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Well-being consequences of fertility trajectories childless women and men
– is there a happiness penalty of non-realized fertility intentions?

Abstract

This research aims to understand the well-being consequences of different childbearing trajectories. We follow childless people during 11 years and ask what kind of well-being outcomes has the transition to parenthood on the one hand, and whether there are any well-being consequences of remaining childless. Furthermore, is there any penalty if childbearing intentions haven't realized, and intentions remained unfulfilled? Fertility trajectories are constructed according the number of children, and according the durability of intentions (continuous postponement, abandonment). Well-being at the start of the investigation and after 11 years is compared. Using both material and subjective measures of well-being, trade of between different aspects of well-being is also considered. On the one side we expect increased subjective well-being in case of transition to parenthood, on the other side we assume happiness penalty in case of non-intended childlessness. Using fixed effect models we reveal different well-being consequences of fertility transitions of woman and man. Abandoner, who could not realize their fertility intention during the 11 years, seems to suffer happiness penalty.

Extended abstract

Research on well-being, as outcome of childbearing behaviour is quite meagre, especially if we consider only longitudinal studies. Research on inequalities and poverty find usually that children are overrepresented in poverty and getting a child is a risk-factor becoming poor. However, in case of a detailed analyse it turns out that getting a child cause a temporary income decline, or slipping into temporary poverty. (Duncan 1994, Bradbury at al. 2001) On the other side, it is often assumed, that children are sources of subjective well-being, such as happiness, satisfaction (Billari 2008, Aassve at al. 2011). Research results, especially of longitudinal nature, are however ambivalent. Some studies found, that children make us happy only for a while (Myrskylä and Margolis 2014), and this is concentrating around the time of childbearing. After a phase, some years after having the child, our happiness seems to returns to the level well before childbearing, and this correspond to the *set point* theory of satisfaction. Other studies however show that having children make us happy in a long run, if income loses and other changes in life course are taken into account (Pollmann-Schult 2014). Taken all together, explicit quantitative research on consequences of childlessness, especially concerning the non-intended childlessness is meagre. Studies touch this issue indirectly, if analysing the transitions to parenthood, since childlessness is a reference in this studies. Therefore, it is not surprising the studies do not differentiate among different ways of childlessness, and their objective and subjective consequences. As long childlessness, especially unintended childlessness seems to be on the rise in several European countries it is worth to look at the outcomes. Namely, what is the economic situation of childless people, and how satisfied are they with their life. Is there any turnover between material situation and

subjective well-being? With other words: could subjective well-being compensate material losses of childbearing?

Data and method

Data

We use 4 waves of the Hungarian Generation and Gender Survey (Turning Points of the Life-course) that spans 11 years. We select a sub-sample based on the fertility status of the respondents at the first wave; childless women and men below age 49 are selected, and followed during the 11 year period.

Measures of outcomes

We experiment with several measures of well-being. Two indicators are created that measures material well-being, namely: equivalent income (elasticity 0.5 is used) and an index of general deprivation (measured with 11 item scale). One of the subjective measures, the so called “making ends meet” question is also closely related to material well-being. The other subjective measures are the followings: i) overall life satisfaction; ii) satisfaction with future prospects, iii) anomie-scale (5 item scale).

Trajectories

We constructed two times three trajectories.

i) Our first considerations only includes whether childless women and man (in 2001) becomes parent and if yes, one or two (or more) children were born until 2012, during the 11 year period.

ii) Our second consideration distinguishes among those deliberately wanted to have children at the first wave. Three outcome in 2012 is considered: a) parent, b) non-parent, but intend to have a child in the 4th wave, c) non-parent, but abandoned her/his intention, and do not intend to have a child in the 4th wave.

(In the next step we want to differentiate intention also according intention in the 2nd and 3rd wave.)

Methods

Analysis of variance and fixed effect (FE) models are used, that are expected to explain changes in economic and subjective well-being. FE model controls time invariant heterogeneity, however FE may include also time- invariant variables where coefficient may vary over time. (Alison 2009)

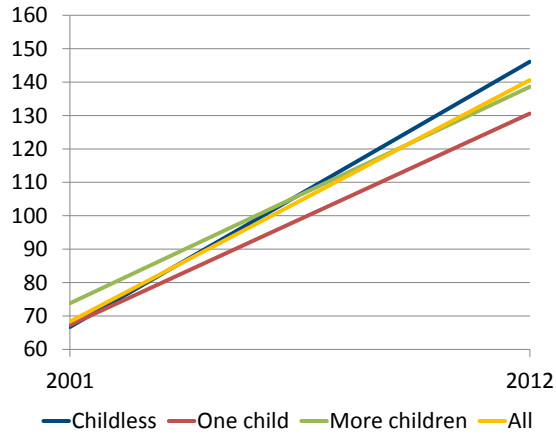
Preliminary results

Figures below show clearly the specific and oppositional developments of material well-being and of subjective well-being (overall life satisfaction). At the first glance, regarding transition to parenthood, it seems that parents have a happiness gain in relation to childless (Figure 1 and 2)

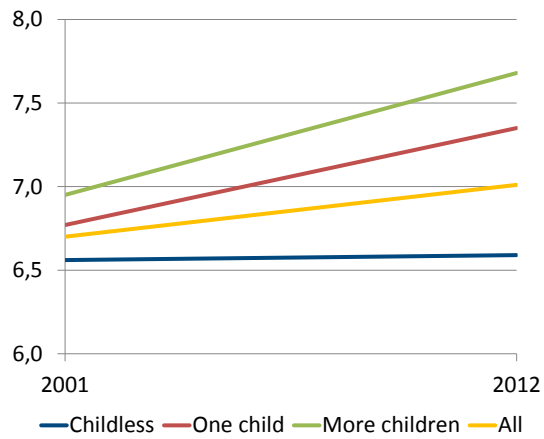
Taking into consideration the intention related fertility trajectories, postponer clearly differ from abandoner. As long postponer experience the increase of material well-being, abandoner's economic position deteriorated during the 11 year period. (Figure 3,4, 5)

Figure 1 and 2

Level of economic well-being (equivalent income, $e=0.5$) in 2001 and 2012, according to fertility carrier of childless in 2001



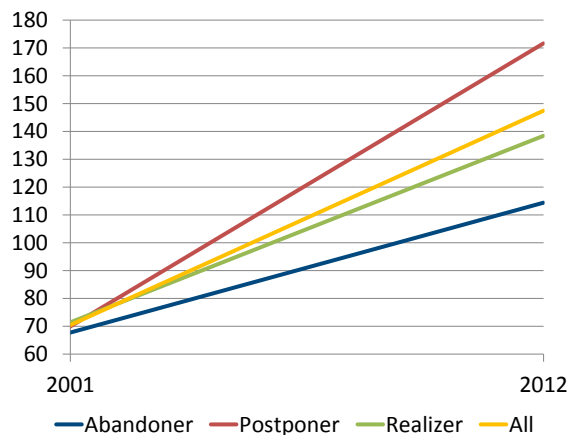
Level of overall life-satisfaction in 2001 and 2012, according to fertility carrier of childless in 2001



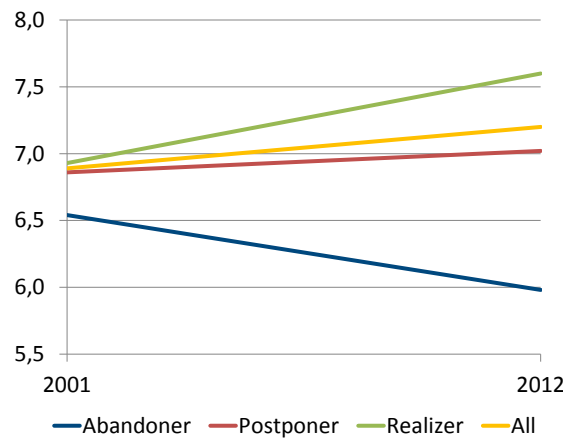
Method: Analysis of variance

Figure 3,4 and 5

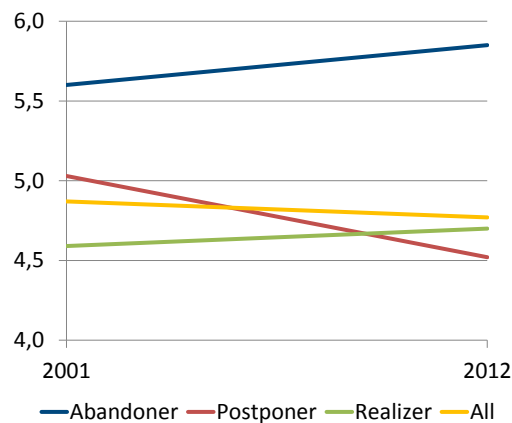
Level of economic well-being (equivalent income, $e=0.5$) in 2001 and 2012, according to realization of fertility intentions, 2001 childless people



Level of overall life-satisfaction in 2001 and 2012, according to realization of fertility intentions, 2001 childless people



Level of social anomie (alienation) in 2001 and 2012, according to realization of fertility intentions, 2001 childless people



Method: Analysis of variance

Preliminary FE models

Table 1.

Effects of (not) having children: Change in the level of equivalent income and overall life satisfaction

	Equivalent income		Overall life satisfaction	
	B	beta	B	beta
Childless	0,344	0.076***	-0.532	-0.112***
2 and more children	-0.055	-0.010	0,131	0,022
ref: one child				
Control: gender, age, age2, level of education				

Table 2.

Effects of non-realization: Changes in the level of equivalent income, and overall life satisfaction and in the level of subjective deprivation scale

	Equivalent income		Overall life satisfaction		Subjective deprivation	
	B	beta	B	beta	B	beta
Postponer	0.638	0.122***	-0,526	-0,109***	-0,067	-0,009
Abandoner	-0.132	-0.016	-1,190	-0,167***	-0,602	-0,112***
Ref: Realizer						
Control: gender, age, age2, level of education						

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