

Marital status of parents in European comparison: Examining the influence of partners' relative status and social context on fertility in cohabiting and marital unions on the basis of EU-SILC

Abstract for the European 4th European User Conference proposed by Alexander Mack¹

The vast increases in rates of non-marital fertility throughout Europe over the last 50 years are largely attributed to a rise in the number of births within cohabiting unions (Kiernan 2004; Sobotka and Toulemon 2008). Recent comparative research has emphasized the role of women's educational attainment for explaining non-marital fertility (Perelli-Harris et. al. 2010). What is lacking in the current scientific debate however is a contextualization of marital decisions of parents within the household and national context. As part of my doctoral research I investigate the marital status of couples with young children on the basis of EU-SILC data. Analytically I focus on parent's decision to have a child within a marital or cohabiting union which allows me to consider the socioeconomic characteristics of fathers and mothers and how they interact. The strength of the EU-SILC data is harnessed by studying the relatively small group of parents with children under the age of one in a wide range of national contexts. The following key hypotheses shall be tested:

H1: Insurance Hypothesis (Oppenheimer, Cherlin)

The likelihood of a marital birth should increase with the socioeconomic resources of the household. This effect should be more pronounced in contexts where there exists a larger acceptance of births outside of marriage. This hypothesis shall be tested by examining household income and whether a couple lives in an owned apartment. The acceptance of non-marital fertility in a society will be assessed at the country level via aggregated attitudinal data derived from social surveys.

H2: Specialization Hypothesis (Becker)

The likelihood of a marital birth should increase the more unequal partners are in terms of socioeconomic resources. This effect should be more pronounced in contexts where mothers are better integrated into the labour market. Relative socioeconomic resources of partners shall be operationalized via education and work experience. Mother's position in the labour market shall be operationalized via country level indicators from official statistics.

H3: Insecurity Hypothesis (Oppenheimer, Blossfeld+Drobnič)

The likelihood of a marital birth should increase the more insecure the individual employment situation or the labour market. At the individual level the effect of temporary employment and unemployment will be examined. Here the analysis must be limited to fathers as data for mothers of young children is not comparable. The unemployment rate will be used as a country level indicator.

The research is designed as a large scale country comparison and shall include data from 27 European countries² for all available waves of the cross sectional version of the EU-SILC. Integrated and country level regression models will be estimated in order to better understand how fathers and mothers socioeconomic resources are relevant to marriage decisions in vastly different national contexts. Additionally multilevel models will be employed to test how national contexts and their disparate institutional arrangements mediate partners' decision making.

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² AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, LV, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK and the UK

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