

And yet they stabilise! The effect of children on marital stability

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Short abstract

The available literature is not conclusive regarding the impact of children on marital stability. Both theoretical deductions and empirical findings provide arguments in favour of stabilising and destabilising impact of children. Moreover, it is also argued that a number of children in equation for marital instability is potentially endogenous and without acknowledging for this the estimate of children's effect on marital stability may be biased.

This study contributes to the on-going discussion by analysing the effect of children on marital stability while controlling for endogeneity of fertility and selection into marriage. It is done through applying a multiproces multilevel model of fertility, marriage formation and marriage disruption where the processes are linked in two ways. First, the prior outcomes of every process are included as covariates of two other processes. Second, the person-specific heterogeneity components of all processes are allowed to be correlated across the equations. The data come from the Polish Generations and Gender Survey 2010/2011.

I found that the presence of children is associated with higher marital stability and the magnitude of the effect is bigger for marriages with at least two children than for marriages with one child. The stabilising effect of children decreases as they age but it does not diminish completely. Controlling for unobserved factors, that may jointly influence the three processes, has not eliminated the stabilising effect of children. On the contrary, the effect has become even stronger. Although it was expected that the unobserved characteristics, on which women differ, should be related to the normative orientation of an individual, the positive estimate of a correlation between process of marital disruption and fertility is interpreted in terms of the pattern of disadvantage. In this way the study adds also to the debate on driving forces of family destabilisation in Central and Eastern Europe.