Running head: INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONS AND FERTILITY INTENTIONS

Fertility Intentions Depend on Intergenerational Relations:
A Life Course Perspective

Eva-Maria Merz

Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute

Abstract

Although the influence of the parental home on individual's fertility is a well-established fact in social sciences, the mechanism behind this influence remains unclear. This study investigated the role of experiencing parental divorce during childhood and current intergenerational family relationships in association with fertility intentions of young adults, based on a life course theoretical framework. Data from the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study ($N = 2,137$) were analysed to predict childbearing intentions in childless respondents and those who had children already. A trend was found for experiencing parental divorce during childhood in predicting a negative intention to have a(nother) child(ren) in the future for both subsamples. This intention was positively predicted by higher quality of current relationships with parents for childless respondents. The negative trend of divorce on childbearing intentions was mediated by current family ties for both subsamples. This study offers an expansion of previous fertility research by applying a life course framework to explain part of the childbearing decision process – fertility intentions.

Keywords: childbearing intentions, life course, divorce, intergenerational relationships

Introduction

Although the influence of the parental home on individual's fertility is a well-established fact in social science (e.g., Rijken & Liefbroer, 2009; Thornton, 1980), the mechanism behind this influence remains unclear. Much research has examined the intergenerational transmission of fertility behaviour and fertility patterns with respect to demographic aspects such as age at first birth and family size (e.g., Barber, 2000; Michael & Tuma, 1985; Murphy & Knudsen, 2002). Additionally, research has examined the role of affective characteristics of the family of origin, relationship quality and socialization context on timing and quantum of fertility (Rijken & Liefbroer, 2009; Rijken & Thomson, 2011; Steenhof & Liefbroer, 2008). Yet, the question *how* fertility intentions depend on the quality of the parental home and characteristics of intergenerational relationships, has not attracted much attention. This is unfortunate because fertility is likely to be prone to influences from the social networks of individuals through the shaping of individual preferences (Bühler, 2008), intergenerational relationships and structure and quality of family life, based on childhood experiences in the own parental home (Simpson, 1999). Life course, attachment, evolutionary and socialization concepts may be considered as possible theoretical frameworks to explain how and under which circumstances the parental home, parent-child relationships and broader family ties influence the fertility intentions of the adult child generation. This study investigated the mechanism behind these associations from a theoretical perspective considering life course socialization and attachment concepts. First, childhood experiences, including the structure and quality of the parental home, are considered as important background characteristics for the shaping of fertility intentions in young adulthood. In a following theoretical paragraph, adult relationships with parents and broader family are discussed in association with young adults' fertility intentions. Based on this theoretical

discussion several hypotheses are formulated and subjected to empirical testing with the aid of data from the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS; Dykstra et al., 2004).

A Life Course Theoretical View on Fertility Intentions

Based on concepts from ethology, biology, and psychology in an evolutionary framework it is argued that close relationships in childhood are associated with healthy functioning and various other positive outcomes in adulthood (Hinde, 1979; 1997). Children are sensitive and responsive to the context and rearing environment during childhood. Based on experiences within close relationships, they develop relatively stable representations of the self and significant others that come to guide orientations, behaviour and experiences in later relationships (Belsky, Steinberg, & Draper, 1991).

Children and later on adults who developed representations during childhood, based on experiences with available caregivers, usually the parents, typically have a positive view of the self and others, and desire intimacy and closeness within relationships (Kachadourian, Fincham, & Davila, 2004). Close adult relationships then are characterized by behaviors that lead to harmonious interactions and few conflicts. In young adulthood, individuals with such positive and secure relationships may wish to transmit these experiences with closeness and reliability in intergenerational ties to a new generation and provide their own children with the same security and reliability they have experienced during their own childhood.

Conversely, early experiences characterized by stressful childhood environments, unavailability of a trusted figure and negative life events, such as divorce are thought to lead to the development of representations of relationships in which either the self and/or others are negatively viewed. Such persons most often have grown up with the experiences of unreliable distant parents and have developed a strong sense of self-reliance and independence in adulthood. They have difficulties with being close or dependent on others as well as with having others depend on them. Generally, such individuals often have complex

relationships and difficulties with balancing caregiving and care seeking behavior within significant relationships. They may express less interest in having own children (Simpson, 1999), tend to be less self-confident and may lack the beliefs in their parenting capacities and their caregiving abilities leading to negative fertility intentions. Paradoxically, those coming from less secure parental homes, are more likely to bear more children at earlier ages. Such behavior has been explained by social learning and socialization mechanisms related to behavior oriented towards increasing the quantity of offspring (Belsky et al., 1991; Simpson & Belsky, 2008). Still, when it comes to wishes and intentions, the negative experiences and memories with unstable parental bonds and limited parental investments may influence young adults in their wish to reproduce and prevent them from outspoken positive childbearing intentions.

Childhood Environment and Divorce

As mentioned above, the childhood environment, usually the parental home, plays an important role in forming and maintaining close relationships. Reliability, availability, and sensitivity of parents in childhood enhances children's trust and confidence in themselves and future relationships. One important life event possibly associated with negative experiences within the parent-child relationship and a problematic development of the parent-child bond is the experience of parental divorce. Divorce may come along with memories of unavailable caregivers, and increases the likelihood of preoccupation with relationships later in life (Feeney & Monin, 2008). Much research on the consequences of divorce has shown adverse outcomes in children, adolescents and young adults with respect to psychological and physical health (Lundberg, 1993), well-being (Maier & Lachman, 2000), and union formation and stability (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). Particularly, children whose parents divorced have shown difficulties in forming and maintaining close relationships as a consequence of the breakup of their parents (e.g., Gähler, Hong, & Bernhardt, 2009). They report dissatisfaction

and conflict in their own relationships (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). In childhood, they have been confronted with the (partial) loss of one parent. This experience may have caused insecurities about the reliability and availability of this parent leading to negative representations of the self and the parent. Often children feel guilty when their parents divorce and think that it is (partly) their fault. Such feelings are reflected by the idea of not being worth the parent's attention and affection. Children whose parents divorced are often confronted with harsher parental discipline, less support from parents, less time commitment (Amato, 2000) and feelings of having been 'abandoned' by one parent. Experiencing the divorce of parents is likely to be drastic for children because it implies the partial loss of the affectional bond with one parent, it often goes along with changes in the parental home, such as the decrease in relationship quality with one parent (Crowell, Treboux, & Brockmeyer, 2009), and other short- and long-term negative effects (Riggio, 2004). Individuals whose parents divorced have been found to hold less positive views of traditional family lives (Amato, 1988), to be less affectionate with their own children (Crowell et al., 2009) and they score lower on self-esteem and social competence (Amato, 2000; Feeney & Monin, 2008). In sum, these consequences of the experience of parental divorce may lead to less trust in close relationships and difficulties with interdependency, and support exchange within (parent-child) relationships. This may elicit feelings of insecurity about own capacities of caregiving and becoming a parent and may be accompanied by negative childbearing intentions.

Humans attach particular importance to close relationships and pair bonds (Belsky et al., 1991). Evidence suggests that children of divorce become sexually active earlier, marry earlier and become parents at younger ages (Rodgers & Pryor, 1998). However, these associations concern demographic *behavior* only. The implications of divorce and parental absence during childhood for attitudes and intentions remain less clear. It seems possible that contrary to their behavioral outcomes, children of divorce initially tend to have more negative

childbearing intentions because they have less trust in relationships including the availability and stability of pair bonds.

Adult Relations

Adults' evaluations of their childhood experiences and family life with primary caregivers, most often the parents, and their influences on current functioning are manifested within a relative stable state of mind (Van IJzendoorn, 1995) and guide individuals in their adult relationships. However, changes in this state of mind are not only possible but significantly associated with presence and timing of life events (Roisman, Padrón, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2002). Negative representations of the relationship with parents may be revised based on positive experiences with close romantic relationships or with the parents later in life, due to positive emotions associated with demographic transitions such as marriage and childbearing and increased capacities in dealing with negative emotions. Individuals who manage to overcome negative experiences and adversities in childhood have been shown to successfully maintain and enjoy close relationships in adulthood (Roisman et al., 2002). Therefore, not only the parental home but also current adult relationships may be important factors in the childbearing decision making process. In fact, divorce studies have identified the quality of the parent-child relationship as an important mediator between the experience of parental divorce and children's later outcomes (Amato, 2000; Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). Additionally, research has suggested that the social network including extended family and friends is also important with respect to positive outcome in adulthood for children of divorce (Feeney & Monin, 2008).

Demographic work too has pinpointed the family as an agency that influences subsequent fertility (Micheli, 2004; Rijken & Liefbroer, 2009). A harmonious parental home with little conflict may pave the way for a positive view of family life, for having own children and strong relationships and reciprocal support exchange between younger and older

generations (Merz, Schuengel, & Schulze, 2007). However, especially the current family situation and relationships with parents in adulthood may be particularly salient for adult children's intergenerational commitment including the continuation of intergenerational relations and solidarity with a new generation. The nature of available kin support is one motivation for early fertility (Trent & Crowder, 1997). Humans have been identified as cooperative breeders (e.g., Hrdy, 2007) and a good relationship with parents and the family network may indicate available support for childrearing and may play a general role in fertility. A high quality current relationship with parents, accompanied by positive broader family ties may suggest kin availability, kin support and commitment of family members and create a secure environment in which individuals wish to become parents themselves. Thus, young adults past and current relationship experiences might not just guide how young adults intend to care for their children but may even play a role earlier in their fertility intentions.

The Current Study and Hypotheses

Although previous work, based on an evolutionary framework has suggested an association between human attachment, childhood structure and the nature of close ties with fertility strategies – i.e. rearing environments and childhood experiences lead to different reproductive strategies in young adults (Belsky et al., 1991; Simpson, 1999) – the role of relationships with parents, the structure of the parental home in association with fertility *intentions* remained under investigated. The wish to become a parent may be based on experiences from childhood within the parental home and from adulthood with current intergenerational ties with the own parents because these experiences might function as a representation of the relation individuals expect to have with their own children.

To this extent then, fertility intentions were expected to be associated with the quality of the parental home. Specifically, a negative influence of parental divorce during childhood on young adults' fertility intentions was hypothesized. A positive association between fertility

intentions and quality of the recent intergenerational relationship with parents and between fertility intentions and quality of ties with the broader family was expected.

Based on the discussed literature, a mediation effect of the quality of current family relationships was expected. Specifically, the adverse effects of the experience of parental divorce on fertility desires were expected to be mediated by the current relationship young adults had with their family.

Method

Design and Sample

The data for this study stem from the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS; Dykstra et al., 2004). The NKPS, a collaboration between the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute, the University of Amsterdam, Utrecht University and Tilburg University, was intended to examine family and kinship relationships across the Netherlands with a particular focus on intergenerational solidarity (Dykstra et al., 2004). Data collection with computer-assisted personal interview and self-completion questionnaire schedules took place from October 2002 until January 2004 for the first wave. This sample was a random sample of individuals, aged 18-79, within private households in the Netherlands ($N = 8,161$, 58.09 per cent female, $M_{age} = 46.43$ years, $SD = 15.13$ years).

Respondent Characteristics

Only respondents ranging in age between 18 and 45 years for women and 18 and 49 years for men were asked questions about future fertility intentions. For the current study a total sample of 2,137 adults was included; their mean age was 33.26 years ($SD = 7.05$) and 61% were female. On average, these respondents had 1.20 children. In Table 1 an overview of respondent and study characteristics can be found. This table shows all study characteristics for both respondents who are childless and respondents who already have at least one child.

[Table 1 about here]

Measures

Fertility intentions. In the current study, fertility intentions were measured as expectations. Respondents were asked if they thought that they would to have (more) children in the future. “Do you think you will have (more) children in the future?” Possible answers to this question were 0 no, 1 don’t know and 2 yes.

Quality of parental home. Parental divorce (experienced yes/no until the age of 15) was used as an indicator of the quality of the parental home during childhood. Parental divorce usually is preceded and followed by fierce discussion between marriage partners (Amato, 1988) and can therefore be used as indicator for the quality of the parental home. Additionally, divorce itself often implies reduced contact and relationship quality with one of the parents, most often the father (Riggio, 2004).

Intergenerational relationship quality. Current relationship quality with parents was measured with the question “Taken everything together, how would you describe your relation with your father/mother?” Respondents answered this question on a scale from 1 not great, 2 reasonable, 3 good, to 4 very good. Additionally, respondents were asked questions about the interest parents recently showed in their lives and whether they received advice from their father and mother. The questions asked to respondents were: “Did you get counsel or good advice from your father/mother in the last 3 months?” and “Has your father/mother shown an interest in your personal life in the last 3 months?” Possible answer categories to these questions were 1 never, 2 sometimes, 3 often. All items were coded in a similar direction with higher values meaning better quality and more interest and advice received and standardized. Based on these six items, two on the quality of the relationship with father and mother, two on advice and two on interest received from father and mother, a mean index of the current quality of the intergenerational relationships was created. Because quality of, and interest and advice in the relationship with father and mother highly correlated with each

other the average score was taken to indicate the current quality of the intergenerational relationship with both parents. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .78. If only one parent was alive, data on this parent was used as indicator for intergenerational relationship quality.

Family ties. Ties with the nuclear and the broader family were measured using six items on strength and closeness of these ties and on information exchange with respect to important events. The following statements were rated on a 5 point scale: "The members of my nuclear family are very close", "The members of my extended family are very close", "The ties between members of my nuclear family are tightly knit", "The ties between members of my extended family are tightly knit", "In our nuclear family we keep each other informed about the most important events" and "In our extended family we keep each other informed about the most important events". Item response options ranged from 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree. The scale *family ties* was computed by taking the average across items; Cronbach's alpha was .80.

Control variables. Because earlier demographic work has shown that fertility is associated with age, gender, and partner status (e.g., Kneale & Joshi, 2008), these variables were included as control variables in our statistical analyses. Additionally, this study also controlled for the number of children respondents already had.

Statistical Analyses

Pearson correlations were calculated to assess bivariate associations among the study variables. Multivariately, ordinal regression analyses were performed predicting fertility intentions with demographic variables, divorce during childhood and current adult relationship variables. In a first step, the statistical effects of the control variables including age, gender, partner status, and number of children predicting fertility intentions were estimated. In a second step, parental divorce as an indicator of the quality of the parental home during childhood was added to the regression model. In the next steps measures of the

current relationship quality with broader family and parents were included in the regression. All analyses were performed among two subsamples, one including childless respondents, and the other one including parents. Possible mediation of the effect of parental divorce during childhood by current family ties was tested using the Sobel z statistic. Furthermore the percentage of the total effect mediated was calculated according to the formula $\alpha\beta / (\alpha\beta + \tau')$. α represents the coefficient relating the independent variable (divorce) to the mediator (family ties), β represents the coefficient relating the mediator to the outcome variable (fertility intentions) adjusted for the independent variable and τ' represents the coefficient relating the independent variable to the outcome variable adjusted for the mediator (Sobel, 1982). The product $\alpha\beta$ represents the mediated or indirect effect and τ' represents the non-mediated or direct effect.

Results

Descriptives and Correlations of Study Variables

An overview of study variables can be found in Table 1. Table 2 presents the correlations among demographic control variables, divorce, broader family ties, and intergenerational relationship with parents with fertility intentions. As indicated in this table and not surprisingly fertility intentions were negatively associated with age of the respondent and the number of own children respondents already had. Fertility intentions were also positively related to higher scores on the quality of current relationship with parents and broader family ties for both subsamples (i.e. childless respondents and parents).

[Table 2 about here]

Multivariate Results

Table 3 and 4 show how fertility intentions of men and women between 18 and 49 years are predicted by various demographic variables, the childhood family context, and current intergenerational and family relationship variables for childless respondents and

parents respectively. Model 1, which included age, gender, partner status and number of children shows that age and being a parent was associated with lower values on fertility intentions in the future. Being female was negatively associated with fertility intentions for both parities whereas having a partner was positively associated with fertility intention for the childless. Adding family background (i.e. the experience of parental divorce, to the regression model) revealed a trend ($p = .09$; $p = .07$ for childless and parent respondents). Individuals who had experienced parental divorce during childhood had somewhat lower fertility intentions compared to respondents from intact families. This trend was found for both groups of respondents: the childless and those who already had children. Next, the quality of ties with the broader family was added to the model as an indicator of current family embedding of the respondents. In the model, for childless respondents the better the quality of family ties, the higher were the fertility intentions (cf. Model 3 in Table 3). For the parent respondents, a similar trend ($p = .06$) was found showing that those with a better quality of family ties had higher fertility intentions (cf. Model 3 in Table 4). In a last step (cf. Model 4 in Tables 3 and 4), the statistical effects of current relationship quality between individuals and their parents on fertility intentions were tested for the two subsamples. Corresponding to hypotheses of this study, a higher quality in intergenerational relationships with parents was positively associated with fertility intentions for childless respondents, and a trend in the same direction was found for respondents who already had children. Interestingly, the negative trend values of parental divorce disappeared after adding the current relationship quality variables. In other words, the effect of parental divorce seemed to be reduced by the effects of the current family ties. This decrease in the predictive value of divorce on fertility intentions after adding family ties to the model reached almost significance for the childless subsample ($z = -1.70$; $p = .09$) and was significant for the parent sample ($z = -2.31$; $p = .02$), confirming partial mediation. In

the childless sample 16% of the effect of divorce on fertility intentions was mediated by family ties and in the parent sample this percentage was 21%.

[Tables 3 and 4 about here]

Discussion

The current study was developed to shed light on the mechanism behind the association between the parental home, parent-child and family relationships in adulthood and fertility intentions of the child generation. Concepts from evolutionary theory of socialization, attachment, cooperative breeding and life course theory were used as a framework within which hypotheses were developed and tested. Comparable to earlier work on the association between family relationships and fertility *behaviour*, this study found associations between family background, current adult relationship characteristics and fertility intentions. In the following sections, the results of this study are ore fully summarized and discussed, the role of different perspectives in explaining the association between family relationships and fertility are considered and some directions for future research are offered.

Divorce and Fertility Intentions

The first hypothesis stated that the experience of parental divorce would negatively associate with fertility intentions in adults. In other words, young adults who had experienced the divorce of their parents during childhood would have lower childbearing intentions than adults who had grown up with both parents. The current study found a trend in line with this expectation for both groups, young adults with and without children. Research on divorce and its short- and long-term developmental effects on children has shown that divorce generally predicts negative outcomes later in life particularly with respect to security and preoccupation with relationships. In a similar vein, divorce may have some negative impact on the wish of having children in young adulthood. Becoming a parent leads to the development of an important relationship in individuals' lives: the relationship between parents and children. If

young adults who have experienced the divorce of their parents as a child still suffer from the consequences, they may be more reluctant to become parents of their own because they may have difficulties in forming and maintaining close relationships and may have doubts in their parental capacities. Having children requires strong commitment with respect to caregiving activities, responsibilities and sensitivity. Positive representations of the self and of relationship partners are an important prerequisite of successfully managing the challenges associated with close relationships and therefore parenting. Children of divorced parents may more often have more negative representations of self and others leading to lower childbearing intentions. Such children as adolescents and young adults have shown adverse outcomes with respect to psychological and physical health (Lundberg, 1993), well-being (Maier & Lachman, 2000), union formation and stability (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). They have difficulties in forming and maintaining close relationships as a consequence of the breakup of their parents (e.g., Gähler, Hong, & Bernhardt, 2009) and report dissatisfaction and conflict in their own relationships (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). Owing to these negative consequences, they may want to prevent their future children to go through the hardship of divorce.

Current Family Relationships and Fertility and Mediation of Divorce Effects

The second hypothesis stated that the current quality of relationships with parents and the broader family will be positively associated with fertility intentions of adults. In line with these expectations the results showed that positive intergenerational relations and strong ties with the broader family predicted positive fertility intentions in adults. Relationships of high quality may encourage the wish to become parents to transmit these positive family relationships to a new generation. Moreover, positive experiences with the current family network may even overcome the negative effects of divorce. Indeed, divorce research has shown that the deteriorating effects of divorce are mediated by the quality of the parent-child

relationship (cf. Amato, 2000). Even though children may suffer from their parent's divorce, the relationship with their parents and its quality is a more important predictor of children's behaviour and well-being (Amato, 2000). In other words, negative outcome may be reconciled by a good relationship quality between children and parents, even in the case of a divorce. Similarly, the current study points to the strength of the parent-child bond in overcoming the long reaching effects of divorce not only for negative psychological outcomes but also for demographic intentions such as childbearing. More specifically, the results showed a negative effect of divorce on fertility intentions which seemed to be mediated by current intergenerational family relationships. The negative effect of divorce disappeared when variables indicating the quality of the current relationships with family were added to the statistical model. Comparable results have been found by a Swedish study; attitudes toward union formation and union commitment seemed to decrease the effect of parental divorce on outcomes in young adulthood (Gähler et al., 2009). Based on the mediation effect of the current report and the Swedish results, the conclusion might be that current relationships, their strength, quality and commitment may lead to overcoming the negative impact of divorce on fertility intentions and other outcomes in (young) adulthood.

Similarly, earlier work on the effects of the adult parent-child relationship in association with adaptive outcomes in adulthood (Merz & Consedine, 2009; Merz, Consedine, Schulze, & Schuengel, 2009) has suggested the importance of this special type of relationship with respect to well-being and intergenerational caregiving. Positive and secure intergenerational relationships benefitted individual's well-being and buffered the stress associated with caregiving. It seems therefore likely that current family relationships may also weaken the negative effects of divorce with respect to the wish of continuation and transmission of the parent-child bond with own children.

Research evidence points to the adaptability of experiences based on positive relationships in adolescence and adulthood (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2008). In other words, even if childhood experiences were characterized by divorce, often associated with separation from one parent (Feeney & Monin, 2008), positive experiences within adult relationships, for example with parents or romantic partners may modify and update earlier negative representations. If adult intergenerational relationships are characterized by high quality, closeness and connectedness, future plans and challenges related to life course transitions, such as becoming a parent, may be met with more confidence and trust in one's own capacities and commitment of the family network. In this study respondents rated the quality of their relationships with parents and other family members in terms of emotional support receipt, affective quality, closeness, reliability, and information exchange in important situations. If they have the impression that all these aspects of relationship quality are high with respect to their own family ties, they may feel secure and supported in their network and may want to face the challenges of becoming a parent. Additionally, they may also have developed self-confidence and self-esteem based on these positive relationship experiences in adulthood leading to trust in their own parenting capacities.

Limitations and Concluding Remarks

The combination of affective relationship characteristics and fertility intentions is an underexposed topic in both demographic fertility and affective family relationship research. When considering evolutionary and socialization theories as background, this is surprising. Such theories state that close relationships serve to ensure that children survive until reproductive age and that they subsequently will go on to successfully raise their own children. For example, children who have developed a secure relationship with and stayed close to a caregiving figure have been found to have significantly better chances to reach reproductive age than children without such bonds (Simspon 1999). In combination with

these earlier findings, the results of this study provide grounds to consider these theories as a framework for fertility research as well and to link childbearing intentions to intergenerational relationships in childhood and adulthood. In addition, the current study made use of a large, geographically representative survey dataset, offering an extension of previous research on divorce and childbearing issues.

These strengths noted, the current work is not without limitations. Most importantly, it is worth considering that the nature of the survey data meant measuring relationship quality and family ties with few items at a superficial level. Given the importance of this dimension, future studies might expand the measurement of relationship quality along several dimensions. Nevertheless, the current findings underline the importance of investigating the quality of parent-child relationships across the life course for facing important challenges and transitions such as childbearing. Another limitation is the cross-sectional nature of the study. Although I have argued that family relationships influence fertility intentions the reverse may also be true. While the effect of parental divorce points to the causality in the hypothesized direction, ongoing longitudinal work will allow for more careful disentangling of the associations between family relationships and fertility.

Overall, the present study goes some way towards illuminating the complex associations that relationship characteristics and important life events have with demographic transitions. Additionally, this study enriches traditional demographic research with concepts from psychology and socialization in an evolutionary framework. It highlights the unique and exclusive character of relationships between children and parents and its long reaching impact far into adulthood. If intergenerational relationships are characterized by high quality, reliability and closeness, the challenges of young adulthood and demographic transitions may be faced with more trust and the wish to transmit the experiences with affective and reliable caregiving relationships to a new generation. Given the struggle between autonomy and

interdependence in close relationships and the increasing number of childless individuals in modern society, work detailing why voluntary childlessness occurs among many young adults nowadays, is a key agenda for social scientists and policy makers.

Acknowledgement

The Netherlands Kinship Panel Study is funded by Grant 480-10-009 from the Major Investment Fund of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO), and by the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI), Utrecht University, the University of Amsterdam, and Tilburg University.

References

- Amato, P. R. (1988). Parental divorce and attitudes toward marriage and family life. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 50, 453-461.
- Amato, P. R. (2000). The consequences of divorce for adults and children. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62, 1269-1287.
- Amato, P. R., & Sobolewski J. M. (2001). The effects of divorce and marital discord on adult children's psychological well-being. *American Sociological Review*, 66, 900-921.
- Barber, J. S. (2000). Intergenerational influences on the entry into parenthood: Mothers' preferences for family and non-family behaviour. *Social Forces*, 79, 319-348.
- Belsky, J., Steinberg, L., & Draper, P. (1991). Childhood experiences, interpersonal development, and reproductive strategy: An evolutionary theory of socialization. *Child Development*, 62, 647-670.
- Bühler, C. (2008). On the structural value of children and its implications on intended fertility in Bulgaria. *Demographic Research*, 18, 569-610.

- Crowell, J. A., Treboux, D., & Brockmeyer, S. (2009). Parental divorce and adult children's attachment representations and marital status. *Attachment & Human Development, 11*, 87-101.
- Dykstra, P. A., Kalmijn, M., Knijn, T. C. M., Komter, A. E., Liefbroer, A. C., & Mulder, C. H. (2004). *Codebook of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study, a multi-actor, multi-method panel study on solidarity in family relationships, wave 1. NKPS working paper no. 1*. The Hague, Netherlands: Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute.
- Feeney, B. C., & Monin, J. K. (2008). An attachment-theoretical perspective on divorce. In J. Cassidy & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), *Handbook of attachment. Theory, research, and clinical applications* (2nd ed, pp. 934-957). New York/London: Guilford.
- Gähler, M., Hong, Y., & Bernhardt, E. (2009). Parental divorce and union disruption among young adults in Sweden. *Journal of Family Issues, 30*, 688-713.
- Hinde, R. A. (1979). *Towards understanding relationship*. London: Academic.
- Hinde, R. A. (1997). *Relationships: A dialectical perspective*. Sussex, United Kingdom: Psychology Press.
- Hrdy, S. B. (2007). Evolutionary context of human development: The cooperative breeding model. In C. A. Salmon & T. K. Shackelford (Eds.), *Family relationships. An evolutionary perspective* (pp. 39-68). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kachadourian, L. K., Fincham, F., & Davila, J. (2004). The tendency to forgive in dating and married couples: The role of attachment and relationship satisfaction. *Personal Relationships, 11*, 373-393.
- Kneale, D., & Joshi, H. (2008). Postponement and childlessness: Evidence from two British cohorts. *Demographic Research, 19*, 1935-1968.
- Lundberg, O. (1993). The impact of childhood living conditions on illness and mortality in adulthood. *Social Science Medicine, 36*, 1047-1052.

- Maier, E. H., & Lachman, M. E. (2000). Consequences of early parental loss and separation for health and well-being in midlife. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 24*, 183-189.
- Merz, E.-M., & Consedine, N. S. (2009). The association of family support and wellbeing in later life depends on attachment style. *Attachment & Human Development, 11*, 203-221.
- Merz, E.-M., Consedine, N. S., Schulze, H.-J., & Schuengel, C. (2009). Wellbeing of adult children and ageing parents: associations with intergenerational support and relationship quality. *Ageing & Society, 29*, 783-802.
- Merz, E.-M., Schuengel, C., & Schulze, H.-J. (2007). Intergenerational solidarity: An attachment perspective. *Journal of Aging Studies, 21*, 175-186.
- Michael, R. T., & Tuma, N. B. (1985). Entry into marriage and parenthood by young men and women: The influence of family background. *Demography, 22*, 515-544.
- Micheli, G. A. (2004). Kinship, family and social network. The anthropological embedment of fertility change in southern Europe. In G. Dalla Zuanna & G. A. Micheli (Eds), *Strong family and low fertility: A paradox? New perspective in interpreting contemporary family and reproductive behaviour* (pp. 77-104). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2008). Adult attachment and affect regulation. In J. Cassidy & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), *Handbook of attachment. Theory, research, and clinical applications* (2nd ed, pp. 503-531). New York/London: Guilford.
- Murphy, M., & Knudsen, L. B. (2002). The intergenerational transmission of fertility in contemporary Denmark: The effects of number of siblings (full and half), birth order and whether male or female. *Population Studies, 56*, 235-248.

- Riggio, H. R. (2004). Parental marital conflict and divorce, parent-child relationships, social support, and relationship anxiety in young adulthood. *Personal Relationships, 11*, 99-114.
- Rijken, A. J., & Liefbroer, A. C. (2009). Influences of the family of origin on the timing and quantum of fertility in the Netherlands. *Population Studies, 63*, 71-85.
- Rijken, A. J., & Thomson, E. (2011). Partners' relationship quality and childbearing. *Social Science Research, 40*, 485-497.
- Rodgers, B., & Pryor, J. (1998). *Divorce and separation: The outcomes for children*. York, England: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Roisman, G. I., Padrón, E., Sroufe, L. A., & Egeland, B. (2002). Earned-secure attachment status in retrospect and prospect. *Child Development, 73*, 1204-1219.
- Simpson, J. A. (1999). Attachment theory in modern evolutionary perspective. In J. Cassidy & P. R. Shaver (Eds), *Handbook of attachment. Theory, research, and clinical implications* (pp. 115-140). New York/London: Guilford.
- Simpson, J. A., & Belsky, J. (2008). Attachment theory within a modern evolutionary framework. In J. Cassidy & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), *Handbook of attachment. Theory, research, and clinical applications* (2nd ed, pp. 131-157). New York/London: Guilford.
- Sobel, M. E. (1982). Asymptotic intervals for indirect effects in structural equation models. In S. Leinhardt (Ed.), *Sociological methodology* (pp. 290-312). San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass.
- Steenhof, L., & Liefbroer, A. C. (2008). Intergenerational transmission of age at First birth in the Netherlands for birth cohorts between 1935 and 1984: Evidence from municipal registers. *Population Studies, 62*, 69-84.

- Thornton, A. (1980). The influence of first generation fertility and economic status on second generation fertility. *Population and Environment*, 3, 51-72.
- Trent, K., & Crowder, K. (1997). Adolescent birth intentions, social disadvantage, and behavioural outcomes. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 59, 523-535.
- Van IJzendoorn, M. H. (1995). Adult attachment representation, parental responsiveness and infant attachment: A meta-analysis on the predictive validity of the Adult Attachment Interview. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117, 387-403.

Table 1

Overview on Main Study Characteristics for Childless Respondents and Parents (N = 2,137)

Childless respondents (<i>n</i> = 864)	% or <i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
Gender (% female)	54.63		0 – 1
Age in years	28.81	6.53	18 – 49
Partner (% yes)	79.28		0 – 1
Parental divorce (% yes)	18.29		0 – 1
Current relationship quality with parents	0.23	0.64	-2.20 – 0.96
Family ties	4.01	0.61	1.38 – 5.50
Fertility intentions (% no)	17.48		
Fertility intentions (% don't know)	13.88		
Fertility intentions (% yes)	68.63		
Parents (<i>n</i> = 1,273)	% or <i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
Gender (% female)	65.43		0 – 1
Age in years	36.28	5.65	18 – 49
Number of children	2.01	0.92	1 – 11
Partner (% yes)	92.07		0 – 1
Parental divorce (% yes)	13.28		0 – 1
Current relationship quality with parents	-0.03	0.70	-2.20 – 0.96
Family ties	4.09	0.55	1.25 – 5.50
Fertility intentions (% no)	63.86		
Fertility intentions (% don't know)	13.43		
Fertility intentions (% yes)	22.70		

Table 2

Correlations Among Study Variables for Childless Respondents and Parents (N = 2,137)

Childless respondents (<i>n</i> = 864)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender	-						
2. Age in years	-.09*	-					
3. Number of children	-	-	-				
4. Partner	-	.25***	-	-			
5. Parental divorce	-	.05	-	-	-		
6. Current relationship quality with parents	.03	-.25***	-	-.05	-.21***	-	
7. Current family ties	.03	.03	-	.13***	-.14***	.34***	-
8. Fertility intentions	-.01	-.50***	-	-.04	-.02	.23***	.08 ⁺
Parents (<i>n</i> = 1,273)							
1. Gender	-						
2. Age in years	-.26***	-					
3. Number of children	-.05 ⁺	.35***	-				
4. Partner	-	-.07	.09**	-			

5. Parental divorce	-	-.10***	-.09**	-	-		
6. Current relationship quality with parents	.16***	-.18***	-.09**	.01	-.20***	-	
7. Current family ties	.12***	-.15***	-.03	.03	-.12***	.40***	-
8. Fertility intentions	.03	-.53***	-.40***	.02	.02	.15***	.12***

Note. Gender, partner, and parental divorce are dummy coded such that 1 = female, yes. ⁺ p < .10 * p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001.

Table 3

Ordinal Regression Predicting Fertility Intentions for Childless Respondents (n = 864)

<i>Independent Variables</i>	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
<i>Step 1 Demographic characteristics</i>								
Gender	-.40*	.16	-.41*	.16	-.40*	.16	-.40*	.16
Age	-.19***	.01	-.19***	.01	-.19***	.01	-.18***	.01
Partner	.62**	.21	.64**	.21	.56**	.21	.57**	.21
<i>Step 2 Parental home characteristics</i>								
Parental divorce			-.33 ⁺	.20	-.28	.20	-.20	.20
<i>Step 3 Family relationships</i>								
General family ties					.24 ⁺	.13	.11	.14
<i>Step 4 Parent-child ties</i>								
Relationship quality with parents							.33**	.13
Nagelkerke R^2	.280		.283		.287		.294	

Note. Gender, partner, and parental divorce are dummy coded such that 1 = female, yes. ⁺ $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 4

Ordinal Regression Predicting Fertility Intentions for Parents (n = 1,273)

<i>Independent Variables</i>	Estimate	<i>SE</i>	Estimate	<i>SE</i>	Estimate	<i>SE</i>	Estimate	<i>SE</i>
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
<i>Step 1 Demographic characteristics</i>								
Gender	-.48**	.14	-.47**	.14	-.52***	.15	-.54***	.15
Age	-.22***	.02	-.22***	.02	-.22***	.02	-.22***	.02
Number of children	-.85***	.10	-.86***	.10	-.86***	.10	-.86***	.10
Partner	.29	.25	.27	.25	.24	.25	.25	.25
<i>Step 2 Parental home characteristics</i>								
Parental divorce			-.34 ⁺	.19	-.28	.19	-.21	.20
<i>Step 3 Family relationships</i>								
General family ties					.33**	.13	.25 ⁺	.14
<i>Step 4 Parent-child ties</i>								
Relationship quality with parents							.18 ⁺	.11
Nagelkerke R^2	.396		.398		.403		.404	

Note. Gender, partner, and parental divorce are dummy coded such that 1 = female, yes. ⁺ $p < .10$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.