in majority of the countries studied.

In Spain and Italy, data from the European Community Household Survey suggests that where fathers play a substantial role in care activities with the first-born of young couples, the transition to a second birth is faster (Cooke 2003). Similarly, using the Italian ISTAT Survey on Births, Pinnelli and Fiori found that fathers' participation in domestic labour and childcare significantly increased the intention to have a second child for working women. However, this factor had no influence on intentions to have a third child or on the fertility intentions of non-working women (Pinnelli and Fiori 2008). Finally Kaufman, in analyzing the 1987/1998 and 1992/1994 waves of the United States National Survey of Families and Households found that while egalitarian women are less likely to intend or actually have a child than traditional women, for men the opposite is the case (Kaufman 2000). However, Torr and Short examining the same data found evidence of a 'U-shaped curve' in the predicted probabilities of a second birth by division of household labor at the individual level (Torr and Short 2004). Here, therefore, both 'traditional' couples where women contributed most to domestic chores and 'modern' couples who shared domestic tasks relatively equally were more likely to have a second child than the intermediate group of 'partial-sharers'.

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The purpose of this presentation is to examine how gender and gender equity shapes fertility intentions in a country where women have historically had a strong position both in the family and in the society and where family and gender equality policies have been developed to support not only women's employment but also father's role in child care. We also wish to further the current discussion on gender and fertility by looking at fertility intentions at different parities as well as fertility ideals. Westoff and Higgins (2009), for example, argued that ambiguous findings partly result from the different measures of fertility used in studies. In the present paper, we examine childbearing intentions at the onset of family life as well as intention to have a large (3+ children) family and high fertility ideals separately. We expect that the impact of both structural (control) and ideational variables will vary somewhat depending on the nature of the intention: structural variables will have a stronger association than ideational factors with intentions which describe current choices (intention to have the first child, or the second child among one-child parents),

while ideational factors explain better more abstract fertility desires (e.g. ideal size of the family). In addition to gender role attitudes, we will also look to what extent ideational and structural determinants of fertility intentions are gender specific. We agree with those who stress that in order to understand current fertility trends we need to know also what influences men's childbearing plans (McDonald 2000, Olah 2003, Puur et al. 2008, Westoff & Higgins 2009).

Data and methods

We use data from Finnish Well-being and Social Relationships Survey, conducted in 2008 among 7000 25-44-year-old men and women who had no children or only one child. The questionnaire included questions about various aspects of personal and marital well-being, attitudes and expectations towards work, family and social relationships, as well as childbearing ideals and intentions. In the present paper, we study the childbearing intentions among 25-39-year old men and women who have either no children or one child.

We examined the intention to become a parent (among childless persons), intention to have the next child (among one-child parents), intention to have a large family (intention to have 3+ children) as well as personal ideal of a large family (ideal 3+ children). Fertility intentions were inquired in the survey by asking if the respondent planned to have a(nother) child sometime in the future (No/Don't know/Yes/Currently pregnant, or partner pregnant). Those who could not tell their plans were combined with those who said 'no'. Pregnant couples were excluded from the study. Intended (expected) number of children was obtained from a question in which the respondents were asked how many children they had planned to have altogether (including current children). Fertility ideals were measured by asking respondents their personal ideal number of children.

The independent variables include gender ideology (summary measure), work orientation (summary measure), family orientation (summary measure), number of siblings, and religiousness. Control variables include age, partnership status, number of children (0/1), education, and household income. Variable for gender ideology was created from a set of questions regarding gender roles in working life and in the family. Several of the items focused on men's role in the family. For the analysis, gender ideology measure was divided into three groups, those with traditional attitudes, intermediate, or modern gender role attitudes.

Results

According to bivariate analysis, ideal family size seemed to decrease with more modern gender role attitudes among both men and women. However, the association of the expected number of children with gender ideology appeared to be U-shaped: those with traditional attitudes showed the

highest expected number of children, but did not differ markedly from those with modern attitudes. Among childless women, on the contrary, those with intermediate attitudes expressed the highest expected number of children, and those with traditional attitudes the lowest expected number of children.

We used multivariate analysis to examine whether the gender role attitudes as well as other ideational variables would have an impact on fertility intentions also when we controlled for other factors known to influence childbearing. On the whole, it appeared that ideational variables exhibited significant association with the intention to have the first child among both men and women, while there was hardly any effect on the second child. As expected, the impact of ideational factors on the expected family size as well as fertility ideals was clearly stronger than on the more concrete childbearing plans. Multivariate analysis of the intentions provided some support for the descriptive findings. Among men, more modern or egalitarian attitudes appeared to be positively associated with the intention to start childbearing. Among women, those with traditional gender role attitudes were less likely than modern or intermediate women to initiate parenthood. However, gender ideology played no role in the decision to have the second child. Among men, gender ideology shaped also fertility expectations and desires: traditional men were more likely to expect and hold an ideal for a large family (3+ chld), but, somewhat surprisingly, also modern gender ideology was associated with higher fertility expectations (but not family size ideals) among men. Among women, gender ideology did not have any significant impact on fertility expectations or ideals.

Many of the independent variables proved to influence childbearing intentions among men and women in a similar fashion. For example, orientation towards work appeared to have a U-shaped association with intention to start childbearing among both men and women. Those with either low work orientation or with high work orientation were less likely to decide for parenthood than those who fall in the intermediate position. In previous studies (for example Hakim 1999), it is often expected that career-oriented women are more likely to remain childless than other women. However, Finnish data shows that this may well be the case for men as well.

On the basis of these findings, it is difficult to conclude that modern gender ideology either inhibits or increases childbearing among Finnish men or women. In addition, childbearing ideals and intentions may be tied with partnership status, particularly among men. To what extent gender role ideologies – as well as other ideational factors - are associated with and influence childbearing via partnership, is not clear and there is clearly a need for further research on this topic.