

Job Characteristics and Birth Plans and Transitions in Sweden

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This study examines job characteristics and birth plans and transitions in Sweden. Tensions between work and family increased at the end of the 20th century (Winslow 2005). The current study seeks to address whether one's birth plans and transitions are affected not only by one's own job characteristics but also by a partner's job characteristics. Are people considering how their partner might combine work and family?

Caldwell (2004) concludes that the trend of low fertility will persist, and he links this to female labor force participation. However, there has been a reversal in the relationship between women's work and fertility. Before the 1980s, the association was negative, while it became positive in the 1980s and strongly positive in the 1990s (Rindfuss, Guzzo, and Morgan 2003). Indeed, two recent Swedish studies find that women who have established themselves in the labor force are more likely to begin childbearing (Andersson and Scott 2005, Bernhardt and Goldscheider 2006). In addition, income is positively related to the transition to motherhood (Andersson and Scott 2005). On the other hand, egalitarian gender role attitudes seem to have no significant effect on women's transition to first birth, while there was a negative effect for men (Bernhardt and Goldscheider 2006). This study goes beyond previous research in examining the effect of particular job characteristics on women and men's birth plans and transitions. Additionally, we consider partner's job characteristics as potentially important influences on fertility.

We use data from the 1999 and 2003 Swedish survey on “Family and Working Life in the 21st Century.” Our sample is limited to 924 respondents who participated in both surveys, were in a relationship (steady or cohabiting partner) at the 1999 interview, and reported that they/their partner was working at least 20 hours per week at the 1999 interview. Respondents were asked about their birth plans and actual births (between 1999 and 2003). Respondents were also asked about the characteristics of their job as well as the characteristics of their partner’s job. Positive job characteristics include: “it pays well,” “it provides good career possibilities,” “it makes it easy to take parental leave,” and “it makes it easy to work part-time to have time for one’s family” (the latter two were combined into one question with regards to partner’s job). Negative job characteristics include: “it involves a lot of overtime work,” “it involves a lot of business travel,” “it involves work at night, in the evenings and/or on weekends,” and “it involves long travel time to and from work.” Responses included “applies completely,” “applies partially,” and “does not apply at all.” Because we have couple data, we can test the effect of various combinations of own and partner’s job characteristics.

While a clear majority of young adults plan to have children, 43% of those partnered in 1999 had a child by 2003. Preliminary results indicate that there is some disconnect between the effects of women's job characteristics on their birth plans and the same job characteristics of men’s partners on men's birth behaviour. Women whose jobs pay well, offer good career possibilities, and involve overtime work or business travel are more likely than women without such jobs to plan to have a child. However, men whose partners have career-oriented jobs (offer good career possibilities, require overtime work, or entail business travel) are less likely to have a child during this period. On the other hand,

men with partners who have jobs that make it easy to take parental leave or work part-time are more likely to have a child. In addition, both men and women with jobs that make it easy to take parental leave or work part-time are more likely to have a child themselves, though this pattern is stronger for those in their early twenties. In conclusion, women with career-oriented jobs may have difficulty convincing their partners to have children, but there are signs that "family friendly" jobs may promote childbearing for young people in Sweden.

References

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