Swedish Men's Fertility Intentions and Behaviours

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Abstract

This study examines three aspects of men's reproduction – reproductive attitudes, fertility intentions, and fertility outcomes. We seek to contribute to research that so far has mainly addressed low levels of fertility by focusing on women's employment and delayed childbearing. Sweden provides a unique context because of its explicit policies aimed at promoting gender equality in both work and family realms. We analyze longitudinal data from the Swedish Young Adult Panel Study (YAPS), waves 2003 and 2009. We use four attitudinal measures (fertility readiness; importance of non-family goals; importance of children; gender role attitudes), and study their influence on Swedish men's fertility intentions and behaviour. Having a sufficient income to support a child, suitable housing, and high personal importance of children decreases men's likelihood of delayed fertility intentions. Having a sufficient income also increases the likelihood of actual fertility within the six-year time period.

Introduction

Family patterns in Europe have undergone extensive changes in the past fifty years. The so-called "Golden Age of the Family" with high marriage and birth rates at relatively young ages, few divorces and the exceptionality of non-traditional family forms ended by the mid-/late 1960s. In the era of the Second Demographic Transition that evolved ever since, people increasingly refrain from long-term commitments with respect to partnerships as well as childbearing (van de Kaa 1987; Lesthaeghe 2010). By the 1990s, below-replacement level fertility has characterized nearly all societies in Europe, with the average number of children per woman being so low in many countries that the term "lowest-low fertility" was cointed (Kohler et al. 2002). Along with these trends, an increase in childlessness levels have been noted (Sobotka 2004). Comparing the completed fertility for different birth cohorts, a clear pattern of growing prevalence of childlessness, especially for women born in the 1960s, was seen nearly everywhere in Europe (Frejka and Sardon 2004). Studies have also shown diverging patterns to end the reproductive years of life without any biological offspring for women and men, with a higher proportion of men facing this scenario than women (see e.g. Dykstra & Hagestad 2007; Rønsen & Skrede 2006; Jensen 2010). In spite of growing interest in the topic, we have limited knowledge on motives and the decision-making process leading to increasing proportions of successive cohorts ending up childless or childfree, the latter term used to emphasize the voluntariness of this state (Agrillo & Nelini 2008). A recent review of research on fertility has moreover pointed out the continued main focus on women -- even though the shortcomings of such narrow view have been discussed in the mid-1990s (see Goldscheider & Kaufman 1996) -- which is likely to impair our understanding of this complex issue (Balbo et al. 2013).

It is well known that men start family formation at higher ages than women, and they have lower family size ideals than women, at least in Europe. Also the gap between the ideal and the actual (achieved) family size is often larger for them than for women. Moreover, although very few people consider a life without children as ideal, a somewhat higher proportion of men than women declare the no child option as their personal ideal (Testa 2012). Earlier studies indicated that an important reason of a couple remaining childfree is a decision made by the male partner in the relationship and the woman accepting it (see Agrillo & Nelini 2008). More recent research on couple decision-making also suggests that in case of differences in childbearing intentions

among members of a couple, usually the party not wanting a(nother) child succeeds (Thomson 1997; Thomson and Hoem 1998, but see Berrington 2004 for contrasting results). This again points to the importance of studying men and their views and role in fertility decision-making.

In this paper we aim to deepen our understanding on male fertility. We study three aspects of men's reproduction – reproductive attitudes, fertility intentions, and fertility outcomes. We seek to shed more light on how these aspects are interrelated and study how their interplay influence men's reproductive patterns. As much of the research on fertility in the European context has sought to address low levels of fertility by focusing on women's employment and delayed childbearing, we aim to contribute by providing better insight on men's fertility dynamics. We focus on Sweden, a unique context because of its explicit policies aimed at promoting gender equality in both work and family realms (Oláh & Bernhardt 2008). Our study addresses the role of fertility readiness, the importance of non-family goals (career, leisure, wealth) along with that of children, and of gender role attitudes on Swedish men's fertility intentions and behaviour.

Theoretical considerations [to be developed]

There is a long tradition to acknowledge the importance of attitudes for childbearing decisions in the demographic literature. The Second Demographic Transition theory itself has a main focus on changes in attitudes and aspirations to explain contemporary fertility and partnership trends, as altruism has been increasingly replaced by individualism and the urge for self-fulfillment (van de Kaa 1996; Lesthaeghe 2010). Attitudes play an important role also in the theory of *Reasoned Action* (Fishbein & Ajzen 1975) and built on that, the theory of *Planned Behaviour*, in short TPB (Ajzen 1991; Ajzen & Fishbein 2005), developed in the field of social psychology, both of which have been increasingly utilised in demographic studies on family building in recent decades (see e.g. Billari 2009; Philipov 2009a; Dommermuth et al. 2011), addressing the role of intentions as a key issue in the behavioural decision-making process also with respect to childbearing. These theories (and studies) have enhanced our understanding in general of the relationship between attitudes, norms, intentions and behaviour, that is, about the processes of how attitudes and norms about childbearing influence the intentions to become a parent or have further children. Also the relationship between intentions and actual behaviour has been extensively studied (see e.g. Schoen et al. 1999; Philipov 2009b; Morgan & Racking 2010; Kapitány & Spéder 2012).

We will build upon these insights when studying Swedish men's reproductive decision-making and outcome.

Data and methods

Data for this paper come from the Swedish Young Adult Panel Study (YAPS). Designed by Professor Eva Bernhardt at Stockholm University, and with Statistics Sweden in charge of all fieldwork ,YAPS concentrates on young adults in the prime ages for family formation, that is cohabitation, marriage, and childbearing. Data were collected via both mail and web surveys conducted in 1999, 2003, and 2009. The first survey was conducted in spring 1999 with a sampling frame based on three cohorts, at the time aged 22, 26, and 30 years old. The response rate was 65% for a total of 2820 respondents. In spring 2003, a second survey was sent to the original participants as well as to a new cohort of 22 year olds, which resulted in a total of four cohorts (born in 1968, 1972, 1976, and 1980). With the additional cohort and a response rate of 72%, the total number of respondents in 2003 was 2816. The sample for the current study is restricted to men who had no children, and whose partner/spouse was not pregnant at the 2003 wave. Our working sample includes 827 respondents. Fertility intentions and all independent variables are measured in 2003. Data from the 2009 wave and public register are used to measure fertility outcomes.

Dependent variables

Our focus is on men's fertility intentions and behaviour. Our first dependent variable is fertility intentions in 2003. Intentions are measured with the question: 'When do you think you will have your first child?' Responses included less than two years, two to five years, more than five years, and don't know. Our second dependent variable is fertility behaviour between 2003 and 2009. This is measured with a dichotomous variable that indicates whether a man had a child during this time period or not.

Independent variables of interest

As in this study we seek to understand the influence of men's attitudes on their fertility intentions and behaviour, we use four attitudinal dimensions. The first attitudinal dimension measures four

aspects of fertility readiness, as discussed by Hobcraft and Kiernan (1995). Respondents were asked about conditions that might be important in thinking about having children. These statements are: 'I live in a good partner relationship,' 'I have completed my education,' 'I (we) have a sufficient income to support a child,' and 'My (our) housing situation is suitable for a child.' Respondents could answer yes or no.

The second dimension measures three aspects of the importance of non-family goals. Respondents were asked how important a series of activities was to them. Importance of leisure is measured with the statement, 'To have a lot of time for sports, hobbies and other leisure time activities.' Importance of money is measured with the statement, 'To earn own money.' Importance of career is measured with the statement, 'To be successful in my work.' Responses to all three statements are on a scale from 1 ('unimportant') to 5 ('very important').

The third attitudinal dimension measures importance of children. Respondents were given a series of statements about children. We conducted factor analysis in order to determine whether we could create one or more scales. Principal component analysis resulted in two components. The first component measures personal importance of children and includes the following four statements: 'To have children is part of what gives life meaning,' 'I enjoy children,' 'I think I can be satisfied with my life if I am a good parent,' and 'Spending time with the family is more rewarding than work.' Cronbach's alpha is .756. The second component measures social importance of children and includes the following four statements: 'Something is missing if a couple never has children,' 'It is my duty to society and/or to my (extended) family to have children,' 'Children need siblings,' and 'To have children is a confirmation of a good partner relationship.' Cronbach's alpha is .674. All statements include responses that range from 1 ('don't agree at all') to 5 ('agree completely'). Therefore, the two scales range from 4 to 20, where higher values indicate more importance on personal/social importance of children.

The fourth attitudinal dimension measures importance of gender role attitudes (in line with Puur et al. 2008; Goldscheider et al. 1010). We use a question about perceived ideal division of labour, 'What do you think would be the best arrangement for a family with preschool children?' Responses include: 'Only the man works and the woman takes the main responsibility for home and children,' 'Both work, but the woman works part-time and takes the main responsibility for home and children,' 'Both work, but the man works part-time and takes the main responsibility for home and children,' and 'Both parents work roughly the same hours

and share responsibility for the home and children.' In order to emphasize egalitarian gender roles, we created a dichotomous variable in which those who chose the response that both parents should work and share responsibility for the home and children are compared to all others.

Control variables

We control for cohort, relationship status, education, work hours, and income, all measured in 2003. Cohort is measured with four dummy variables: 1972, 1976, and 1980, with 1968 as the reference category. Relationship status is measured with four dummy variables: single, in a non-coresidential relationship, and married, with cohabiting as the reference category. Education is measured as a dummy variable for whether the respondent completed at least two years of university education. Work hours is measured with a dummy variable with those who work 35 hours or more per week compared to those who work less than 35 hours per week. Income is measured with four dummy variables: 100,000 to 199,999 SEK, 200,000 to 299,999 SEK, and 300,000 SEK or more, with less than 100,000 SEK as the reference category.

Analytical strategy

We first present descriptive statistics of our variables. In order to analyse fertility intentions and behaviour we estimate a series of regression models. First, we use a multinomial regression model because fertility intentions are measured with a categorical variable. We estimate coefficients and odds ratios for men who intend to have a child in 2 to 5 years, men who intend to have a child in more than 5 years, and men who don't know when they will have a child, in relation to men who intend to have a child in less than 2 years. Second, we use a logistic regression to analyse our dichotomous fertility behaviour variable.

Results

Descriptive results

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics of our study variables. In our sample of 23-35 year old Swedish men in 2003, just over half intended to have a child within five years, with 18 percent intending to have a child within the next two years and 35 percent intending to have a child in

two to five years. Another 27 percent intended to wait more than five years, and 20 percent indicated that they did not know when they might have a child. In the six year period following their initial intentions, 36 percent of the men actually had a child.

We consider several factors that men might consider in planning for children. In terms of fertility stimuli, 58 percent of men said they had completed their education and 56 percent of men indicated that they were living in a good partner relationship in 2003. Not quite half (48 percent) said they had a sufficient income to support a child, and only 36 percent indicated that they had suitable housing for a child. In terms of the importance of non-family goals, importance of making money had the highest mean at 4.45 out of 5 points. Looking at the means, it is apparent that men rate leisure time and career as important. In terms of importance of children, men rate personal factors, such as enjoying children, much higher than social factors, such as duty (15.5 versus 9.5). Finally, over three-quarters of men responded that the best arrangement for a couple with children is that both parents should work and share responsibility for the home and children.

The younger cohorts are overrepresented somewhat, with 35 percent of men born in 1980, 33 percent of men born in 1976, 22 percent born in 1972, and 10 percent born in 1968. About 38 percent of men in the sample are single, with the remaining men in some kind of relationship. 39 percent of men were in a cohabiting relationship, 19 percent of men were in a non-cohabiting relationship, and only 4.5 percent of men were married. One-fifth of men had university education and 69 percent worked 35 or more hours per week. The income distribution was 24 percent less than 100,000 SEK, 24 percent 100,000 to 199,999 SEK, 37 percent 200,00 to 299,999 SEK, and 14 percent 300,000 SEK or more.

Multivariate results

Fertility intentions

Table 2 shows the results from the multinomial logistic regression of fertility intentions. Coefficients and odds ratios are shown for men who intended to have a child in 2 to 5 years, men who intended to have a child in more than 5 years, and men who did not know when they wanted a child, with the reference category those men who intended to have a child in the next two years. Two of the four fertility stimuli variables had a significant effect on men's fertility intentions. First, men who said they had a sufficient income to support a child were significantly

less likely than men who did not feel they had a sufficient income to say they intended to have a child in 2 to 5 years, intended to have a child in more than 5 years, or did not know when they would have a child relative to intending to have a child within two years. For example, men who said they had a sufficient income were 93 percent less likely to say they would delay having a child for more than 5 years than men who said they did not have a sufficient income. Second, men who said they had suitable housing were significantly less likely than men who did not feel they had suitable housing to intend to have a child in 2 to 5 years, intend to have a child in more than 5 years, or to not know when they wanted a child. For example, men who said they had suitable housing were 77 percent less likely to say they would delay having a child for more than 5 years than men who said they did not have suitable housing.

Personal importance has a similar effect on men's fertility intentions. Men who placed more emphasis on the personal importance of children were less likely to delay having children or to say they do not know when they will have children. For example, each point increase on the personal importance scale reduced the likelihood of planning for children in more than five years by 30 percent. In terms of the other independent variables of interest, neither gender role attitudes nor any of the three importance of non-family goals variables had any significant effect on men's fertility intentions.

Not surprisingly, relationship status affects fertility intentions. Single males were significantly more likely than cohabiting males to say they will delay having children for two to five years or more than five years relative to planning for children within the next two years. Single males were also more likely to indicate that they do not know when they will have children. Men in non-cohabiting relationships were significantly more likely than cohabiting men to say they intend to have a child in more than five years. In contrast, married men were significantly less likely than cohabiting men to delay having children, either in two to five years or more than five years.

Cohort has limited effect on men's fertility intentions apart from two findings. First, men in the youngest cohort (born in 1980) were significantly more likely than men in the oldest cohort (born in 1968) to say they intended to have a child in more than five years. Second, men in the 1972 cohort were significantly less likely to be unsure of their fertility plans than men in the 1968 cohort. There were no significant effects of education, work hours, or income on men's fertility intentions.

Fertility behaviour

Table 3 shows the results of the logistic regression of fertility outcomes by 2009. Consistent with its effect on fertility intentions, perception about sufficient income had a positive effect on men's fertility. Specifically, men who felt they had sufficient income to support a child in 2003 were 2.5 times as likely as men who did not share this feeling to have had a child by 2009. Although perception of suitable housing and personal importance of children both had a negative effect on delaying having children, neither variable had a significant effect on actual fertility. As with fertility intentions, importance of non-family goals and gender role attitudes had no significant effect on actual fertility.

Consistent with effects on delayed fertility intentions, single men and men in non-cohabiting relationships were less likely than cohabiting men to have had a child by 2009. In fact, single men were 93 percent less likely and men in non-cohabiting relationships were 62 percent less likely to have had a child compared to cohabiting men. While married men were less likely than cohabiting men to intend to delay having children, they were not significantly more likely to actually have a child in the time period.

Men in the middle two cohorts (1972 and 1976) were significantly more likely than men in the oldest cohort (1968) to have a child by 2009. It may be that the older men had passed their prime ages for having children. Again, education, work hours, and income have no significant effects on actual fertility.

Conclusion [to be written]

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Fertility intentions in 2003	
Within the next 2 years	17.6
2 to 5 years	34.8
More than 5 years	27.2
Don't know	20.3
Fertility outcome	
Had child between 2003 and 2009	36.2
Cohort	
1968	10.4
1972	22.1
1976	32.6
1980	34.8
Relationship status	
Single	37.7
Non-cohabiting relationship	19.0
Cohabiting	38.6
Married	4.5
University education	20.3
Works 35+ hours per week	68.7
Income	
Less than 100,000 SEK	23.7
100,000 to 199,999 SEK	23.5
200,000 to 299,999 SEK	37.0
300,000 SEK or more	13.7
Fertility stimuli	
Live in a good partner relationship	56.2
Have completed education	58.3
Have a sufficient income to support a child	48.1
Have suitable housing	36.0
Importance of non-family goals	
Importance of leisure time (1-5)	4.18
Importance of making money (1-5)	4.45
Importance of career (1-5)	3.90
Importance of children	
Personal importance (4-20)	15.53
Social importance (4-20)	9.47
Gender role attitudes [both parents should work and share responsibility for home and children]	77.9

Note: all numbers are percentages except measures of importance of non-family goals and importance of children

Table 2. Multinomial logistic regression of fertility intentions (ref = less than 2 years)

	2 to 5 years			More than 5 years			Don't know		
	B	Exp(B)	Sig	B	Exp(B)	Sig	B	Exp(B)	Sig
Cohort (ref = 1968)									
1972	-0.694	0.500		-1.439	0.237		-1.253	0.286	*
1976	0.184	1.202		-0.030	0.971		-0.761	0.467	
1980	0.714	2.043		2.033	7.637	*	-0.047	0.954	
Relationship status (ref = cohabiting)									
Single	2.229	9.290	*	3.429	30.859	**	3.099	22.167	**
Non-cohabiting relationship	0.725	2.065		1.352	3.865	*	0.448	1.565	
Married	-1.581	0.206	*	-20.129	0.000	***	0.309	1.361	
Education	0.252	1.286		0.246	1.279		-0.312	0.732	
Works 35+ hours per week	-0.202	0.817		-0.046	0.955		0.136	1.145	
Income (ref = Less than 100,000 SEK)									
100,000 to 199,999 SEK	0.737	2.090		1.183	3.265		0.948	2.581	
200,000 to 299,999 SEK	0.946	2.575		1.181	3.259		0.828	2.289	
300,000 SEK or more	0.797	2.219		1.011	2.748		1.109	3.030	
Fertility stimuli									
Live in a good partner relationship	0.070	1.073		-0.139	0.870		-0.307	0.735	
Have completed education	0.418	1.518		0.022	1.022		0.540	1.716	
Have a sufficient income to support a child	-1.643	0.193	***	-2.686	0.068	***	-2.053	0.128	***
Have suitable housing	-1.219	0.295	**	-1.473	0.229	**	-1.784	0.168	***
Importance of non-family goals									
Importance of leisure time	-0.306	0.736		-0.199	0.819		0.007	1.007	
Importance of making money	-0.087	0.917		-0.393	0.675		-0.313	0.732	
Importance of career	0.084	1.088		0.075	1.078		-0.105	0.901	

Importance of children									
Personal importance	-0.168	0.845	*	-0.360	0.698	***	-0.390	0.677	***
Social importance	0.045	1.046		-0.003	0.997		0.028	1.028	
Gender role attitudes	0.090	1.095		0.033	1.033		0.376	1.456	

Note: * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Table 3. Logistic regression of fertility outcomes by 2009

	B	Exp(B)	Sig
Cohort (ref = 1968)			
1972	1.364	3.913	**
1976	1.213	3.363	*
1980	0.563	1.756	
Relationship status (ref = cohabiting)			
Single	-2.697	0.067	***
Non-cohabiting relationship	-0.982	0.375	**
Married	0.865	2.376	
Education	0.536	1.709	
Works 35+ hours per week	-0.471	0.625	
Income (ref = Less than 100,000 SEK)			
100,000 to 199,999 SEK	0.148	1.159	
200,000 to 299,999 SEK	0.197	1.218	
300,000 SEK or more	0.204	1.226	
Fertility stimuli			
Live in a good partner relationship	-0.515	0.597	
Have completed education	-0.031	0.970	
Have a sufficient income to support a child	0.931	2.537	*
Have suitable housing	0.210	1.234	
Importance of non-family goals			
Importance of leisure time	0.048	1.050	
Importance of making money	0.118	1.125	
Importance of career	-0.175	0.839	
Importance of children			
Personal importance	0.063	1.065	
Social importance	0.052	1.053	
Gender role attitudes	-0.153	0.858	

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$