

Public Childcare, Family Ideology and Fertility in Sweden

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- extended abstract -

Since the 1970s, fertility in Western Europe has fallen dramatically and stagnated well below replacement level. Far from being a new phenomenon, low fertility has attracted increasing political attention. In order to motivate potential parents, many national governments and EU-politicians consider implementing family policies, which are assumed to support childbearing. Such policies include parental leave, child benefits and child care services. Contrary to many other social policies, which are subject to retrenchment, family policies are expanded rather than cut back. Therefore, the question remains whether family policies are in fact instrumental to successfully increase fertility? While many researchers point to the fact that the impact of family policies on fertility may depend on the type of policy (e.g.: money transfers, services) and/or the economic situation, comparatively little attention has been attributed to the ideological aspects of family policies. Concentrating on childcare, this paper investigates the interrelationship between family ideology, family policies and fertility outcome in Sweden.

Sweden is a country in which the childcare system is well established. 53% of children aged 0-6 years are in public childcare and most children of working parents have a childcare slot (Oláh and Bernhardt 2008). Simultaneously, fertility is comparably high with a Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of 1.88 in 2007 (SCB 2008). While several studies suggest a causal relationship between childcare provision and total fertility rate, Andersson et al. (2004) do not find a significant effect of childcare in Sweden. This result might indicate that potential parents can make their childbearing decision independently from childcare conditions as the quality of the Swedish system is on a sufficiently high level across the whole country. Moreover, the authors suggest that the development of childcare over time might explain the absence of significant coefficients as parents' perception of local childcare provisions does also depend on its overall level.

Bringing up the normative aspects of the childbearing decision, Bernhardt and Goldscheider (2006) propose that gender role attitudes shape the fertility behavior of the young Swedish population. Based on the analysis of the survey "Family and Working Life in the 21st Century" they find that more traditionalist men are more

likely to become a parent at young ages than men with more egalitarian attitudes. This relationship does not occur for Swedish women.

In order to better capture the relationship between childcare, family ideology and fertility, I assume a conditional effect of childcare provision and the acceptance of parents who make use of childcare services outside the family. We assume that an extended provision of care facilities has a positive impact on the transition to first birth in those provinces in which there is a high acceptance of working mothers sending their pre-school children to public childcare. In regions where social acceptance for public care arrangements is low the care system remains less considered in individuals' childbearing decision.

To empirically investigate this relationship, a multi-level model is computed including childcare provision. I use the two waves of the survey "Family and Working Life in the 21st Century" which provide information on individual gender role and family attitudes. Calculating first birth intensities between the first and the second wave, I estimate a multi-level model with individual characteristics, regional level characteristics and an interaction term of individual level and regional level variables. As regional units, I use the Swedish provinces (län). In order to account for regional differences in the family ideology, the individual answering patterns to the survey items concerning gender role ideals are aggregated (for an evaluation of this procedure, see Kravdal 2006). Moreover, other regional level variables which enter the model, e.g. public childcare provision in the provinces, are taken from *Statistics Sweden*. In order to control for family ideologies when investigating the effect of childcare on fertility, we model the interrelation of the two variables as interaction term.

Bibliography

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