

Attitudes, beliefs, family ideals and first births in Germany

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The strong decline in fertility rates across Europe captured the attention of numerous researchers. Two general strands of explanations for the development of births were central in this debate: On the one hand, economic factors determine childbearing while on the other hand it was suggested that cultural and ideational shifts are responsible for decreasing fertility. The importance of social psychological dispositions to explain individual childbearing decision is mirrored in the growing use of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB, see Ajzen 1991; Philipov et al. 2009) in fertility research. The TPB acknowledges the importance of attitudes for all different kinds of behavior. In the context of childbearing, attitudes are the result of a person's evaluation about the effects of having a child. If overall the anticipated rewards exceed the emotional and financial costs, attitudes toward childbearing are positive. If, however, the expected unfavorable consequences of having a child outweigh the advantages, childbearing attitudes are negative. A number of studies have shown that attitudes in fact play an important role in the childbearing decision (see e.g. Dommermuth et al. 2011; Billari et al. 2009; Moors 2008; Barber and Axinn 2005; Liefbroer 2005; Barber et al. 2002; Barber 2001).

However, less is known about the constituting factors of attitudes. Are there anticipated consequences of childbearing that are more important for the final childbearing decision than others? How do attitudes toward work relate to attitudes toward children? Do general family values shape attitudes? And do these relationships differ between men and women? How do these components affect first births?

Attitudes formation is a dynamic process involving beliefs on the effects of children on a person's life. Beliefs are the sum of information a person has about the consequences of the behavior (Ajzen 1991: 191). For the case of childbearing, such beliefs might concern e.g. financial costs of children, time demands of childcare, expected emotional returns of having children and the effects of children for a person's standing in society. Moreover, it was argued that also attitudes toward alternative behaviors (Barber 2001; Barber and Axinn 2005: 61) are of interest to understand the decision-making process. Alternative behaviors are related to other life domains affected by having children, e.g. career and education related goals. These activities usually cannot be performed at the same time,

i.e. they compete for women's time. Beliefs about behavioral consequences are coined within a person's overall values system. In other words, attitudes are embedded in a complex setting of personal and social ideas on families and life-styles.

In this paper, I plan to investigate which beliefs are important and how childbearing attitudes and ideas about the family relate to each other. One question to answer is whether women with positive childbearing attitudes are generally more traditional. Moreover, I plan to investigate whether positive attitudes toward childbearing contradict a strong career orientation of women (cf. Tables 1 and 2). In a second step, I investigate whether attitudes determine entry into parenthood. To better understand the potential father's role in the childbearing decision-making process, this analysis also considers male partner's attitudes.

For the empirical study I use the German Family Panel *pairfam*. This dataset includes a multitude of attitudes and values questions. The participants were young German residents (cohorts born between 1991-1993, 1981-1983 or 1971-1973). The first wave (n=13,891) is used to investigate the relationship between different ideational aspects. Employing factor analytical methods, I investigate which beliefs constitute family attitudes. Moreover, I study in how far attitudes toward the family and toward other life domains are related. Based on discrete time hazard analysis of the risk of first conception, I investigate the effect of attitudes on first conception. For this second analysis, I use the information about first childbirth or first pregnancy since last wave (n=2,515). In this analysis we will also consider male partners' attitudes in order to shed some light on fathers' role in the childbearing decision-making process.

Taking a first glance at the data (cf. Tables 1 and 2) reveals that the largest group of female respondents attaches comparably little importance to career or education goals (n=3,450). Most males (n=3,040), however, attach moderate importance to job-related goals. Also children are not very relevant in most respondents' lives. This finding is found for both men and women. In order to identify socio-demographic effects, we plan to analyze how these answering patterns vary across age groups and educational levels. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient is negative and significant both for the male and the female sample (see notes to the tables). Respondents for whom children are important seem to attach less relevance to career goals. This implies that for German young adults having children and an occupational career are perceived as two still contradictory spheres in life.

Table 1: Answering patterns concerning the importance of children and importance of career. Female respondents. Row percentages.

		Importance of children			total
		low	moderate	high	
importance of career and/or education	low	1,024 28.93%	682 19.27%	1,834 51.81%	3,540 100%
	moderate	1,437 53.72%	873 32.64%	365 13.64%	2,675 100%
	high	654 74.07%	188 21.29%	41 4.64%	883 100%
total		3,115 43.89%	1,743 24.56%	2,240 31.56%	7,098 100%

Source: pairfam, wave 1. Auhtor's own calculations. Answering patterns observed for the question "How much importance to you attach to the following 5 life domains at the moment?" Categorization based on the tertiles. Missings excluded. Unweighted data. Spearman's R²= -0.41.

Table 2: Answering patterns concerning the importance of children and importance of career. Male respondents. Row percentages.

		Importance of children			total
		low	moderate	high	
importance of career and/or education	low	664 24.65%	715 26.54%	1,315 48.81%	2,694 100%
	moderate	1,456 47.89%	1,153 37.93%	431 14.18%	3,040 100%
	high	727 74.11%	223 22.73%	31 3.16%	981 100%
total		2,847 42.40%	2,091 31.14%	1,777 26.46%	6,715 100%

Source: pairfam, wave 1. Auhtor's own calculations. Answering patterns observed for the question "How much importance to you attach to the following 5 life domains at the moment?" Categorization based on the tertiles. Missings excluded. Unweighted data. Spearman's R²= -0.42.

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