Adolescent Fertility Attitudes and Childbearing in Early Adulthood

Introduction

- Adolescents who plan to have children in the future are more likely to have a child by their late teens.
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Adults & Adulthood

- Work on adult attitudes and fertility assumptions that such attitudes reflect a more general orientation towards family and childbearing.
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Data & Methods

- National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health)
- Children adolescent females ages 15 and older in 1995 at Wave I, and
- Reinterviewed in 2007-08 at Wave IV when ages 26-32 (N=5,078)
- Key predictor: Eight-Item Pregnancy Attitudes Scale measured at Wave I (r = 0.76)

Results

- There is a clear association between Wave I attitudes and having a child by Wave IV.
- BUT, the majority of those who are childless still plan to have children, especially at the most negative scores.

Discussion

- Teenagers' negative attitudes towards adolescent pregnancy are associated with lower birth rates not only during adolescence but well into early adulthood.
- However, these attitudes are unrelated to future childbearing plans.
- These findings are consistent with the notion that adolescent fertility attitudes reflect individuals' long-term views on how childbearing should be incorporated into the life course.
- Delayed fertility, rather than planned childlessness.
- Because the sample is still young, it remains to be seen whether those with delayed fertility will achieve their fertility preferences.
- If people believe fertility should ideally occur under the “right” conditions, some may never reach that point.

Multivariate Results, continued

- To test whether the association weakens with age, we ran interactive models (not shown)
- Teen attitudes remain a significant predictor of 1st birth timing into the mid-20s but do not predict births after 25
- Among those with no children by Wave IV, teen fertility attitudes are not associated with future fertility intentions.

Research on Teens' fertility attitudes typically takes a rational choice approach and reflects the beliefs of costs and benefits of having a child as a teenager.

- In a rational choice framework, these attitudes would only affect fertility in the short-term (i.e., teen fertility)
- Any link to adult fertility would be due primarily to back factors and adult achievements and statuses.

- These attitudes show how adults prioritize childbearing and the centrality of the parent role.
- Adults' orientation towards childbearing is generally viewed as affecting childlessness, the timing of births, and the number of births.

Research Question: Are Teens' Attitudes Linked to Adult Fertility?

- These literature do not fully consider how people view childbearing vis-à-vis the life course
- "Getting pregnant now is one of the worst things that could happen to me."
- "If I got pregnant, I might have to drop out of school."

- This orientation likely forms during adolescence, when teens consider adult roles.
- If this is the case, then teens' fertility attitudes could have long-term links to adult fertility.

- While analyses using Wave IV data, predicting
- 1st births using event history methods
- Future fertility intentions using multinomial logistic regression for 3-category outcome: no children yet plans to 2 children eventual no children yet and doesn’t plan to have children; children already.

- Control for a range of demographic, socioeconomic, and psychosocial factors, including adult statuses and aspirations.

- Using a logistic approach, we investigated the association between Wave I attitudes toward childbearing and future fertility intentions.
- The model controlled for a range of demographic, socioeconomic, and psychosocial factors, including adult statuses and aspirations.

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