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Fertility between Desire and Reality

Table of Contents

- 1 Introduction**
- 2 Disambiguation, Empirical Results and Theoretical Concepts**
 - 2.1 The Desire for Children
 - 2.2 State of Science
 - 2.3 Theoretical Approaches in Fertility Research
- 3 Data and Methods**
 - 3.1 Data Sets
 - 3.2 Statistical Methods
- 4 Original text of the Analyses**
 - 4.1 "Jugend (wieder-)vereinigt? Die Familien- und Berufserwartungen ost- und westdeutscher Jugendlicher."
 - 4.2 "Kita, Kirche, Kinder – Zum Einfluss von Kinderbetreuung und religiöser Eingebundenheit auf die erwartete Kinderzahl von Frauen in Ost- und Westdeutschland"
 - 4.3 "Biographical Consequences of Teenage Motherhood in Germany"
- 5 Summary of the Analyses**
 - 5.1 "Jugend (wieder-)vereinigt? Die Familien- und Berufserwartungen ost- und westdeutscher Jugendlicher"
 - 5.2 "Kita, Kirche, Kinder – Zum Einfluss von Kinderbetreuung und religiöser Eingebundenheit auf die erwartete Kinderzahl von Frauen in Ost- und Westdeutschland"
 - 5.3 "Biographical Consequences of Teenage Motherhood in Germany"
- 6 Challenges in Fertility Research**
 - 6.1 Limits of Predictability of Reproductive Decisions
 - 6.2 Longitudinal Data
 - 6.3 Questioning
 - 6.4 Missing Information
 - 6.5 Small Numbers of Cases
 - 6.6 Determinants of the Macro Level
- 7 Conclusion**

Abstract

What are the reasons for differences between the desire for children and the reality? For answering this question, central concepts are clarified, first. Then, a summary of previous studies and central theoretical approaches, namely the New Home Economics, the Theory of Biographical Determination and the Theory of Planned Behaviour, are given. This section is followed by an overview of the used data sets as well as the statistical methods that were used in the analyses.

The main part of the thesis contains three empirical studies. The first one examines whether even more than 20 years after the reunification East and West German juveniles differ in their familial and occupational future expectations. Based on Socio-economic Panel *SOEP* data, it can be shown that these young men and women do not differ in the stated importance concerning both areas of life. The juveniles only differ in the perceived likelihood of realizing these similar plans: East German juveniles indicate a lower likelihood of having at least two children as well as of occupational success. However, structural conditions, especially the unemployment rate and the institutional childcare of the state they lived in provide an important clue.

The second study is conducted in the context of the well known fact that families with two children most frequently occur in Germany, irrespective of the region. As an alternative, the East Germans prefer single child families, whereas the West Germans stay childless or have three and more children. On the basis of the data of the German Family Panel *pairfam* and its East German complementary study *DemoDiff*, the influence of child care and religious involvement on parity-specific East-West differences of the expected number of children was examined. The analyses expose a decreasing relevance of the regional origin when there is controlling for childcare and religious involvement.

The third study deals with the longterm consequences of teenage motherhood. Especially the attainment of an occupational degree, the proportional time in employment and the partnership stability are taken into account. By analyzing *SOEP* data, the negative influence of teenage motherhood on the attainment of an occupational degree lasts even while controlling for other explanatory variables. The negative impact on the proportional time in employment, however, can be explained by controlling for the number of children. In terms of partnership stability the higher divorce risk of teenage mothers is explained by the early marriage.

Finally, the challenges of fertility research are discussed in detail. Therefore, the limits of predictability of reproductive decisions, the partial absence of longitudinal data, problems of operationalisation, missing information in secondary analysis as well as small case numbers when analyzing specific topics and the problem of appropriate macro level indicators are described.