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Nonmarital Childbearing

- Steady increase in proportion of nonmarital births in Western countries
- Large variation across countries – why?
  - Differences in nonmarital unions
  - Differences in social policies
  - Differences in women’s employment
  - Differences in attitudes and social norms
- Comparative research linking attitudes toward and levels of nonmarital childbearing is scarce

Why Might Attitudes Matter?

Second Demographic Transition Theory
- Weakening of traditional attitudes toward marriage and childbearing
- Increased emphasis on individual autonomy and self-actualization

Theory of Planned Behavior
- Behavior is more likely to occur if individuals maintain positive attitudes toward the behavior
- Attitudes may affect behavior more if the behavior has some support in society
- Regardless of individual attitudes, behavior is discouraged if it is not supported by norms

Research Questions
- How have countries changed over time in both attitudes towards single parents and levels of nonmarital childbearing?
- Are nonmarital childbearing and attitudes correlated, and have these correlations changed over time?
-Does the pace of changes in nonmarital childbearing predict level of support for nonmarital childbearing?

Data

- Attitudinal data:
  - Eurostat, National Center for Health Statistics (US), Statistics Canada, & Australian Bureau of Statistics
  - Used linear extrapolation for missing (NMBR)
  - Limited US data to non-Hispanic whites

Measures

Key dependent variable
- Proportion of births that are nonmarital

Independent variable
- Attitude toward nonmarital childbearing/single parenthood is proxied by responses to the statement “If people want to have kids, they ought to get married.”
  - Used as a proxy for support for nonmarital childbearing in other research (Thornton & Young-DeMarco 2001; Gubernskaya 2010)

Multivariate Analysis

Two stages
1) Regress nonmarital birth ratio on time in five-year groups corresponding to five years preceding each attitudinal measure - Centered time variable
   - Time coefficient represents pace of fertility change
2) Pool data into country-level analysis (n = 57) to predict attitudes - Hausman test to determine fixed vs. random effects
   - Control for compositional differences as measured in surveys

Conclusions

- Overall, attitudes toward single parenthood and nonmarital fertility are not strongly linked at the country level
- Suggests contextual, economic, and policy factors are likely more relevant for nonmarital fertility levels
- Changes in attitudes and changes in nonmarital fertility likely part of broader societal changes

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