

Plans and Worries: The Economic Context of Fertility Intentions among Young Adults

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Research Questions

1. Is economic context related by young adults' plans to be parents?
2. Is economic context associated with the ideal number of children?
3. Is economic context associated with young adults' plans to delay fertility?

Definition of Economic Context

We define economic context as objective economic resources (education, earnings, employment status, number of weeks worked, hours worked) and subjective perception of economic circumstances (worries about future jobs, worries about money)

Significance

- **What undermines fertility plans?** Parenthood continues to be a near-universal life goal among Americans. It is important to understand the mechanisms that can possibly undermine fertility plans.
- **Studying fertility intentions.** One advantage of studying fertility *intentions* among young adults is that they are not affected by unintentional fertility or infertility issues.
- **Adding in men.** Most research on fertility intentions and economic context focuses on women. For men, research suggests that financial strain may postpone fatherhood. Examining fertility intentions also allows for an easier comparison of young men and women, as observing fertility behavior is often more difficult among men.

Theoretical Background

- **Opportunity cost approach:** Children mean decreased earnings opportunities for women. Lower earnings potential and economic instability → Declining opportunity costs of children → Higher fertility.
Expectation: Women who are employed full-time and/or highly educated are more likely to think they will not have children in the future and will also desire fewer children.
- **Financial constraint approach:** Children can be perceived as too expensive, and intentions are shifted downward. Economic strain → reduced fertility expectations.
Expectation: Men and women who experience financial difficulties are more likely to think they will not have children in the future and will also desire fewer children.

Data

Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) Transition to Adulthood Supplement (TA).

Sample population: Young adults age 17 to 25 who have no children (for fertility intention analyses) and are either in school, working, or unemployed.

Years: 2005, 2007, 2009 (number of observations per respondent range between 1 and 3).

Sample size: about 2200.

Measures

Dependent variables: 3 dimensions of fertility intentions:

- the chances that respondents thought they would have children
- the respondents' ideal number of children
- the expected age at parenthood

Measures of economic context include:

objective indicators

- education (college education vs. less than college education)
- current employment status (employed, unemployed, currently enrolled in education)
- log earnings from all jobs last year
- number of weeks worked last year
- average number of hours worked per week last year.

subjective indicators

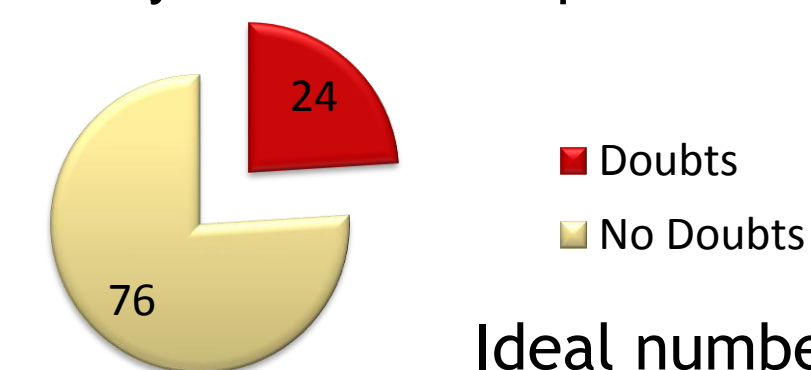
- worries about money ("How often do you worry that you won't have enough money to pay for things")
- worries about a future job (How often do you worry that

Methods

Multivariate models are estimated using logistic and linear random effects models

Descriptive Statistics

Certainty about future parenthood



Ideal number of children	2.28
% who want only 1 child	11.00
Expected age at parenthood	27.57

RQ 1: Who has doubts about future parenthood?

(Logistic Random Effects Model: Doubts about becoming a parent)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
College	-0.737**	-0.667**	-0.741**
Unemployed	0.660**	0.640**	0.601*
Enrolled	-0.096	-0.053	-0.045
Log earnings from all jobs	-0.064**		
Weeks worked		-0.006	
Total hours worked (all jobs)			-0.012*
Worried about money	0.060	0.073	0.075
Worried about future job opportunities	0.134**	0.142**	0.145**

RQ 2: : What shapes the ideal number of children - who only wants ONE child?

(Logistic Random Effects Model: Wanting one child vs. two or more children)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
College	-0.886**	-0.791*	-0.907**
Unemployed	0.895**	0.976**	0.943**
Enrolled	0.117	0.197	0.186
Log earnings from all jobs	-0.001		
Weeks worked		0.003	
Total hours worked (all jobs)			0.003
Worried about money	-0.046	-0.043	-0.058
Worried about future job opportunities	0.120+	0.107	0.115+

RQ 3: What shapes the desired timing of parenthood

(Random Effects Model: Expected age at entry into parenthood)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
College	0.888***	1.018***	0.982***
Mom HS degree	0.457	0.492+	0.534+
Mom more than HS degree	1.177***	1.177***	1.272***
Unemployed	-0.131	-0.050	-0.112
Enrolled	0.365*	0.316*	0.372**
Log earnings from all jobs	-0.016		
Weeks worked		-0.004	
Total hours worked (all jobs)			-0.004
Worried about money	-0.057	-0.052	-0.036
Worried about future job opportunities	0.102**	0.098**	0.102**

Note. + p<.10, * p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001

Summary and Conclusions

- Overall, most of our evidence supports theories suggesting that economic strain suppresses fertility intentions. Those with less education, who are unemployed, working fewer hours, or worried about their future job prospects, were more likely to doubt whether they would have any children.
- We also find that worrying about future job opportunities is associated with wanting fewer children or plan on having children later.
- We find some support for the opportunity cost approach regarding the desired timing of children: Higher levels of education of respondents and their mothers as well as current enrollment are linked to a preference for later parenthood.
- We further examined gender differences (not shown here) but found that while there are small differences in the mechanisms that predict fertility intentions, these differences are not statistically significant. Also, there was no consistent evidence to suggest that economic context influences men and women differently.
- We find that worries about future job constraints matter beyond objective economic conditions. This is important since subjective perceptions of economic security are often missing from fertility analyses and worries about the future should be incorporated more systematically in the analyses.

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