

# Intra-family Exchange and Europe's Low Fertility

Robert G. White  
University of Wisconsin - Madison

Laura Bernardi  
Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research

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## Abstract

Understanding the pathways to the emergence and persistence of low fertility in Europe remains a fundamental challenge. We examine the importance of changing patterns of resource exchanges among family members for both the timing of first births and cumulative fertility. We hypothesize that shifts in exchanges among family members of material support and labor play an important role in the postponement of fertility. We analyze a new dataset of over 500 kinships collected in eight European countries and show that intra-family exchanges of wealth and child care are significantly related to both age at first birth and cumulative fertility. Employing both family and kinship fixed effects, we further show how family structure, distinguished by co-residency patterns and measures of proximity to near kin, has important independent effects on the postponement of childbirth.

## **Intra-family Exchange and Europe's Low Fertility**

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*Extended Abstract*

The persistence of below replacement fertility in Europe remains among the most important long-term challenges for labor market policy, health expenditure planning and pension projections. Yet, while the potential consequences for long-run economic growth across Europe are clear, the demography of lowest-low fertility remains poorly understood. The emerging consensus over the importance of postponement of childbirth and a commensurate potential for recovery presents hope for a demographic solution but few answers to the many questions concerning both the emergence and persistence of below replacement fertility. Traditional explanations of fertility account for increasingly smaller shares of fertility trends alongside the continued decoupling of fertility from marriage across Europe. Current explanations instead emphasize changing marriage patterns, trends in human capital attainment and growing uncertainties in labor markets (Rindfuss et al., 2003; Billari and Kohler, 2004; Kogel, 2004; Morgan and Taylor, 2006). However, just as the postponement of marriage drives the declines in marital fertility in many regions of Europe, so does the rise of non-marital fertility and the shortening duration of marriage complicate these relationships. Similarly, uncertainties in economic outlook and the persistence of inflexibility in workplace arrangements counter a growing number of policy interventions designed to lower the costs of child bearing. Given the regularity with which European countries have entered into below-replacement fertility and the

ongoing ageing of Europe, distinguishing the factors driving lowest-low fertility in Europe remains a critical challenge.

We hypothesize that shifts in intra-family exchanges of both material and socio-emotional support play an important role in the continued increases in the postponement of childbirth in Europe. Family traditions across Europe have involved a wide array of exchanges among kin that have historically played important roles in the growth of both agrarian societies and urban enterprises. Transfers of material resources and labor occurring between distant kin, in-laws, and siblings and across generations have long been central to family formation and entrepreneurial development. While estimating the importance of intra-family exchanges for individual welfare remains challenged by the availability of adequate data, most studies of intra-family exchange confirm the continued frequency of intra-family exchanges. These studies largely emphasize inter-generational exchanges between parents and children. Soldo and Hill (1993, 1995) provided early estimates of the magnitude of parent-child exchanges of time and financial resources in the United States and found that the net flow of these exchanges occurred from parents to their adult children. This finding has been confirmed in Europe (Kohli et al., 2000; Kohli, 2004; Grundy, 2005; Litwin et al., 2008) and is robust to distinctions between time and money transfers (Attias-Donfut et al. 2005). While the magnitude of the net flow from parents to children has been shown to decline and ultimately reverse with parents' age (Grundy, 2005; Kohli, 2004; Litwin et al., 2008), up to seventy-five percent of parents have been reported to make transfers to their children (Grundy, 2005). Given the prevalence of such transfers and their potential importance during periods of increasing economic uncertainty in Europe (Kurz, 2004), such transfers may figure prominently in adult children's decision-making.

Decision-making concerning the timing of fertility may be particularly subject to influences from intra-family exchanges. Following schooling, adult children are at early stages in their careers with commensurately low income relative to their expected future earnings. Whether adult children have formed independent households, the labor market uncertainty characteristic of early careers may pose considerable insecurity concerning long-run financial stability. Moreover, exchanges of child care have been among the most common traditional exchanges from parents to children. The availability of kin members' child care may play a particularly important role in the cost-benefit calculus involved in fertility decision-making given the continued dissolution of multiple generation households and growing geographic residential mobility. Gains in women's labor force participation further constrain the availability of grandparents' child care while raising the demands for care among adult children. In such a context, it is unsurprising that the availability of institutional child care has been negatively correlated with age at first birth (Del Boca, 2002). While studies adopting alternate measures of child care availability such as the number of open child care spaces (Hank and Kreyenfeld, 2003) or emphasizing higher parity births (Kravdal., 1996; Andersson, Duvander and Hank, 2004) find more mixed evidence, larger studies using longitudinal data report significant effects of the availability of high quality local child care on the timing of first births (Rindfuss et al., 2007). The limited number of studies including measures of informal care supplied by grandparents find similar effects on fertility timing (Del Boca 2002; Hank and Kreyenfeld 2003). To the extent that kin provided child care is substitutable for such institutional child care, kin members stand to play potentially important roles in their family members' fertility choices.

We analyze a new dataset of over 500 kinships collected from eight countries in Europe to investigate the relationship between intra-family exchanges and fertility. Individual

respondents in nineteen rural and urban field sites across Italy, France, Germany, Austria, Poland, Croatia, Sweden and Russia described complete family kinships in lengthy interviews with ethnographers. In addition to reporting their genealogies, respondents reported the demographic characteristics of family members and extensive information about exchanges of material resources, labor and job assistance among family members. We take advantage of the unique nature of genealogical data to construct a dataset of individuals across families within each kinship and across all kinships that includes the full set of available measures of socio-demographic characteristics and exchanges. This dataset includes all individuals who are currently at risk of fertility and their predecessors. The inherent age structure and generational ordering of genealogical data allows reconstructing individuals' cumulative fertility, age at first birth and birth intervals. All adults in this dataset may be distinguished as both children in their birth families and then later as parents or singletons during adulthood. Considering the full set of possible unions across 570 individual respondents then gives rise to a dataset of 7,625 fertility histories. Figure 1 illustrates an example of the different families which may be constructed from a genealogy. The parents in the family labeled one are children in families two and five. Similarly, the parents in family two are children in families three and four. Defining such families in a given genealogy gives rise to the full sample of individual fertility histories. Tables 1 and 2 report the distributions of age at first birth and cumulative fertility in the resulting sample.

We summarize the frequency and value of different types of intra-family exchanges and report correlates of exchange frequency with determinants to fertility outcomes. We examine patterns in transfers from parents to their adult children, among adult children and between more distant kin and adult children and evaluate the importance of such transfers for both the timing of

fertility and cumulative fertility. We find that intra-family exchanges are related to age at first birth and cumulative fertility. We confirm the finding that intergenerational exchanges from parents to children remain the most prevalent types of exchanges and find significant bivariate correlations between material resource exchanges and age at first birth. We also document the prevalence of exchanges of child care support among families and the relationship between child care exchanges and age at first birth. Variations in child care exchanges across both urban and rural areas as well as different country settings are significantly related to variations in age at first birth and cumulative fertility.

While these correlations are suggestive, both the frequency of intra-family exchanges and their importance for recipients' behaviors are likely to be conditioned on three sets of family structural attributes. First, geographic proximity poses an obvious constraint to intra-family exchanges. Distance affects both the ease of contact between family members and related exchanges of information concerning the demand, supply, contingencies and obligations of exchanges that may be important for initiating exchanges. While there are few datasets with measures of family characteristics, location and exchanges, Fors and Lennartsson's (2008) evidence of the positive effects of geographical proximity on the frequency of contacts between parents and children is suggestive of ties that may also facilitate material exchanges. Analyzing the dyadic ties that are available in the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study, Van Gaalen et al. (2008) similarly find that higher average geographical distance between siblings decreases the annual frequency of contact across parent-child dyads. Institutional settings characterized by local or national policies concerning child care, family leave and flex time pose an additional set of geographic factors with potentially important consequences for exchanges. However, accounting for such effects has proven difficult. The correspondence between welfare policies

and family structure (Kohli 1999, 2004) and the likely effects of family structure on the frequency and magnitude of exchanges raises important identification concerns.

Intergenerational support has also been reported across countries with varying welfare regimes (Kohli 1999; Daatland and Lowenstein 2005; Fritzell and Lennartsson 2005), and explicit efforts to relate policy attributes to patterns of exchange have generated inconclusive findings (Litwin et al., 2008).

Second, the availability of kin presents perhaps the greatest constraint to exchanges. The likelihood of any individual family member receiving a transfer is increased by an order of magnitude that is directly tied to the number of family members. While geography and family members socio-economic status reflect important mediating factors, current family size and the age distribution of living family members reflect attributes of family structure that pose direct effects on the potential supply of transfers. Although adult children with large sibships have been shown to have more contact with their siblings than their parents (Downey, 1995; Tomassini et al. 2004; Uhlenberg and Cooney 1990), they remain at greater risk of receiving transfers given the larger set of prospective donors. Greater differences in ages between kin may also correlate with differences in incomes that are associated with different stages of lifetime career trajectories, further raising probabilities for transfers. Differential propensities to transfer between men and women suggest that gender composition may be further attribute of family structure for intra-family exchange. For instance, there is evidence of higher frequencies of inter-generational contacts between mothers and children than between fathers and children (Fors and Lennartson, 2008) and between daughters and parents than between sons and parents (Spitze and Logan, 1990; Grundy and Shelton, 2001; Fors and Lennartson, 2008). These patterns of contact may underlie the observed declines in probabilities of contacting parents with

increases in the number of sisters (van Gaalen et al., 2008). More importantly, they may also similarly shape exchanges of resources between parents and children, situating sisters in unique positions to affect patterns of inter-generational transfers.

The third set of family structure attributes concerns family cohesiveness. Individual family size is secondary to the strength of family emotional and economic ties that may ease exchanges among family members. Whether defined by emotional closeness (Rossi and Rossi, 1990; Lye, 1996; Motel and Szydik, 1999), the responsive to individual needs (Grundy, 2005) or broader measures of family cohesion (van Gaalen et al., 2008), alternate measures of family cohesion consistently correlate with frequencies of contact.

We consider each of these sets of family attributes to examine the importance of family structure for both the frequency of exchanges and their consequences for fertility outcomes. We pay particular attention to the age and gender composition of near kin and to measures of family cohesiveness. Our findings that sisters' fertilities are more strongly correlated than all siblings' fertilities (White and Bernardi, 2008) reflects potential differences in the family influences on fertility that may also have important correspondence with transfers. Whether such ties exert multiplying effects on fertility outcomes remains uncertain.

We undertake multilevel analysis to account for both nuclear family-level and kinship-level effects and show how gender composition and family age distributions mediate the correlations between exchange intensity and both the timing of first births and cumulative fertility. Comparing estimates of fertility outcomes controlling for fixed family-level, kinship-level and both family- and kinship-level effects further distinguishes the interactions between kinship structure and exchange effects on fertility. These findings reflect possible pathways by which family members may influence one another's fertility decision-making. Accounting for



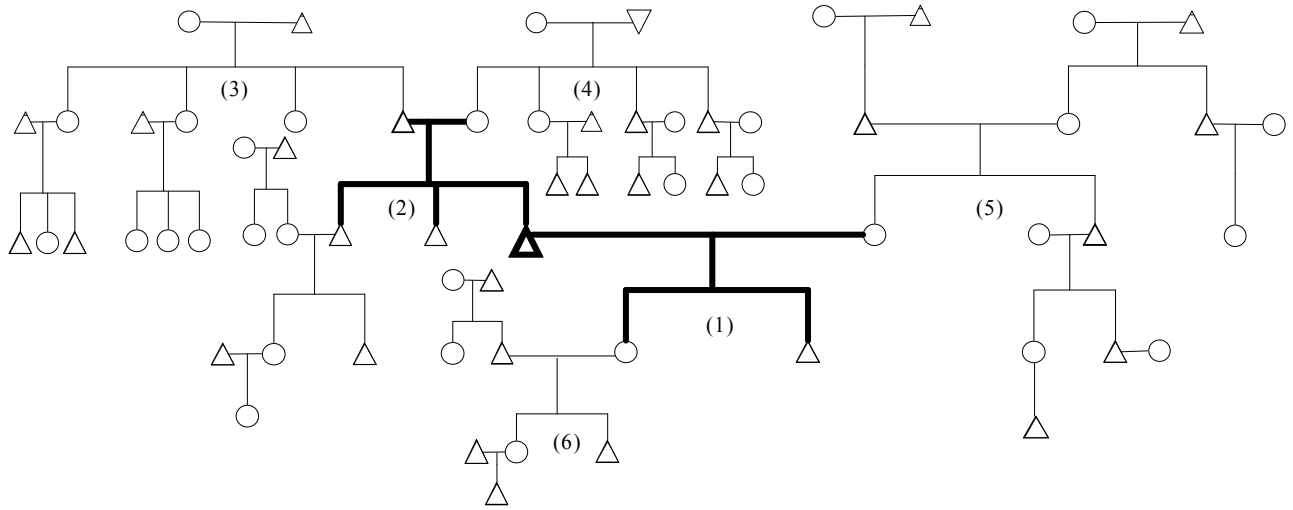
such measures of social exchange also provides evidence of the consequences of family influence on fertility outcomes. These differences in family structure and exchange frequencies may underlie the historical geographical divide between family structure and marriage traditions that Hajnal (1965) first attributed to regional trends in European fertility and which remain central in accounts of Europe's low fertility.

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**Figure 1. Selecting Families within Three Degrees of Kinship**



**Table 1. Summary: Mean Age at First Birth by Birth Cohort and Select Covariates**

	Cohorts														
	1928-1937		1938-1947		1948-1957		1958-1967		1968-1977		1978-1987		Total		
Country	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	N
Austria	26.14	0.79	22.79	0.63	21.12	0.64	22.69	0.55	23.34	0.60	21.21	1.31	23.02	0.28	1,232
Germany	23.90	0.74	23.41	0.93	22.92	1.17	24.21	0.66	23.30	1.06	21.07	0.93	23.54	0.51	534
France	24.89	0.74	25.30	0.85	24.38	0.68	26.74	0.79	26.45	0.60	21.11	0.69	25.25	0.44	857
Croatia	24.14	0.70	23.94	0.69	22.88	0.45	23.60	0.78	23.92	0.74	20.18	1.25	23.66	0.33	675
Italy	26.90	0.69	25.43	0.35	24.08	0.43	24.80	0.61	25.58	0.56	22.94	0.70	25.44	0.28	1,870
Poland	25.01	1.02	25.08	0.63	23.16	0.34	22.47	0.47	23.37	0.53	20.76	0.50	23.54	0.30	1,678
Russia	24.90	1.31	27.58	1.67	24.94	1.32	24.43	1.28	22.43	0.84	19.57	0.86	24.48	0.56	316
Sweden	24.69	1.16	23.59	0.83	24.69	0.82	25.83	1.28	26.24	0.89	21.41	1.68	24.72	0.46	464
<i>Region</i>															
Eastern Europe	24.60	0.59	24.65	0.42	23.21	0.29	23.09	0.35	23.39	0.39	20.58	0.41	23.63	0.21	3,203
Western Europe	26.32	0.46	24.52	0.33	23.22	0.35	24.35	0.39	24.80	0.40	22.15	0.65	24.61	0.20	4,422
<i>Rural/Urban</i>															
Urban	25.99	0.48	25.65	0.37	24.32	0.37	26.21	0.50	25.03	0.63	20.47	0.65	25.40	0.24	2,690
Rural	25.62	0.50	24.06	0.33	22.82	0.28	23.06	0.29	24.14	0.34	21.43	0.45	23.79	0.18	4,935
<i>Education</i>															
No University Degree	25.38	0.37	24.07	0.29	22.82	0.24	23.29	0.29	23.57	0.31	21.00	0.46	23.80	0.15	5,181
University Degree	28.54	1.23	26.51	0.56	26.14	0.60	26.67	0.56	26.78	0.50	22.29	0.74	26.41	0.28	1,462
<i>Socio-Economic Status</i>															
Poor	22.14	0.78	24.32	0.96	23.54	0.68	23.26	1.00	22.52	0.92	20.84	0.84	23.13	0.39	515
Middle Class	25.90	0.40	24.46	0.28	22.91	0.27	23.81	0.31	24.34	0.32	21.28	0.46	24.17	0.17	5,655
Wealthy	27.16	0.96	25.14	0.57	24.62	0.47	24.38	0.64	25.23	0.90	22.28	0.97	25.16	0.31	1,216
<i>Employment</i>															
Not Full-Time	25.96	0.38	24.32	0.28	22.41	0.27	23.49	0.37	24.33	0.41	21.51	0.51	24.18	0.17	4,436
Full-Time	28.61	2.15	26.73	0.67	24.42	0.34	24.34	0.39	24.35	0.44	21.62	0.51	24.64	0.23	2,833
<i>Total</i>	25.75	0.37	24.56	0.26	23.22	0.23	23.87	0.27	24.31	0.30	21.31	0.40	24.24	0.15	7,625
N	989		1,219		1,518		1,443		1,426		1,031		7,625		

Note: Weighted sample of women only. Ages included imputed ages from reported age intervals. Eastern Europe includes Germany, Croatia, Poland and Russia. Western Europe includes Austria, France, Italy and Sweden.

**Table 2. Summary: Mean Cumulative Fertility by Birth Cohort and Select Covariates**

	<i>Cohorts</i>														
	<i>1928-1937</i>	<i>1938-1947</i>	<i>1948-1957</i>	<i>1958-1967</i>	<i>1968-1977</i>	<i>1978-1987</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>N</i>	
<i>Country</i>															
Austria	2.55	0.48	2.35	0.26	1.97	0.19	1.27	0.13	0.98	0.11	0.32	0.06	1.48	0.08	1,232
Germany	1.98	0.19	1.51	0.14	1.21	0.15	1.37	0.11	0.75	0.11	0.34	0.12	1.27	0.06	534
France	2.25	0.19	1.96	0.12	1.86	0.16	1.35	0.08	1.01	0.13	0.16	0.06	1.50	0.05	857
Croatia	1.97	0.22	1.62	0.22	1.41	0.13	1.05	0.25	0.98	0.12	0.22	0.06	1.28	0.06	675
Italy	2.46	0.16	1.85	0.14	1.22	0.11	1.26	0.07	0.78	0.07	0.24	0.06	1.35	0.05	1,870
Poland	2.54	0.21	2.03	0.21	2.02	0.11	1.63	0.10	1.02	0.09	0.38	0.06	1.53	0.05	1,678
Russia	2.32	0.27	1.66	0.21	1.69	0.16	1.52	0.17	1.06	0.15	0.52	0.11	1.40	0.07	316
Sweden	1.39	0.33	1.36	0.16	1.39	0.18	1.56	0.17	1.13	0.12	0.11	0.05	1.22	0.06	464
<i>Region</i>															
Eastern Europe	2.28	0.13	1.84	0.13	1.83	0.08	1.47	0.09	0.99	0.07	0.37	0.05	1.45	0.04	3,203
Western Europe	2.40	0.15	1.97	0.10	1.54	0.10	1.29	0.06	0.90	0.05	0.25	0.04	1.41	0.03	4,422
<i>Rural/Urban</i>															
Urban	1.96	0.10	1.59	0.08	1.46	0.09	1.25	0.06	0.78	0.08	0.16	0.04	1.30	0.04	2,690
Rural	2.60	0.17	2.10	0.11	1.73	0.09	1.37	0.07	0.97	0.05	0.34	0.04	1.47	0.03	4,935
<i>Education</i>															
No University Degree	2.45	0.13	2.07	0.11	1.78	0.08	1.48	0.06	1.08	0.05	0.36	0.04	1.59	0.03	5,181
University Degree	1.44	0.19	1.50	0.13	1.45	0.13	1.22	0.08	0.73	0.06	0.17	0.04	0.95	0.05	1,462
<i>Socio-Economic Status</i>															
Poor	1.99	0.25	2.36	0.30	1.70	0.31	1.72	0.22	1.16	0.15	0.52	0.12	1.59	0.10	515
Middle Class	2.45	0.13	1.97	0.10	1.71	0.07	1.32	0.06	0.95	0.05	0.32	0.03	1.45	0.03	5,655
Wealthy	2.20	0.21	1.70	0.13	1.62	0.16	1.47	0.11	0.72	0.09	0.12	0.04	1.31	0.05	1,216
<i>Employment</i>															
Not Full-Time	2.46	0.11	2.03	0.09	1.77	0.09	1.39	0.09	1.07	0.06	0.32	0.04	1.59	0.04	4,436
Full-Time	2.42	0.36	1.47	0.14	1.54	0.08	1.31	0.05	0.77	0.05	0.23	0.03	1.10	0.03	2,833
<i>Total</i>	2.36	0.11	1.93	0.08	1.66	0.07	1.34	0.05	0.92	0.04	0.30	0.03	1.42	0.03	7,625
<i>N</i>	989	1,219	1,518	1,443	1,426	1,031	7,625								

Note: Weighted sample of women only. Ages included imputed ages from reported age intervals. Eastern Europe includes Germany, Croatia, Poland and Russia. Western Europe includes Austria, France, Italy and Sweden.