

Fertility disparities

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Concentration and polarization of reproduction among men and women in the UK

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Despite the media concern about recent declines in fertility rates, punitive policies such as the benefit cap and the two-child limit and the associated political discourse in the UK continue to vilify poor parents with large families, framing them as irresponsible for having children they cannot afford to raise. Drawing on the work of feminist social reproduction theory, this paper investigates the concentration and polarization of fertility among men and among women across cohorts in the UK. The paper analyses completed family size for four cohorts using ELSA (cohorts born 1935-44 and 1945-54) and the 1958 and 1970 cohort studies, and the concentration ratio as a measure of inequality in the distribution of overall fertility and the ratio of the share of the total children born to a given education category relative to the size of that education category in the cohort as a measure of polarization. Are lower-educated women and men bearing a disproportionate share of reproduction, and has this changed over time? The results show increasing concentration of fertility over cohorts among both women and men. However, whereas among men there is no consistent evidence of educational polarisation of fertility, among women polarisation appears to have increased over time. Making visible the contribution to social reproduction made by larger families, as well as the gendered and classed inequalities in how this contribution is distributed, the results illustrate the need to redirect current policy logic toward recognition and adequate welfare support for larger and less resourced families.

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Female unemployment and unplanned pregnancy: coincidence or common cause?

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Studies report mixed findings regarding the relationship between female unemployment and childbearing, with lower-educated women being more likely to have a child following or during an unemployment spell. The frequent explanation for the positive link between unemployment and childbearing has been that unemployed women have lower opportunity costs of childbearing. This argument assumes that pregnancies result from a rational decision-making process. However, that is often not the case; many pregnancies are unplanned. Given that, is there an alternative explanation of the association between female unemployment and pregnancy risk?

We propose that the link between female unemployment and pregnancy might be due to the common cause bias, such as that some individuals may have little control over their occupational trajectories, and the same individuals may also have less control over their fertility. If that is the case, unemployed women would be more likely to have unplanned pregnancies compared to employed women.

We explore this idea using 2009-2019 Pairfam data. First, using mixed effects logistic regression models, we find that, compared to women who were employed, unemployed women are significantly more likely to have an unplanned pregnancy and significantly less likely to have a planned pregnancy in the year following their unemployment spell, net of their education, income, age, and marital status.

Next, to investigate the possible common cause for unemployment and unplanned fertility, we examine individual dispositions such as self-regulation, autonomy in decision-making, and conscientiousness as possible precursors to both experiencing unemployment spells and having unplanned pregnancies.

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Pathways to Higher Order Fertility in the UK: A Couple-Level Perspective on State and Company Support
Giovanni Minchio - University of Trento, Helen Kowalewska - University of Bath, Stefani Scherer - University of Trento, Agnese Vitali - University of Trento,

How does the experience of first parenthood influence the likelihood of having a second child? Do parental leave, childcare, and work arrangements matter for the transition to a second child? Given the high costs of childbearing, state-provided cash support and employer-provided welfare likely matter in helping parents to balance employment and family responsibilities; however, their roles remain underexplored. Further, how do the fertility intentions of the couple figure in? Most research takes an individual-level perspective; yet, a couple-level approach matters for understanding how each partner's desires and situations – including their shared or differing intentions to have additional children – shape family outcomes.

To contribute to addressing these gaps in knowledge, this study examines which state and company work-family arrangements facilitate transitions to second parity – and for which couples – leveraging data from the first five waves of the Millennium Cohort Study to take a couple-level perspective. We analyse the factors associated with the likelihood (and timing) of the transition to second births, focusing on the influence of partners' family-work arrangements and company-level welfare and flexibility. We also investigate how fertility intentions – and partners' (dis)agreement on these intentions – shape this process.

Early results show that socio-economic factors are key predictors of fertility intentions and the transition to a second child. Mothers' use of company-level flexibility is associated with higher probabilities of having a second parity, while no association is found for father's use. Company welfare practices show no direct link, but couples who pay for childcare exhibit lower second birth probabilities.

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Deroutinization of Labor and Second Birth in West Germany: The Moderating Role of Childcare
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Technological change and globalization have transformed the structure of labor markets in advanced economies, creating a divide between workers performing abstract tasks, which are in high demand, and those engaged in routine tasks, which are in declining demand. To date, only a few studies have examined the fertility effects of these long-term changes. This study contributes to the literature by investigating the association between shifts in task demand at both the occupational and regional levels and second births, while also considering the moderating role of childcare availability. We calculate abstract and routine task intensities using data from the Employment Survey of the German Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training and the Bundesagentur für Arbeit, linking these data to individual fertility and employment histories of women from the German Pension Fund (a 2 percent random sample). Our findings indicate that the predicted probability of second births is positively associated with abstract task intensity at the occupational level but negatively associated with the growth of abstract tasks at the regional labor market level, with the opposite pattern observed for routine tasks. Among women in highly abstract occupations, greater childcare availability is linked to a higher second birth risk.

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