

Gender Roles and Fertility Intentions in Poland, Hungary, Belgium and Norway

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1. The purpose of the study

The study aims at investigating how women's attitudes towards gender roles affect the child-bearing intentions in four countries: Poland, Hungary, Belgium and Norway, which differ remarkably in terms of the transition from a traditional to modern perception of gender roles in the family i.e. the transition from the male breadwinner family model to the dual earner-dual career model. Following discussions on interdependencies between fertility and the conflict between gender attitudes and practices of sharing household duties (Neyer, Lappergard & Vignoli 2011; Matysiak (2012); Goldscheider, Bernhardt & Lappegård 2014), we try to illustrate different dimensions of this conflict in the countries under study and their impact on fertility intentions.

2. Data and methods

The analysis made use of the data from the first wave of the Generations and Gender Survey conducted in Hungary (2004/2005), Belgium (2008-2010), Poland (2010/2011) and Norway (2007/2008). We focused on mothers with one or two children living with their partners. Firstly, in the descriptive approach views on gender roles (declarative attitudes) and executed sharing household and childcare duties between parents (practiced attitudes) were compared to illustrate levels of conflict between them.

Two variables were defined to measure a degree of social approval of the gender equality (the attitude variable) and a degree of equal sharing household duties between mothers and fathers ('burden of responsibilities' variable). The attitude variable was defined by use of 10 questions on respondent's views on gender roles. Its values result from aggregating answers according to the Likert's scale. This variable measures to what extent the gender equality is approved by respondents (Table 1).

Table1. Construction of the attitude variable

Opinions on the gender equality

The following opinions were taken into account:

1. A woman can have a child as a single parent even if she doesn't want to have a stable relationship with a man
2. A woman has to have children in order to be fulfilled
3. When parents are in need, daughters should take more caring responsibility than sons
4. In a couple it is better for the man to be older than the woman

5. On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do
6. If a woman earns more than her partner, it is not good for the relationship
7. A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his/her mother works
8. Children often suffer because their fathers concentrate too much on their work
9. If parents divorce it is better for the child to stay with the mother than with the father
10. When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women

Respondents selected one answer according to Likert's scale coded as follows:

fully agree = 1; agree = 2; neither agree or disagree = 3; disagree = 4; fully disagree = 5.

These codes were aggregated – the higher value takes the sum, the more egalitarian attitude is declared.

The 'burden of responsibilities' variable was based on 10 questions referring to parents' involvement in home work and care for children (Table 2). This variable indicates how these family responsibilities are shared between women and men.

Table 2. Construction of the 'burden of responsibilities' variable

Household responsibilities including child care – 'housework and childcare' variable

The following statements on different activities run within families with children up to 14 years are taken into account:

1. dressing the children or seeing that the children are properly dressed
2. putting the children to bed and/or seeing that they go to bed
3. staying at home with the children when they are ill
4. playing with the children and/or taking part in
5. taking the children to/from school, day care centre, babysitter or leisure activities
6. preparing daily meals
7. doing the dishes
8. shopping for food
9. cleaning the house
10. doing small repairs in and around the house

Respondents selected only one answer for each statement according to Likert's scale coded as follows: always respondent's partner or somebody else = 1; most often respondent's partner = 2; equally a respondent and a partner = 3; most often a respondent = 4; always a respondent = 5.

These codes were aggregated – the higher value takes the sum, the higher is the respondent's share (burden) of these responsibilities.

These two variables were used to estimate logit models of intentions to have a second child and a third child among women living in a couple. In addition, the set of explanatory variables were included: age, education, labour market status, household income, the number of children and age of the youngest child.

By confronting attitudes towards gender roles with practised sharing of family responsibilities by gender we defined different types of the incompatibility between views on gender roles and practised gender roles (Table 3). In our study on fertility intentions and the conflict between the attitudes towards gender roles and gender role practices we focused on these dimensions of the conflict.

Table 3. Gender roles attitudes vs. gender role practices

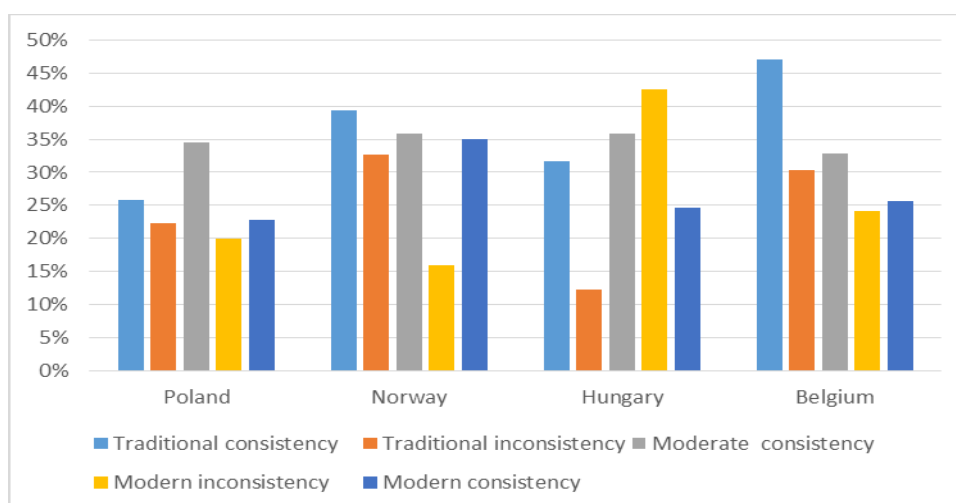
Attitudes towards gender roles	Burden of responsibilities		
	Low	Moderate	High
Traditional	Traditional inconsistency		Traditional consistency
Moderate		Moderate consistency	
Modern	Modern consistency		Modern inconsistency

3. Selected results

The descriptive analysis pointed to different degrees of acceptance for the gender equality and the division of household duties in four countries under consideration. Norwegian and Belgian families showed the lower conflict between declarations on gender roles and practiced gender roles in comparison with families in Poland and Hungary.

Moreover, we found how the views on gender roles confronted with their practices stimulate/destimulate mothers' fertility intentions. In Poland mothers belonging to the 'moderate consistency' group declared the highest fertility intentions. In Hungary this observation refers to the 'modern inconsistency' group of women i.e. mothers with modern gender roles attitudes showed the highest intentions despite the high burden of family responsibilities. Interestingly, Hungarian mothers of traditional views and the low burden of responsibilities were less inclined to have an additional child. This finding disagrees with the opinion that traditional views on gender roles would support fertility if the responsibilities are not exclusively allocated to mothers. In Norway, mothers of the 'modern inconsistency' group showed the lowest intentions. Having in mind that on one hand changes in the gender roles are the most advanced among Norwegian women, and on the other hand - their highest burden of responsibilities is remarkably lower than in Hungary and Poland, this finding seems to illustrate that the impact of the conflict between the gender attitudes and practices is sensitive to the context. Finally, in Belgium the most inclined to have another child were mothers of the 'traditional consistency' group.

Figure1. Intentions to have a second child/a third child by types of the incompatibility between views on gender roles and practiced gender roles*



*The percentage of mothers who declared their intentions

Modelling results confirmed the influence of gender attitudes and the type of inconsistencies between declarations and practice on the intentions to have more children among mothers of one/two children in four countries considered. They also demonstrated how relevant is the cultural context, which - however - played a different role in each country.

When controlling for other covariates, the significant impact on intentions to transit to the second/third child in Poland was revealed for the incompatibilities between modern gender attitudes of mothers and their high burden of family responsibilities (the 'modern inconsistency') in comparison to traditional views and high burden of responsibilities (the 'traditional consistency' was the reference category). In addition, low household income and inactivity significantly reduced fertility intentions.

In Hungary, the 'traditional inconsistency' limited significantly fertility plans of mothers while the 'moderate consistency' stimulated these plans (as compared to the 'traditional consistency'). Moreover, mothers with tertiary education were more inclined to have an additional child than those with lower levels of education.

Modelling results for Norway confirmed that the conflict of the 'modern inconsistency' type significantly reduced fertility plans. In Belgium the 'traditional consistency' stimulated fertility plans. Moreover, low household income showed a positive impact on plans.

Summing up, our results depicted that different dimensions of the incompatibilities between views on gender roles and their practice may be relevant in different cultural and social contexts. The incompatibilities of the modern type (modern views and high burden of responsibilities) lowered fertility plans in Poland and Norway while their lack under the traditional consistency stimulated mothers to have more children in Belgium. In Hungary the picture is more ambiguous. Here, the positive impact of high education on fertility intentions seems to clarify why mothers with modern views on gender roles declared the highest plans despite their high burden of responsibilities.

The context differences between the countries considered reflect in fact different advances in the gender revolution as well as different family policy regimes. In the more extended discussion on the findings presented these aspects should be referred to.

References:

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