Male Fertility Decision-Making Process and Social Network Using Retrospective Data

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Extended abstrakt

This paper looks into the importance of social network on male fertility in the Czech Republic. We investigate the decision-making process of having a first child by use of individual's network of informal relationships with parents, siblings, parents-in-law, friends and neighbors. We employ sociological theories, theory of lifestyle preferences, and socio-psychological theoretical framework of the ''Theory of Planned Behavior". Philipov et al., 2006; Billari et al., 2009 draw upon the theory of planned behavior in relation to fertility intentions by emphasizing the role of social network in the fertility decision-making process. We extend the existing research on fertility intentions and the theory of planned behavior by providing an analysis based on retrospective data. Drawing from a new study on Czech men (data gathered at the end of 2011 on a nationally representative sample of Czech men aged 40-55), we examine how pressure from family, friends, neighbors influenced male fertility intentions to have a first child. Given the retrospective aspect of our data, we do not use directly the intentions to have a first child as dependent variable. We constructed a variable that measures the time elapsed from the age at which men considered to have a first child until the age they really have their first child. We recoded this time as follows: no plans/spontaneous – the first child was born (almost) unplanned, standard plan –2 to 4 years between considering to have a first child and the birth of the first child, and long plan, 5 or more years between considering to have a first child and the birth of the first child. Socio-demographic, attitudes, ideational and perceived control factors are used as background determinants in our analysis.

Our analysis uses information from 886 male respondents aged 40-55 in 2011, having at least one biological child and experiencing at least one co-residential relationship.

Variables in the equation:

Dependent variable: time elapsed from the age at which men considered to have a first child until the age they really have their first child. This variable comprises three categories: no plans/spontaneous – the first child was born (almost) unplanned, standard plan –2 to 4 years between considering to have a first child and the birth of the first child, and long plan, 5 or more years between considering to have a first child and the birth of the first child.

We use a set of **independent variables** measuring the importance of social network, attitudes and perceived control.

Social norms are measured as the approval or disapproval to become a father for the first time given by a person from the social network considered to be important by respondents.

Attitudes measured several aspects of the value of a child on a scale from 1 to 6. Based on this, an index variable was created. A variable measuring the commitment for family and work was included in the analysis. It measures whether the respondent's core interest was his family, his work or hobbies, or if he is committed both to family and work (ambivalent).

The **perceived control** variables are evaluations of importance of 5 factors (Income, Job, Education, Housing, and Health) as conditions of becoming a parent.

We use five **socio-demographical control variables:**

1) Co-residential union divides respondents into two groups: the first group includes respondents who had cohabited or were married at the time of birth of the first child; the second one includes respondents who were not living in co-residential union with the mother of their first child.

2) "*First child born under socialism*" shows whether respondent's first child was born before 1990 (1990 because of possible conceptions during 1989 and birth in 1990).

3) Age at the time when respondent's first child was born

4) Education comprises four categories: elementary, lower secondary, complete secondary and tertiary education.

5) Enrollment at birth of the first child shows if respondent became a father while still attending school.

Descriptive statistics:

Table 1. Descriptive statistics. Fathers, Czech Republic 2011.

	%	N
Dependent variable		
Unplanned	69	615
Standard term	19	168
Long term	12	103
In co-residential relationship at birth of the first child		
Yes	796	89
No	99	11
1st child born under socialism		
Yes	59	526
No	41	369
Educational level at birth of first child		
Elementary education	3	30
Lover secondary education	44	398
Complete secondary education	40	361
Tertiary education	12	106
Total	**100**	**886**

Results:

In the equation contrasting standard term and no plan in Model 2, results show that that being in co-residential union at the time of birth of the first child, being older and better educated and being enrolled at school have positive effect on standard planning in contrast to unplanned fertility, whereas the birth of the child after 1990 and elementary education favor unplanned fertility.

Being in co-residential union (cohabitation or marriage) implies negotiation about future fertility plans. People who entered co-residential union might have done so to make the first step to establish a family. Older fathers usually have longer time span available to think about becoming a parent. Better education requires longer time of fertility postponement; also the better educated usually have children later. This prolongs the time span between considering having a child and realization of the plan.

The positive effect of school enrollment on standard term might be due to the de-standardization of the educational paths that were typical for the socialistic educational system. The shift toward unplanned fertility after 1990 can be due to emergence of new opportunities. People did not consider becoming a parent when they were too young. Elementary education category might comprise all teenage-fathers, men that became fathers before they reached secondary school diploma. From the economic point of view, there is much less to lose due to fatherhood for men with only elementary education that for those who had invested a lot to get educated.

If respondent's first child was planned, the effect on being in the category standard term is positive. With the rising value of child there is higher chance to plan to become a parent between 2 and 4 years in comparison to unplanned fertility.

Social network has a positive effect on having a child within the standard period of time (fulfilling the standard term). Regarding the perceived control variables, Income played no role in men's decision to become a parent. High importance of having a job, being educated and importance of housing had all positive effects on fulfilling fertility intentions within the standard period of time, whereas the rise of importance of health for childbearing came along with higher chance to become a father unplanned.

Similar scenario can be seen in the equation contrasting no plan and long term in Model 2.

Being in co-residential union favors long term realization over unplanned fertility, having the first child under socialism also favors the long term. This might be a consequence of the lack of other future plans and projections people had before 1990. Thinking about being parent occurred at a younger age than after 1989 – a period characterized by changing social and economic system and emergence of new opportunities.

The older respondent was at the birth of his first child, the more probable he had realized his fertility intentions longer - 5 or more years. The effect of all educational groups is large and positive. There is no effect of respondents view on the planning status of the first child on the length of realization of fertility intentions.

Increasing child value does raise the odds to plan to become a father for a longer time. Family committed respondents preferred childbearing without longer planning, and commitment to work did not have an effect on the length of the realization. There was a positive effect of approval of fertility plans from the first most important person on long term realization, but the approval from the second most important person favored unplanned childbearing. The effect of all perceived control variables excepting the importance of a job was negative, and had favored unplanned fertility over long term realization.

Table 1. Estimated effects and standard errors (in brackets) of multinominal logistic model of the length of plans to have a first child. Men in the Czech Republic, 2011. Number of respondents = 886.

No plans is the base category.	M1		M2	
	Standard term	**Long term**	**Standard term**	**Long term**
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
In co-residential union	1.171**	0.303	1.063*	0.118
	(0.440)	(0.458)	(0.448)	(0.479)
1st child born under socialism	-0.186	-0.00278	-0.169	0.0685
	(0.198)	(0.259)	(0.205)	(0.275)
Respondent's age at birth of the 1st child	0.0698**	0.190***	0.0633*	0.195***
	(0.025)	(0.028)	(0.027)	(0.030)
Education at birth of the 1st child (Complete secondary ref.)				
Elementary	-0.435	0.997	-0.223	0.927
	(0.701)	(0.687)	(0.737)	(0.708)
Lover secondary	0.120	0.309	0.112	0.173
	(0.196)	(0.253)	(0.207)	(0.269)
Tertiary	0.330	0.354	0.130	0.315
	(0.280)	(0.342)	(0.295)	(0.365)
Enrolled at birth of the 1st child	0.411	0.0506	0.0865	0.0974
	(0.526)	(0.698)	(0.551)	(0.704)
1st child planned			0.253	-0.000670
			(0.226)	(0.285)
Child value			0.0343	0.163
Commitment to work and family (Ambivalent ref.)				
Family committed			-0.319	-0.413
			(0.235)	(0.306)
Work committed			-0.0975	-0.00836
			(0.228)	(0.283)
Social network - approval from the most important persons				
1st important person			0.272	1.271***
			(0.292)	(0.310)
2nd important person			0.132	-1.205**
			(0.362)	(0.434)
3rd important person			0.577	0.692
Perceived control				
Income			0.00431	-0.0331
			(0.090)	(0.123)
Job			0.0514	0.119
			(0.095)	(0.129)
Education			0.107	-0.119
			(0.080)	(0.108)
Housing			0.0133	-0.0691
			(0.067)	(0.080)
Health			-0.177*	-0.161
			(0.072)	(0.094)
constant	-4.208	-7.459	-4.467	-7.767