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Gender Equality, the Labour Market and Fertility

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NEW FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND LIVING ARRANGEMENTS — DEMANDS FOR CHANGE IN SOCIAL STATISTICS

SESSION 3: LABOUR MARKET RELATED DETERMINANTS OF FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD DEVELOPMENTS

GENDER EQUALITY, THE LABOUR MARKET AND FERTILITY: A EUROPEAN COMPARISON

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Gender Equality, the Labour Market and Fertility: A European comparison

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developments
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fertility has fallen to extremely low levels in Europe, prompting some to argue that we are on the brink of a 'demographic crisis' that will have serious societal consequences. There is also a parallel need to strengthen the labour force and increase productivity, materialized in the Lisbon Strategy to increase women's employment to 60 percent across Europe by 2010. These dual concerns prompted the European Commission to embark upon a major public debate, resulting in the adoption of recent fertility and labour market policy measures. These mandates raise a dilemma: how to combine an increase in female employment with an increase in fertility?

Beyond posing a predicament, these policies also shape the current debate and channel thinking into one direction. Research continues to target issues surrounding: only women's fertility, paid employment, and the reconciliation of work and family. Although these are core questions, the result is that key aspects have been overlooked. The focus on women means that we know relatively little about men's fertility. The attention to female employment distracts us from more nuanced aspects of employment such working conditions or subjective experiences. We also know less about non-employment related reasons for low fertility, such as lack of a partner or partnership histories, gender equity, family policy or domestic unpaid labour.

This paper proposes *six new demands for data in the area of labour market and fertility research*. Namely, the need for data and research related to: 1) gender equity and family policy, 2) unpaid domestic labour, 3) subjective experiences of paid and unpaid labour, 4) men's fertility; 5) partnership histories and fertility; and, 6) step-family and multi-partnered fertility.

After a brief background, the paper explores the first three interrelated aspects of gender equity, unpaid domestic labour and subjective experiences of (un)paid labour. Using the European Social Survey (2004/5) and examining the impact of these factors on fertility intentions, the paper then tests the empirical validity of these arguments. The analysis offers three central findings. First – *gender equity matters*. Women in countries with higher gender equity exhibit higher fertility intentions, with an added suggestion to link gender equity indices to family policies. Second, *domestic labour impacts fertility intentions*, reminding researchers to look beyond paid employment and acknowledge the impact of the 'second shift' on fertility. Women who engage in considerably more household labour and find housework stressful have lower fertility intentions. Previous research has also largely focussed on the link between the labour market participation and working hours of women. A third finding, however, shows that the missing link appears to be *women's control over the organization of work and influence on organizational policy*. Compared to those who felt that they have no influence, those with some influence or complete control report significantly higher fertility intentions. These preliminary findings challenge us to go beyond standard measures of paid employment to examine the underlying mechanisms that may generate problems between work and family.

The paper concludes with suggestions for three new frontiers of data collection and research. The focus on women's employment and fertility means that we know relatively little about men, who play a key role in fertility decisions and long-term well-being of children. The retreat from marriage and partnerships as the locus of childbearing, complex partnership histories, and higher dissolutions are further under researched areas in the study of fertility. Finally, we need to know more about step-family, multi-partnered and pre-union fertility. A growing recognition of alternative family forms and types of employment experiences invite a future of new frontiers for research in the area of labour market and family research.

INTRODUCTION

Fertility has fallen to extremely low levels in most industrialized countries, with half of the population now living in countries with fertility at or below replacement level (Morgan 2003). Some argue that we are on the brink of a 'demographic crisis' with serious long-term consequences (Morgan 2003; Caldwell & Schindlmayr 2003; Špidla 2007). This includes dramatically aging populations and a shrinking working population, which will penetrate all areas of social life including adjustments in pension reforms, the retirement age, urban planning, public transport, to the very organization of employment (Teitelbaum & Winter 1985; Demeny 2003; Lutz, O'Neill & Scherbov 2003).

These threats prompted the European Commission (EC 2004; 2005) to embark upon a major public debate to raise fertility and female employment, culminating in recent policy mandates (EC 2007). To strengthen the labour force and increase European productivity, the Lisbon Strategy defined a rise in women's employment to 60 percent across Europe by 2010 (EC 2004). This was coupled with the strategic goal to increase European fertility (EC 2005; 2007). These mandates raise a dilemma: how to combine an increase in female employment with an increase in fertility? Beyond posing a predicament, these policies shape the current debate and channel research into one direction. Research continues to target issues surrounding: only women's fertility, paid employment, and the reconciliation of work and family. Although these are core questions, the result is that key aspects have been overlooked. The focus on women means that we know relatively little about men's fertility. The attention to female employment distracts us from more nuanced impacts of work such as the influence of working conditions or subjective experiences. We also know less about non-employment related reasons for low fertility, such as lack of a partner, gender equity, or domestic unpaid labour.

The aim of this paper is to propose six new demands for data in the area of labour market and fertility research. Namely, the need for data and research related to: 1) gender equity and family policy, 2) unpaid domestic labour, 3) subjective experiences of paid and unpaid labour, 4) men's fertility; 5) partnership histories and fertility; and, 6) step-family and multi-partnered fertility. After a brief background of the central theories and literature in this area of research, we move to the examination of the first three interrelated aspects of gender equity, unpaid domestic labour and subjective experiences of (un)paid labour. Using the European Social Survey (2004/5) and a series of logistic regression models of fertility intentions, the paper then explores the empirical validity of these arguments. The discussion then moves to the importance of entering new frontiers of research on this topic, which include the remaining three overlooked data demands of: men's fertility, partnership histories and step-family and multi-partnered fertility patterns. The paper concludes with a brief reflection and discussion.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Prominent theories of low fertility stem from economic, ideational and institutional approaches (van de Kaa 1996; Caldwell & Schindlmayr 2003; Morgan & Taylor 2006; Bryant 2007). Some focus on ideological changes (Rindfuss, Brewster & Kavee 1996; Beets, Liefbroer & Gierveld 1999), often linked to the second demographic transition (van de Kaa 1987; Lesthaeghe 1995). Others argue that postponement is a

rational response to economic insecurity (Kohler, Billari & Ortega 2002; Mills, Blossfeld & Klijzing 2005). A dominant theory is how women's increased economic independence (education, labour force), increases the relative opportunity costs of childbearing via foregone earnings during childbearing and care periods, thereby lowering fertility (Becker 1981).

Scholars have called this theory into question due to the fact that high female employment and fertility can be combined when policies and contexts facilitate the combination of paid work and parenthood (Bernhardt 1993; Oppenheimer 1994; Brewster & Rindfuss 2000). Women's employment leads to lower fertility when institutional constraints are large, such as the lack of childcare, low benefit levels or gender-segregating policies that, as Neyer (2006: 16) argues "signal to women that it might be difficult, if not impossible, to combine employment and motherhood." But why is institutional support essential in some contexts but virtually irrelevant in others? Considerable support in Scandinavian countries facilitates the combination of employment and parenthood, with fertility rates of around 1.8. But neo-liberal countries (US, UK), characterized by a lack of support, report the highest overall fertility levels. What these countries have in common is high gender equality and a break from the male breadwinner model. In these countries it is also possible for women to pursue a career and raise a family, and not choose between the two, which contrasts to the low-fertility Southern European countries (Chesnais 1996; Mills et al. 2008). We therefore need to combine a study of gender equity with norms and policies to understand the low fertility and employment question.

GENDER EQUITY: MINDING AND CLOSING THE GAP

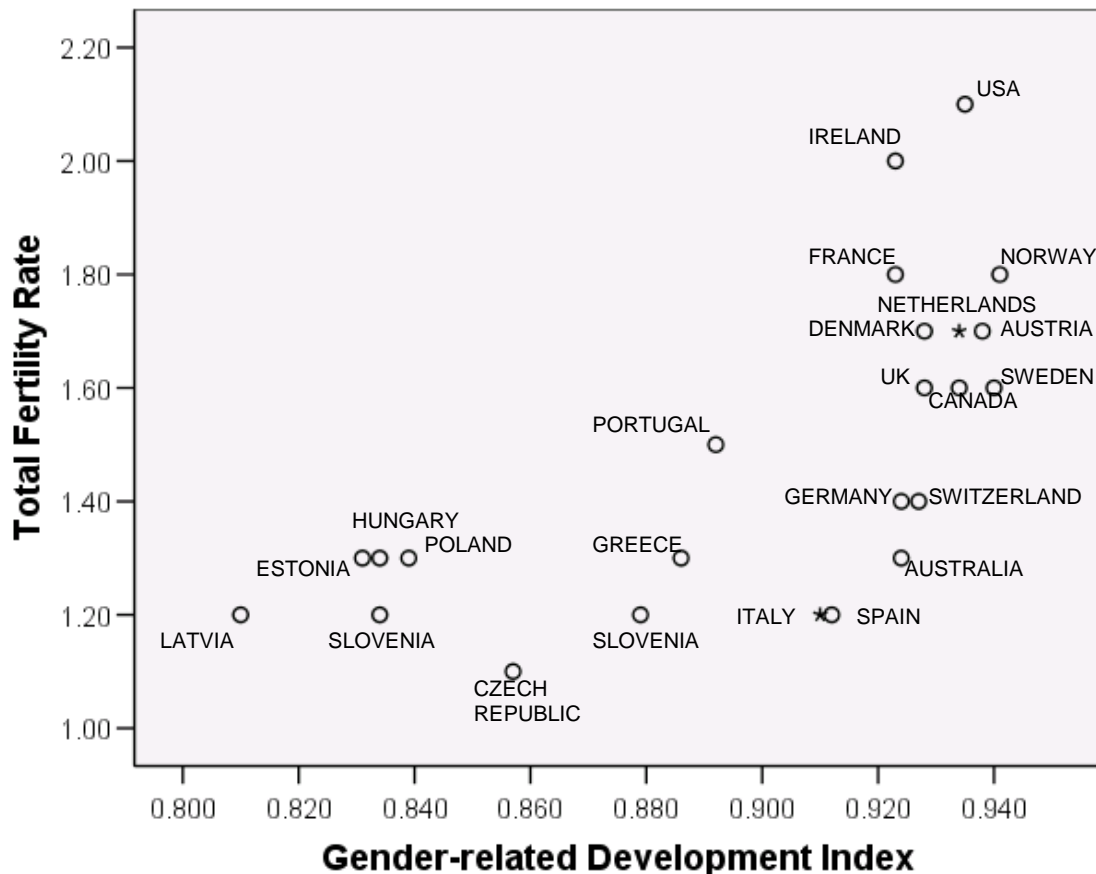
The theory of gender equity has been posited as central to understanding low fertility (Mason 1997; McDonald 2000; 2006; Mills et al. 2008). Figure 1 illustrates the association between gender equity and the total fertility rate, showing higher fertility in the social-democratic Scandinavian and neo-liberal countries. Whereas Southern, Central and Eastern European countries have very low total fertility rates (1.3), coupled with high gender inequality, leading to a central hypothesis: Higher societal gender equity (and targeted fertility and family measures) will lead to overall higher fertility intentions and behaviour. This figure not only demonstrates this relationship, but also shows clear clustering according to institutional context, which follows classic institutional and welfare regime categorizations (Esping-Andersen, 1990) and recent categorizations that incorporate the Southern or more family-oriented and post-socialist welfare regimes (e.g., Mills and Blossfeld, 2005).¹

The study of gender equity has remained theoretical (McDonald 2000; 2006). For this reason, a more refined macro-level gender equity to examine family and fertility issues within Europe is desirable. Beyond the UN's Gender-related Development Index (GDI), the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) and Global Gender Gap (GGG) Index (Hausmann, Tyson, & Zahidi 2006) currently exist. These indices, however, pose serious problems. The GDI is based on the Human Development Index and highly weighted by life expectancy and maternal mortality, making it less applicable. The GGG has modules on health and survival, economic participation, opportunity, educational attainment, political empowerment, but remains broad. The

¹ Most would now argue, however, that there is no cohesive 'post-socialist' welfare regime, with many post-socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe taking different directions.

most serious problem is that these indices sometimes vary substantially, questioning their measurement and asking for more in-depth comparison and analysis of what they are actually measuring.

Figure 1. Total Fertility Rate (TFR) and Gender-related Development Index for Selected Countries



Source: Mills et al. (2008)

Notes: TFR, United Nations http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/worldfertility/Selected_Indicators.xls

GDI, Human Development Report (2003), Table 22, Gender-related development Index

Note: Dates of TFR vary between 2000 and 2001, GDI is 2001

A final critique is that existing macro-level indices exclude policy-related measures, which may more appropriately capture gender systems. Mason (1997: 158) defines gender systems as socially constructed expectations for men and women that “prescribe a division of labour and responsibilities between women and men and grant different rights and obligations to them”. The level of gender development and institutions that support women and men to combine work and care differ greatly per country. Cultural norms surrounding working mothers, use of childcare and the division of labour form a central part of these gender systems. More tangible institutions and related policies relevant for this topic include: tax systems and regulations, employment regulations (specifically in relation to flexible or part-time work), level and acceptability of working women and mothers, contraceptive availability and acceptance, childcare legislation, (and actual) affordability and availability, social protection benefits targeting family support, pro-natalist policies and preferences for family support measures. Strides towards the acknowledgement of

the importance of these policies has begun with new or forthcoming data such as the OECD database on Gender, Institutions and Development and the contextual database of the UNECE Gender and Generations Survey data (see Vikat et al. 2007).

HOUSEHOLD GENDER INEQUALITY: UNPAID DOMESTIC LABOUR

Gender equity not only exists at a societal level, but can also be observed within the household. Over two decades ago, Folbre (1983: 267) argued that ignoring household power relations was a “fatal error of omission” in fertility theory. The EU (2004) mandate to increase and largely focus on women’s paid labour market participation fails to fully recognize that women continue to engage in a substantial ‘second shift’ (Hochschild 1989). McDonald (2000) suggests that very low fertility is the result of a hiatus that has developed between “high levels of gender equity in individual-oriented social institutions and sustained gender inequity in family-oriented social institutions”. Recent studies demonstrate that the unequal distribution of household labour lowers fertility intentions (Mills et al. 2008) and slows the transition to second births (Olah 2003; Cooke 2004; Miller Torr & Short 2004). A central hypothesis is that women who engage in a large share of household labour will have lower fertility intentions and transitions to second or higher births than those who engage in a lower or more equal share of household labour. An additional expectation is that this effect is amplified for those working a higher number of hours.

However, not only is the impact of domestic labour on fertility largely overlooked within the current discussion, but refinements in future data collection on this issue are essential. Ideal data would cover varied types of household labour, which includes detailed activities and duties related to care, joint-leisure activities with children and other tasks (e.g., reading to children, administration, and so on), levels (for e.g., relative levels) or actual estimated hours of housework. This type of data can be collected via surveys, but also more accurately via household time budget data. Other overlooked areas include the impact of the outsourcing of household labour and social support networks.

SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCES OF PAID AND UNPAID LABOUR

Although the link between paid employment and fertility is common in the literature, when paid employment is examined, it is almost exclusively in relation to labour market status and part- or full-time work (e.g., Brewster & Rindfuss 2000; Rindfuss, Guzzo & Morgan 2003; Budig 2003; Engelhardt & Prskawetz 2004; Vere 2007). Studies rarely link low fertility to more nuanced measures such as work perceptions or experiences of paid and unpaid labour. Whereas we would expect that when women and young couples are allowed to decide how their daily work is organized and feel involved in organizational policy decisions, they will experience a lower work-family conflict, which will in turn increase fertility desires and behaviour.

AN EMPIRICAL TEST: FERTILITY INTENTIONS IN EUROPE

Data. The relevance of these three issues can be tested within Europe using the second wave of the European Social Survey (2004/2005), a large-scale quantitative

survey administered in 26 countries.² Defining the dependent variable as *fertility intentions* (intentions to have a child within the next 3 years), we can examine whether these subjective experiences impact fertility. Due to the fact that the research question concerns not only paid, but also the division of unpaid labour in the household, respondents who are not co-residing with their partners are excluded from the analysis. The analysis therefore includes only women between the ages of 20 and 40 within couples who are both cohabiting and married. Using the sample restrictions discussed above, the entire sample consists of 4,948 respondents.

The impact of *household labour* was captured via three variables: hours of household work, share of household work (<75%; >75%), and the more innovative measure of whether the respondent found the housework stressful (strongly agree/agree, neutral, strongly disagree/disagree). Household labour is defined as things done around the home, including cooking, washing, cleaning, care of clothes, shopping, maintenance of property, but not including childcare and leisure activities. Respondents were first asked how many hours in total on both a typical weekday and weekend, do people in their household spend on housework. They were then asked about the share of this housework that they engaged in, ranging from none, to approximate estimations (e.g., quarter, to half, three quarters) up to all or nearly all of the time. Using these variables, a proxy was created of domestic labour hours worked by the respondent and a measure of the share of household work by the respondent.

The impact of *paid labour* was measured via two variables. First, the standard variable of working hours was classified as the total number of hours per week according to the worker's contract (thus excluding overtime). A second more novel variable consisted of an index of 'control over work and policy' (Cronbach's Alpha=.79), which included measures of the degree to which individuals were allowed to: decide how daily work is organized, influence policy decisions about activities of the organization and choose or change the pace of work.

To test the impact of *gender equity* on fertility, a macro-level variable of the Global Gender Gap (GGG) Index (Hausmann, Tyson, & Zahidi 2006) was added to the analysis. The age of the respondent, age squared, number of children in the household and the highest level of education for both the respondent and their partner was also included as controls. Due to space limitations, further detailed models examining clustering into welfare regimes and interaction effects (e.g., control of work * selected countries) in addition to multilevel models, are not shown here.

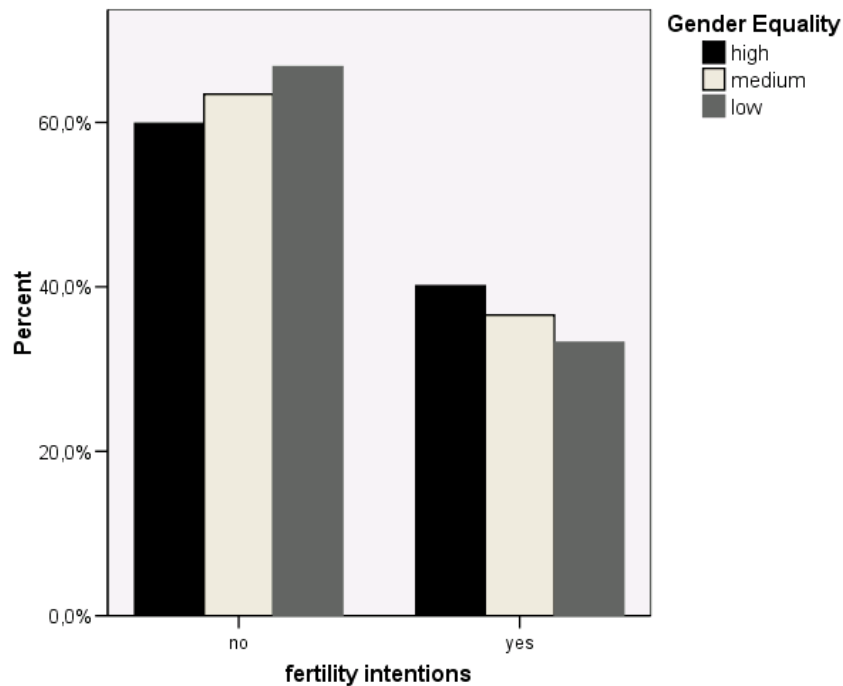
Statistical Analysis. A series of logistic regression models are used to examine the fertility intentions of women in the general European sample. The models first examine the impact of key variables, moving from a simple to more elaborate model adding household labour and paid work determinants. Additional models then include several interaction, welfare regime and country differences (not shown here).

Results. The results are presented in Table 1 and Figures 2 to 4. Three central findings can be derived from this exploratory analysis. First, *gender equity matters* for fertility intentions. As Figure 2 illustrates, those who come from highly gender equal

² The categories of definitely and probably not were classified as no, with probably and definitely yes categorized as yes. Due to the markedly different fertility behaviour and intentions in Turkey, this country was excluded from the analyses, leaving 25 countries: Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Finland, France, United Kingdom, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Slovenia, Slovakia, and the Ukraine. Due to the focus on fertility intentions, the age in both samples has been restricted to between 20 and 40 years of age. In the sample, women older than 40 were also unlikely to have further fertility intentions.

societies have higher fertility intentions, which is shown to be statistically significant in Table 1. Second, Figures 3a and 3b demonstrate that domestic unpaid labour has an impact on fertility intentions. Women who engage in considerably more household labour and find their housework stressful appear to have lower fertility intentions. However, as Table 1 demonstrates, previous research that only examines the levels of unpaid labour misses the important underlying mechanism of the subjective experience of this work. Whereas the share of household labour appears to have no significant impact on fertility intentions, the *experience of domestic work* as highly stressful significantly reduces intentions to have further children.

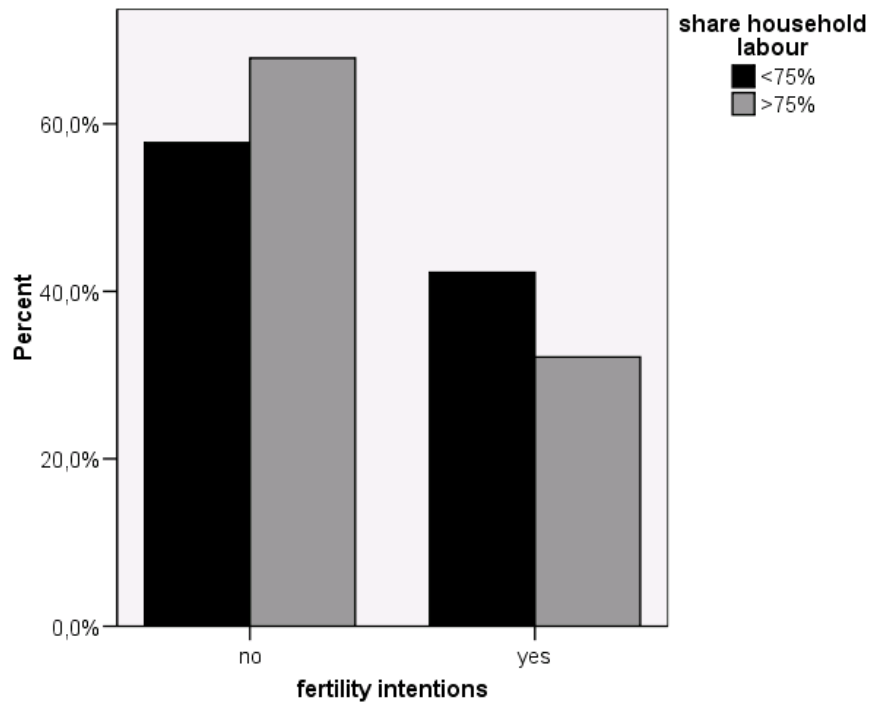
Figure 2. Gender Equity by Fertility Intentions, 25 European Countries



Source: European Social Survey (2004/5, wave 2, excluding Turkey), author's calculations.

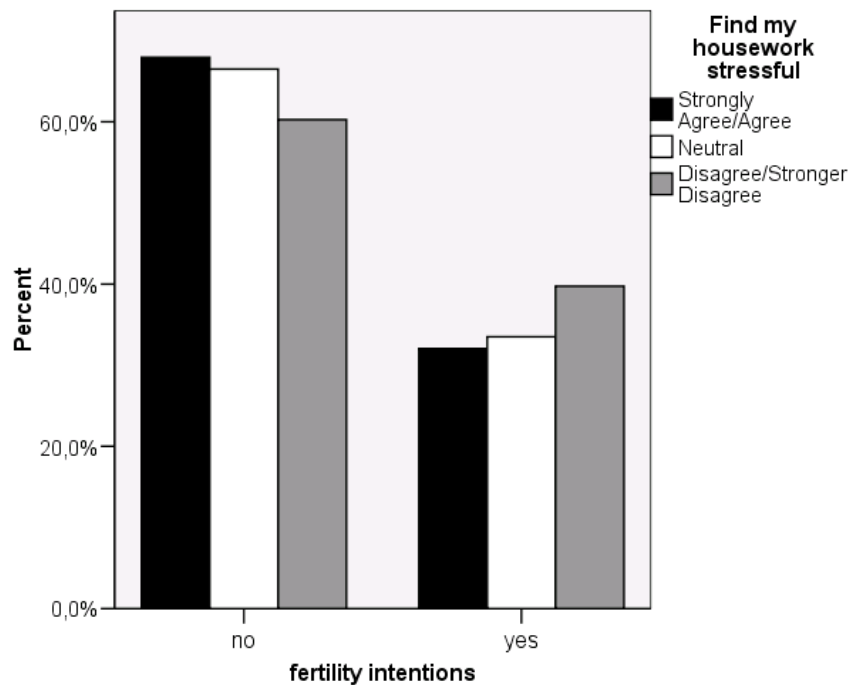
More nuanced findings regarding the impact paid labour comprise the third central finding. Recall that previous research has largely focussed on how the labour market participation of women and specifically the number of work hours decreases fertility. Table 1 demonstrates that the number of work hours shows no significant effect on fertility intentions. Rather, the missing link appears to be *women's subjective feelings of control over work and policy*. Compared to those who feel that they have no influence, those with some influence or complete control report significantly higher fertility intentions, also confirmed in Figure 4. This preliminary empirical analysis provides tentative empirical support for attention to and inclusion of measures related to: gender equity, domestic work and the subjective experience of both domestic and unpaid labour in the study of fertility.

Figure 3a. Share of women's household labour by fertility intentions, 25 European countries



Source: European Social Survey (2004/5, wave 2, excluding Turkey), author's calculations.

Figure 3b. Perception of the stressfulness of housework by fertility intentions, 25 European countries



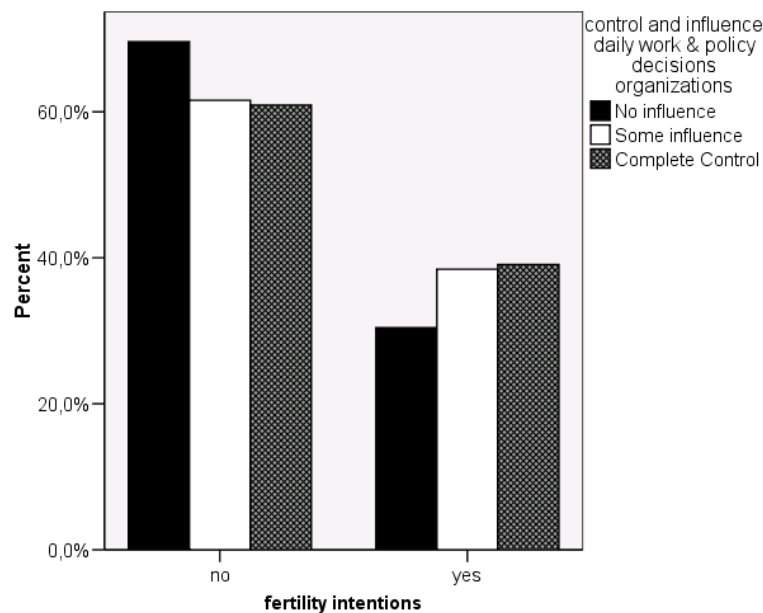
Source: European Social Survey (2004/5, wave 2, excluding Turkey), author's calculations.

Table 1. Estimated coefficients of fertility intentions, women, 25 European countries, 2004/5

Variables	Exp(B) Model 1	Exp(B) Model 2
Age	3.068***	3.080***
Age squared	0.981***	0.981***
Work hours (ref=30+)		
Not working	1.357	1.431
1-20 hours	0.774	0.801
21-30 hours	1.102	1.116
Number of children (ref=none)		
1 child	0.662***	0.667***
2+ children	0.091***	0.091***
Educational level woman (ref=lower sec)		
Upper secondary	0.871	0.848
Post-secondary/tertiary	1.405*	1.305
Educational level partner (ref=lower sec)		
Upper secondary	0.901	0.886
Post-secondary/tertiary	1.416**	1.367*
Hours household work by respondent	0.998	0.999
Share household work by respondent (ref=<75%)		
>75% household work	0.982	0.979
Gender gap (ref=low)		
Medium equality	1.151	1.093
High equality	1.554***	1.465***
Housework stressful (ref=strongly agree/agree)		
Neutral		1.166
Strongly disagree/disagree		1.251*
Control over work & policy (ref=no influence)		
Some influence		1.363**
Complete control		1.543***
-2LL	2498.625	2475.139

Source: European Social Survey (2004/5, wave 2, excluding Turkey), author's calculations.

* p < .10; ** p < .05; *** p < .01

Figure 4. Fertility intentions by index of experience of control and influence on daily work and organizational policy decisions, 25 European Countries

Source: European Social Survey (2004/5, wave 2, excluding Turkey), author's calculations.

NEW FRONTIERS: Men's fertility, partnerships and step-family fertility

Men's fertility: The Untold Story. Although men have been increasingly acknowledged in the literature, it is almost exclusively in relation to employment (Mills, Blossfeld & Bernardi 2006). When they are linked the family, it is generally in relation to father's interaction with children. This focus is tied to increases in divorce and the growth of stepfamilies (Cooksey & Fondell 1996; Kalmijn 1999; Hofferth 2006) and men's non-residential relationship with children (Goldscheider 2000; Hogan & Goldscheider 2001). There are several reasons for the absence of research into men's fertility. First, fertility data was exclusively collected from women until recently, often citing the unreliability of men's data. Men's reproductive roles have been summarized as 'absent and problematic' with existing research almost exclusively studying men in developing countries, or viewing men as 'partners', and employing a problem-oriented approach (Greene & Biddlecom 2000). This absence of men means that we lack understanding of a fundamental part of fertility decision-making and may misinterpret or neglect vital drivers of low fertility. For example, research on postponement and its relation to ART (Assisted Reproductive Technology) and infertility focuses almost exclusively on women (Billari et al. 2007). Yet, we know from medical literature that there is evidence of a decline in male fertility with age, particularly over 45 (Hassan & Killick 2003).

We therefore need serious attention to collection data on men's fertility, reproductive roles and parenting. This includes information on: sexual intercourse, contraceptive use, fertility intentions, partnership status at first and higher order births, fertility outcomes, living arrangements and activities of father's with children, and men's infertility. Several key hypotheses could examine the opportunity costs of fertility for men (e.g., in relation to occupational mobility), fertility intentions of men and how these vary with age or are influenced by key life course 'triggers' (e.g., entry into marriage, employment events).

Partnership Histories and Fertility. Previous research and current the policy debate has largely focussed on economic constraints and work-family reconciliation, ignoring the impact of non-employment related reasons for low fertility. Specifically, there has been little attention to connecting data on changing partnership formation and partnership histories with fertility. We know from previous research that younger cohorts are experiencing more partnerships, different partnership forms (e.g., cohabitation, non-residential LAT commuting relationships), forming more complex partnership paths, postponing 'serious' relationships, and have a higher probability of dissolution (Mills 2004). The retreat from marriage and partnerships as the locus of childbearing, accompanied with growing dissolutions and increase in multiple unions may operate to postpone fertility. Using Eurobarometer data, Testa (2007) recently demonstrated that the lack of a suitable partner and change in priorities were the most cited reasons for not having the intended number of children in Europe. Yet surprisingly we rarely see these aspects explored in significant detail in the literature. Whereas work and family reconciliation dominate the data, research and policy discussion, difficulties in combining work and family and the cost of children were stated as the least important, suggesting that previous research has overlooked key issues. Other neglected data and research in relation to partnerships and fertility also includes legal issues of the impact of divorce, symbolic (commitment) questions, re-partnering and alimony (see Poortman & Mills 2008).

Step-Family and Multi-partnered Fertility. The rise in partnership dissolution and alternative partnership forms also brings new types of family and fertility issues.

Although there are more step-families and evidence of growing multi-partnered fertility among men (Guzzo & Furstenberg 2007), we know relatively little about fertility in these contexts. Vikat, Thomson and Prskawetz (2004) demonstrate that the presence of women's pre-union children has a strong effect on fertility (shared child in new union). They also call for more data and research into: pre-union children, co-residence and parentage of pre-union children. One hypothesis may be that fertility in higher order partnerships and step-families may be used to solidify a relationship. However, for men in particular, higher levels of alimony or maintenance payments, non-residence of pre-union children, and labour market situation may operate to lower fertility. What remains clear is that we require more cross-national comparative European data and research that covers women's, but also men's fertility and parenting roles, attention to partnership histories (including legal issues) and fertility in step-families.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this paper was to identify new demands for data in the area of labour market and fertility research. The initial arguments were complemented by a comparative European analysis to demonstrate the importance of including gender equity, unpaid domestic labour and subjective experiences of (un)paid labour into future research and data collection efforts. Women in countries with higher gender equality have higher fertility intentions. This research could be supplemented, however, by more attention to the impact of how family policies shape gender systems. A suggestion to connect these policy indicators to current gender equity indices was made. This paper also reminds researchers to not only focus on paid employment and work-family reconciliation, but to consider the vital impact of the 'second shift' and its impact on fertility.

Analyses also challenged researchers to go beyond standard measures of employment such as work hours to examine the underlying mechanisms that generate conflicts between work and family. The analyses demonstrated that stressful experiences of domestic labour and feelings of a lack of control over work or influence in organizational policy decisions significantly inhibited fertility. This calls for more nuanced examinations of the work-family link. A final argument was to enter new frontiers of data collection and research by exploring what appear to be overlooked topics of growing relevance. The focus on women's employment and fertility means that we know relatively little about men, who undoubtedly play a key role in fertility decisions and long-term child well-being. The retreat from marriage and partnerships as the locus of childbearing, more partnerships, different partnership forms (e.g., cohabitation, non-residential LAT commuting relationships), forming more complex partnership paths, postponing 'serious' relationships and more dissolutions all operate to potentially postpone or inhibit fertility. This is related to the final call for more data collection and research into the study of step-family, multi-partnered and pre-union fertility. The growing recognition of alternative family forms and types of employment experiences are increasingly acknowledged and invite a future of new frontiers for research in the area of labour market and family research.

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