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GGP RESEARCH NOTE

Which Gender Equality Matters?

Gerda Neyer¹, Trude Lappegård², & Daniele Vignoli³

Does gender equality matter for fertility? We studied how three dimensions of gender equality affect the intentions of women and men to have a child in the near future: employment, financial situation, and equity in housework & care. Gender equality in each of these dimensions has a different impact on the childbearing intentions of women and men, but parenthood is still a dividing line between more and less gender equality.

Does Employment matter?

The impact of employment on childbearing intentions varies considerably by gender and whether individuals are already parents. For both childless women and men, being in full-time employment is a pre-condition for considering parenthood in the next three years. The importance of employment also holds if we consider the partner's employment status in our analysis. This gender-equal pattern vanishes once women and men have a child. Full-time employment loses its positive and significant predictive power for mothers' intentions to have a second child. However, if a mother's partner is employed, her intentions to have another child are noticeably stronger than if the partner is not employed. This contrasts with the childbearing intentions of fathers who have a child. Fathers who are employed are more likely to consider having a second child than fathers who are not employed, while their partners' employment has no decisive bearing on these intentions. There is also a gendered pattern among parents who have two or more children. For mothers with two or more children the employment status of their partner is still crucial in directing fertility intentions, irrespective of the woman's own employment status. For fathers, however, their partners employment status has no impact on their childbearing intentions.

Does Money matter?

We looked at how men and women view their financial situation and whether they judge it to be easy or tight. This is seen as an indicator of their ability to participate in social life and to engage in activities that they value, one of which may be having children. Our results suggest that there is a so-called u-shaped influence of economic difficulties on short-term fertility intentions after the first child. But the associations are weak and the lack of gender differences

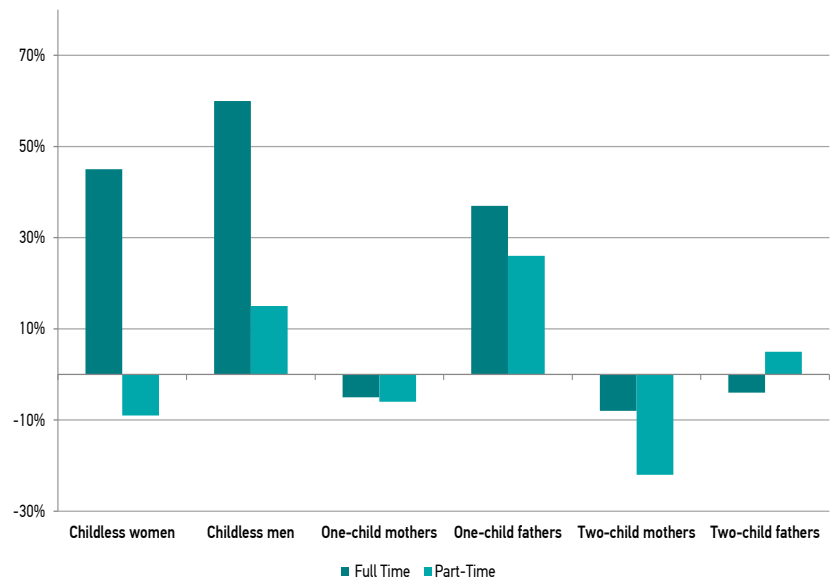


Figure 1 - Likelihood that employed men & women intend to have a child compared to non-employed men & women

Source: Generations and Gender Survey, Wave 1; Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Russia, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Georgia, Austria, Italy, Norway.

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is surprising. Since women usually deal with expenses covering basic, everyday household needs (food, body care, cleaning material, children's diapers, toys, clothes, and so forth) one would expect that difficulties making ends meet has a different influence on the childbearing intentions of women than of men. This is not the case. Given the impact and the gendered effects of employment and unemployment on childbearing intentions, one would also expect to find some gender differences and some stronger influence of economic pressure on childbearing intentions. The absence of such differences suggests that the impact of being employed or not has a different influence on childbearing intentions than the overall financial situation of the household. Perhaps this is because having a job or not is an objective situation, while "making ends meet" captures the respondent's perception of the household's economic situation. Overall, the results suggest that looking at the perceived economic situation is not sufficient to assess the link with fertility intentions. It is important to distinguish whether a tight financial situation is brought about by volition (such as the purchase of a house) or whether the economic difficulties are brought about by something other than one's own choice (such as unemployment) and are thus a sign of economic vulnerability.

Does housework matter?

We constructed two indices, one of men's contribution to household chores (preparing meals, doing the dishes, shopping for food, and doing the vacuum cleaning) and one of their contribution to childrearing tasks (dressing the children, putting them to bed, playing with them, and staying at home with them when they are sick). We also consider whether the respondent is satisfied with the division of household work or childcare tasks. For the childless, neither the division of household work nor their satisfaction with it influences their childbearing intentions significantly. Mothers who get support in household work from their partner are more inclined to intend to have another child in the next 3 years than mothers who do not get support. For fathers, the actual division of household work does not matter. It is their satisfaction with it that affects their childbearing intentions. The more satisfied they are with the division of household work, the more they tend to consider having another child.

This underlines the gendered impact of gender equality on childbearing intentions. For mothers, greater equality in the sharing of household tasks is associated with a higher inclination to have another child. For fathers, the actual division of work has no significant impact on their further childbearing intentions. A more balanced division of childrearing tasks between parents and satisfaction with this tend to increase childbearing intentions of mothers as well as of fathers. One-child parents who are satisfied with the sharing of childcare are more inclined to consider having a second child than those who are not satisfied. Surprisingly, for one-child fathers the actual sharing of childcare influences their childbearing intentions positively, while for one-child mothers there is no significant effect of the actual division of care work on their intentions to have a second child. Relief from care work, however, matters significantly for mothers of two children.

Which Equality Matters for Fertility Intentions?

In our analysis we have proposed and tested three dimensions of gender equality and their impact on childbearing intentions. Our results highlight the need to consider the different inequalities and to identify their substantive elements, not only in employment and in the family, but also in other gender-equality and fertility relevant areas of life. To look for inequalities in resources, in capabilities, in agency, and in the perception of fairness, provides a useful tool to locate the essential dimensions of inequality and to understand which gender (in)equalities matter for childbearing decisions.

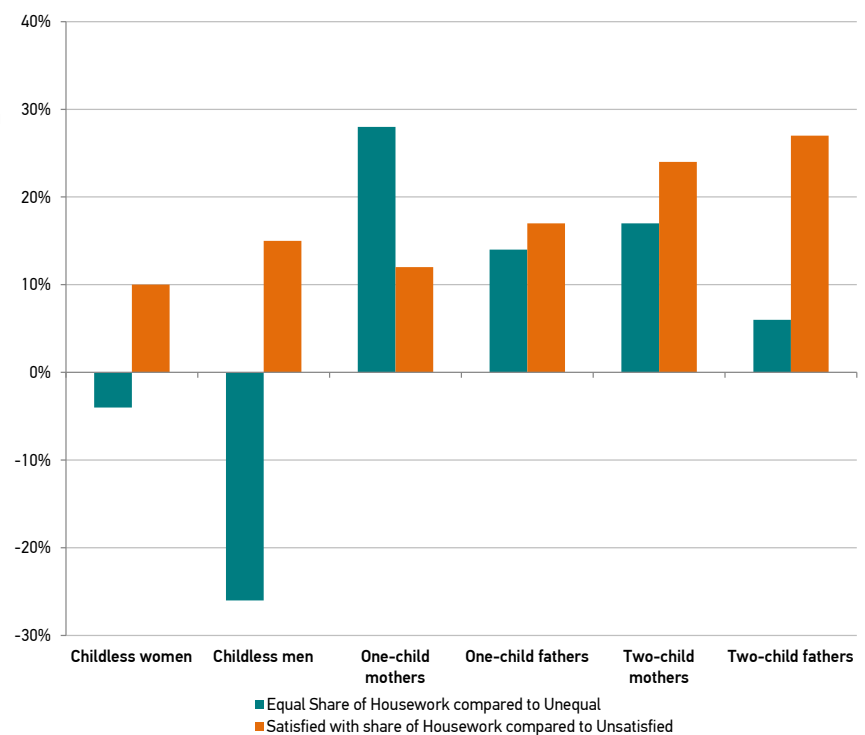


Figure 2 - Likelihood that men & women intend to have a child and its relationship to household work

Source: Generations and Gender Survey, Wave 1

This Research Note is based on the following paper

Neyer, Gerda, Trude Lappegård, and Daniele Vignoli. (2011) "Gender equality and fertility: Which equality matters?." *European Journal of Population/Revue européenne de Démographie* 29(3): 245-272.

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What is the Generations and Gender Programme?

Family relationships have changed a lot over the past few decades. Today's families differ considerably from the 1950s where a male breadwinner was supported by his doting housewife. Families have become less stable, more complex and highly diversified. The rapid ageing of European populations has also contributed to this rapid pace of change and new types of families have emerged alongside new relationships between generations and between genders. Understanding these changes will help us meet many of the challenges that societies face today such as: How do we support and care for older people? How is disadvantage inherited? why are women having fewer children? Answering such questions is the primary aim of the Generations and Gender Programme (GGP).

The GGP was launched in 2001 and now covers 19 advanced industrialized countries. It improves our understanding of how various factors affect family life by collecting high quality individual-level survey data on topics such as partnership formation & dissolution, fertility and intergenerational solidarity. Respondents are interviewed every 3 years and changes in the family life are recorded. Importantly, the GGP covers the whole adult life-course, between the age of 18 and 79, and is therefore the only dataset dedicated to the longitudinal and cross-national study of family life and generational relationships from early adulthood to older ages. Over time, the GGP follows respondents through relationships, marriages, parenthood, divorces, deaths and many of the trials and tribulations that people meet with, tracking the impact and consequences of these events at an individual and societal level. This survey data are complemented with indicators at the regional and national level through a contextual database and help us understand what part policy and other contextual factors play in family life.



Generations & Gender Programme

For more information, visit our website: <http://www.ggp-i.org>
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