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**Family Size Preferences of Adolescents across Contemporary Family Forms:
How Does Parental Dissolution Affect Adolescents' Fertility Preferences?**

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1. Introduction

Wide-scale decline of birth rates in the Global North and other “more developed” societies has left many countries with period fertility rates that are below replacement level and in some cases substantially so. Social science explanations of this development and its implications have offered varying points of emphasis on the arrival of what appears to be a more or less permanent feature of many family regimes across Europe (Lutz, 2006; Lutz, 2007; Lutz, Skirbekk, & Testa, 2006). Many accounts have focused on the gap between ideal and actual family sizes, but our research here is motivated by another interesting dimension of this phenomenon; the associated declines in *ideal* and *intended* fertility (Goldstein, Lutz, & Testa, 2003; Lutz, 2006; Lutz, Skirbekk, & Testa, 2006). Specifically, we are concerned with how shifts in family size preferences may be linked with another trend in family life of the last decades: the diversification of family types due to relationship dissolution and subsequent re-partnering.

2. Context

Until the 19th century childbearing was most directly tied to economic need and social norms (Sanders, 2012). Socioeconomic changes in the late 19th and 20th centuries eroded childbearing’s economic and normative foundations. What has come to known as the “Second Demographic Transition” (Lesthaeghe & Surkyn, 1988), i.e. changes in cultural norms and values such as secularization and calls for gender equality, socioeconomic changes by means of increased female labor participation and technological innovations such as the birth control pill, gave people more control over their own fertility and weakened normative expectations for childbearing. Family life is no longer a given; more and more, it is an actively chosen path of individuals, shaped by one’s wants and desires. Thus we have witnessed a decline not only of realized fertility but also of desired fertility.

Demographers have tried to answer the question of declining fertility by means of a variety of explanatory variables but the most used theoretical framework remains the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985). Attitudes toward a particular behavior, along with subjective norms (social pressure), predict intentions and intentions predict behavior. Thus in the case of childbearing, positive attitudes toward having children, coupled with the social pressure to do so, increase the likelihood of childbearing. Since normative pressure has declined, one might infer that nowadays people generally have the number of children they want. Although there is sometimes a gap between desired fertility and actual fertility and some unwanted fertility (especially in the US), interest in childbearing is increasingly predictive of fertility intentions and a strong predictor of fertility (Schoen, Astone, Kim, Nathanson, & Fields, 1999; Testa, Sobotka, & Morgan, 2011; Sanders, 2012). Therefore it is especially important to understand how these fertility preferences are formed and adjusted throughout the life course, especially since early planning or life events can set young people on a path that orients them towards certain experiences and opportunities while foreclosing others (Mahaffy & Ward, 2002).

Social learning theory tells us that preferences of individuals are to a great extent formed by what these individuals have experienced within their own families of origin. As Lutz (2006; 2007) states, childbearing is especially linked to partnerships. So the stability and the nature of parental relationships should also have an effect on preferred family size. But since the 1960's, there have been some drastic changes in family configurations. Divorce rates have risen, more children are born outside the context traditional marriage and more people live in a myriad of biological, step- and half kinship relationships. All this leads to the possibility that the increase in family diversity is somehow linked to the observed declines in actual, ideal and preferred fertility rates. Since the youngsters of today will build the families of tomorrow, it is interesting to find out how family life circumstances influences current adolescents' family aspirations. What intentions do they have for their own family life and how do their current family life and future family ideals intertwine?

The majority of research to date has examined the experience of a parental separation on family size preferences as a binary (parents were divorced or separated or not.) However, this approach does not take into account the diversity of families of origins (and thus diversity of socialization environments) that follow parental dissolutions. Moreover, these studies have not taken the attitudes of adolescents toward competing alternative behaviors into account (Axinn & Thornton, 1996; Barber, Ideational influences on the transition to parenthood: attitudes toward childbearing and competing alternatives, 2001; Sanders, 2012; Marsiglio, Hutchinson, & Cohan, 2000; Teachman, Tedrow, & Crowder, 2000; Barber & Axinn, 2005; Edin & Kefalas, 2005; van der Valk, Spruijt, de Goede, Larsen, & Meeus, 2008). The research presented here addresses some of these gaps.

3. Data and Methods

To examine these ideas, data are used from the LAGO dataset (Leuven Adolescenten- en Gezinnenonderzoek or Leuven Adolescents and Families Study). This survey is conducted on a yearly basis by FaPOS (Family and Population Studies) of the KU Leuven. The total dataset of LAGO contains information from over 7000 pupils from 49 Flemish secondary schools. The distribution of gender, year and educational track strongly resembles the total school population in Flanders (Vanassche, Sodermans, Dekeyser, & Matthijs, 2012). The dataset contains information on family configurations, family relations, individual well-being, family related attitudes and future family expectations and aspirations. For the analyses we use the third and the fourth data collection rounds where family size preference is incorporated into the questionnaire. We further restrict the research sample to youngsters aged 14 and up. The final subset after cleaning for our analyses contains information of 1873 respondents.

For the multivariate analyses of youngsters' family size preferences, we use multinomial logistic regression technique instead of Poisson regression models that are normally used to when dependent variables are counts of various events. Poisson regression models illustrate the probability of events with the assumption that the events are random and independent of each other. However, we assume that the event of "children" is not random and that the distinctions

between having no, one, two or more children are not independent. The metric variable ‘family size preference’ (range 0 to 5) is recoded into four different categories: no children (4.1%), one child (10.1%), two children (63.8%) and three or more children (21.9%). Reference category for the models presented below is ‘two children’ which is also the mean of the original family size preference and corresponds to a ‘normative fertility’ level.

4. Preliminary results

Here we begin to add to the picture of childbearing intentions/preference earlier in the life course. The core question that we raised concerns the impact of parental dissolutions and resultant alternative family structures on preferences. Indeed we find that adolescents who had this experience seemed to prefer small families. But not in a straightforward manner, because while less likely to favor families of three or more children, they didn’t seem any more likely than reference respondents to favor childless or one child families. When looking at family types that children of dissolution end up in, we find the “dissolution” effect is concentrated among those alternating between two single parent families. The strong effect of number of siblings on childbearing preferences indicates the importance of additional dimensions of family structure. And because this relationship is quite consistent with actual patterns of realized fertility, we can have greater confidence that the preference variation that is modeled here is not idiosyncratic. Parental relationship variables while theoretically salient have relatively little explanatory power, perhaps because relationships with parents are subject to rather wide fluctuation in adolescence. We also have some evidence that perspectives emphasizing rational planning are forming even at this stage of the life course, both through parents’ education and occupational statuses but also the expectation of the respondents. Our full paper also includes gender-specific results which add consider nuance to the general model presented in this abstract.

Table 1. Multinomial regression models predicting the family size preferences
(reference category = 2 children, N =1873)

	0		1		3	
	Coeff	p	Coeff	p	Coeff	p
(1) Parental Dissolution						
(2) Structure Variables						
Family Type (ref: Intact)						
Single Family	-0.28	0.57	-0.01	0.99	0.19	0.49
Step Family	0.01	0.99	0.19	0.58	0.19	0.52
Alternating between two single parents	-0.03	0.97	-0.89	0.16	-1.35	0.02
Alternating between single parent and step family	-0.20	0.70	-0.21	0.59	-0.56	0.10
Alternating between two step families	0.13	0.82	0.44	0.26	-0.20	0.60
Siblings						
# of Biological Siblings	-0.35	0.02	-0.38	0.00	0.36	0.00
# of Step Siblings	0.14	0.41	0.05	0.70	-0.01	0.90
(3) Relationship Variables						
NRI Mother	-0.01	0.68	-0.01	0.29	0.00	0.86
NRI Father	-0.02	0.27	-0.01	0.66	0.02	0.15
Current Parental Conflict	0.54	0.05	0.04	0.84	-0.12	0.43
(4) Aspiration Variables						
Divorce Chances	1.64	0.00	0.58	0.09	0.13	0.64
Educational Aspiration (ref: College)						
No Degree	0.50	0.65	0.26	0.75	1.22	0.02
Secondary	-0.20	0.48	0.31	0.09	-0.18	0.21
Labor Force Participation (own) (ref: fulltime)						
Part-time	-0.40	0.22	-0.24	0.25	0.31	0.03
At home	14.27	0.99	14.12	0.99	0.88	0.09
(5) Individual Controls						
Age	0.01	0.90	-0.03	0.60	0.06	0.24
Male	0.25	0.33	0.25	0.15	-0.44	0.00
Educational Track (ref: ASO)						
BSO	-0.62	0.13	0.60	0.01	-0.31	0.11
TSO	-0.29	0.31	0.12	0.56	-0.62	0.00
Had sex	0.47	0.09	-0.01	0.97	-0.16	0.29
(6) Parental Controls						
Mother's higher education						
Mother's employment (ref: fulltime)	0.04	0.91	-0.66	0.01	0.12	0.43
Part-time	0.14	0.62	0.12	0.49	0.03	0.83
At Home	0.33	0.37	-0.33	0.24	-0.01	0.97
Father's employment (ref: employed)						
Not employed	-0.09	0.85	-0.08	0.80	0.49	0.01
Constant	-2.78	0.10	-0.98	0.37	-2.48	0.00

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