

## **Correspondence between fertility intentions and behaviour in Austria A couple analysis**

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### **Introduction**

In this paper, I address the issue of fertility decision-making among couples using individual-level data. Correspondence between partners' short-term fertility desires and subsequent childbearing behaviour is analysed in a longitudinal approach looking at the respondent's as well as at the perceived partner's fertility desires. Following the approach proposed by Miller and Pasta (1996), a distinction is made between respondents who perceive a positive disagreement (with the partner having weaker desires than the respondent), and respondents who perceive a negative disagreement (with the partner having stronger desires than the respondent).

### **Theoretical background**

There are two major theoretical frameworks suitable for studying fertility decision-making: the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and the Theory of Traits-Desires-Intentions-Behaviour (TDIB). I review both with the intention of showing how they take into account the dyadic aspect of reproduction. Moreover, I discuss an overview of decision rules used to resolve conflict.

### **Research hypotheses**

I hypothesize that men and women who want to have a child now and perceive that their partner does not want (positive disagreement) are more likely to have a child than men and women who do not want to have a child now but perceive that their partner wants (negative disagreement) (*Hypothesis 1, signed difference effects of disagreement*).

I suppose that men and women who perceive a disagreement with their partner about wanting a(nother) child now have a childbearing behavior closer to that of respondents who perceive agreement on not having a(nother) child than to that of respondents who perceive agreement on having a(nother) child (*Hypothesis 2, double-veto power effect*).

Since in Austria there is still a normative pressure that pushes couples to have at least one child, I hypothesize that disagreement is shifted toward having a child among childless men and women and toward not having a child among men and women who already have (at least) one child (*Hypothesis 3, parity effect*).

Since women generally have the primary responsibility for childrearing and face a number of barriers in combining work and family life in Austria (Prskawetz et al. 2008), I suppose that women are more influential than men in the decision of having a(nother) child if disagreement rises within the couple (*Hypothesis 4, gender effect*).

I hypothesize that men and women who live in more gender-egalitarian relationships in terms of gender division of childcare tasks will be more prone to resolve the conflict in favor of childbearing than men and women who live in less gender egalitarian relationships (*Hypothesis 5, gender equality effect*).

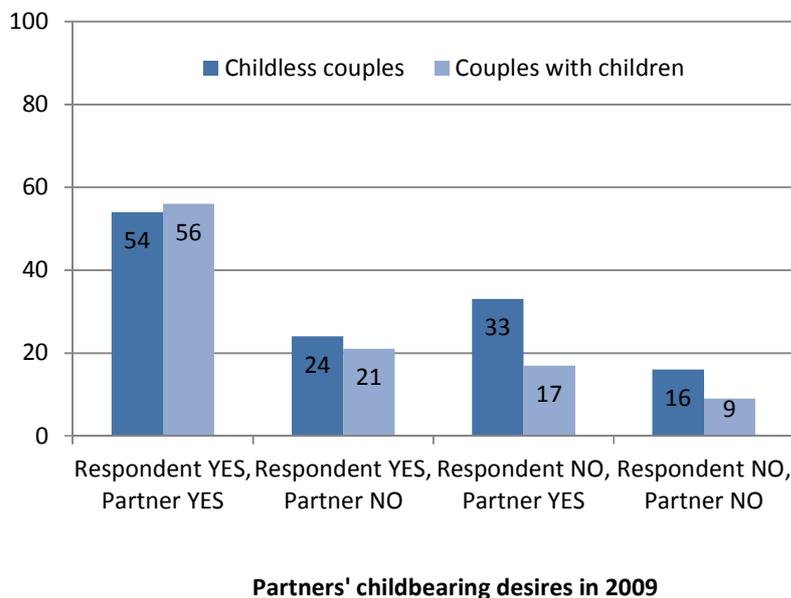
Eventually, I suppose that men and women with more bargaining power than their partner are more likely to solve the disagreement according to their own childbearing desires (*Hypothesis 6, bargaining power effect*).

### **Data**

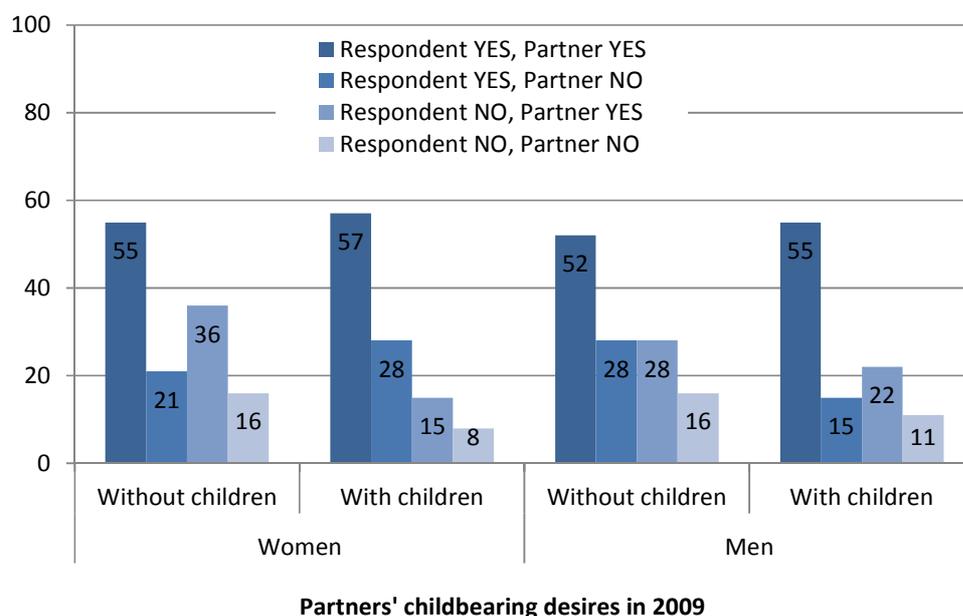
I used data from the survey Families in Austria (*Familienentwicklung in Österreich*), conducted by the Austrian National Statistical Office in 2008/9 and in 2012/13 in the framework of the international Generations and Gender Programme. In 2008/9 the whole sample size included 5,000 individuals, men and women, aged 18-45. 78% of them were re-interviewed four years later. I restricted the analysis to 2,604 heterosexual couples in which the female partner was neither pregnant nor older than age 50 at the time of the first interview and one of the partners was re-interviewed in 2012/13. Furthermore, I selected only those unions in which neither partner had been surgically sterilised, and the respondent answered both questions about his or her own and the partner's fertility desires at the first survey (2008/9). Survey questions used to measure childbearing desires were worded as follows: 1) Do you want to have a child now? 2) Does your partner want to have a child now?

## Results

Descriptive analysis has shown that the outcome of disagreement is situated between that of agreement on yes and that of agreement on not having a child (Figure 1) and that men tend to prevail in the decision of a first child and women tend to prevail in the decision of a second (or higher birth order) child (Figure 2).



**Fig.1: Couples having a child in the intra-survey period (2009-2013) by partners' short-term fertility desires in 2009 (in %)**



**Fig 2: Couples having a child in the intra-survey period by partners' short-term fertility desires in 2009 (in %)**

Preliminary multivariate analysis has shown that:

- The disagreement effect on subsequent reproductive behavior is not signed;
- In case of disagreement, the childbearing outcome is located in between that of agreement on having a(nother) child and that of agreement on not having a(nother) child;
- Men tend to be more influential at parity zero and women afterwards; but this evidence is not supported by specific statistical tests comparing the fitting of different models;
- At parity zero the childbearing outcome of disagreeing couples lies between that of agreement on yes and that of agreement on no, at the higher parities the outcome of disagreement is closer to that of agreement on no than to that of agreement on yes;
- Couples with a more gender egalitarian division of childcare tasks are not necessarily more prone to solve their conflict in favor of another child than less gender egalitarian couples;
- Couples in which partners have the same power in decision-making are not necessarily more egalitarian than couples in which the distribution of bargaining power is gendered.

### Conclusion

Models including only women's or only men's desires are likely to be miss-specified.

Subjectively reported partner's desire may not reflect exactly the partner's objective fertility desires. Ideally, research on couple decision-making should be based on a double source of information on partner's desires, i.e., subjective and objective reports

### Reference

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