

Couples' attitudes and the transition to first births in Germany

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Having children, especially having a first child, has strong effects on parents' lives. Some of these effects might be perceived as negative, e.g. the reduced time availability to pursue one's occupational career. Other aspects of parenthood might be perceived as positive, such as emotional returns from children. Research indicates that these cost and rewards of having children are related to childbearing behavior. Persons who expect strong negative consequences of having children seem to be less likely to enter parenthood than those who expect less negative consequences (Bernhardt and Goldscheider 2006; Liefbroer 2005). In addition to explicit attitudes toward childbearing and career goals, more general attitudes may also affect fertility behavior. More traditional individuals, such as those who believe it is important to be married and to have children, seem to enter parenthood earlier than their non-traditional counterparts (Moors 2008; Thomson 2002).

The existing studies usually analyze the effect of attitudes toward childbearing on actual childbirth from a single individual's perspective. However, most children are born to parents that form a couple and it was shown that the opinion about having children of both partners is related to actual childbearing (Jansen and Liefbroer 2006; Rosina and Testa 2009; Thomson 1997; Thomson and Hoem 1998). However, there are only few datasets that offer attitude information of both partners. It was argued that couples' attitudes are closely related, e.g. because partners select each other on basis of value orientation. Moreover, cohabiting partners continuously exchange their views on life domains and form a consensus on childbearing intentions (Miller and Pasta 1995). However, as was shown on basis of the pairfam dataset for Germany, couples do not always comply with the childbearing plans of one another. The answering patterns in Table 1 show that 26.3 percent of childless couples do not agree concerning their

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intention to have a child in the next two years. Will these couples find a consensus? Which partner will push his or her attitude concerning the childbearing decision in the next two years? We expect that the effect of attitudes within a couple depend on several aspects such as gender, education and the importance a person attaches to children.

Table 1: Answering patterns concerning the intention to have a child in the next two years. Childless couples in Germany.

		female partner	
		yes	no
male partner	yes	37.4%	13.3%
	no	13.0%	36.2%

Source: Hillmann and Kuhnt (2011). pairfam, wave 1.

This paper investigates the effect of both partner’s attitudes toward children and the family on actual entry into parenthood. For the empirical study, we use the German Family Panel pairfam (four waves: 2008-2011) which includes a multitude of attitudes questions surveyed among young Germans. The dataset has several advantages. On the one hand, in wave 1, for approximately 50 percent of respondents also partners were interviewed. This enables us to consider both females’ and male partners’ attitudes and their relationship with childbearing. On the other hand, we use the panel data structure to investigate the effect of a respondents’ opinions and attitudes at one point in time on her childbearing thereafter. Here we follow the recommendation of Lesthaeghe and Moors (2002) to use panel data, which allows researchers to take into account the causal relationship between attitudes and demographic behavior.

Our empirical analyses consist of two parts. First, we use multivariate imputation by chained equations (MICE; see van Buuren and Groothuis-Oudshoorn 2011). This procedure allows a reduction of biased effect estimation which might occur in case of systematic nonresponse of partners. Second, based on the imputation model, we run discrete time hazard models to investigate the transition to first births.

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