Trends in Nonmarital Birth Rates and Approval of Nonmarital Childbearing in Western Countries

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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 policy
  - Differences in women's employment
  - Differences in attitudes and social norms
- Comparative research linking attitude 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 impact behavior more if the behavior has some support in society
- Regardless of individual attitudes, behavior is discouraged if it is not supported by broader 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:

- Three waves (1994, 2002, 2012) from the International Social Survey Programme and General Social Survey

Nonmarital birth ratios (NMBRs):

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

Measures

Key dependent variable

- Proportion of births that are nonmarital

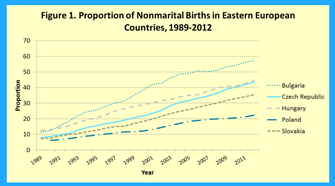
Independent variable

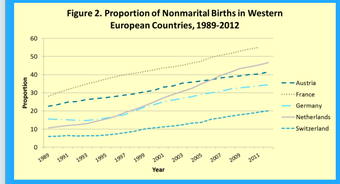
- Attitude toward nonmarital childbearing/single parenthood is proxied by responses to the statement "If people want to have kids they ought to get married."
  - Used as a proxy for support for nonmarital childbearing in other research (Thornton & Young-DeMarco 2001; Gubernskaya 2010)

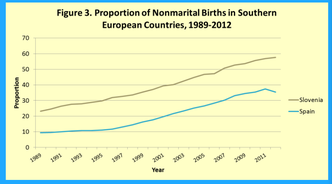
Table 1. Proportion Who Disagree or Strongly Disagree with the Statement "People Who Want Children Ought to Get Married," 1994, 2002, 2012.

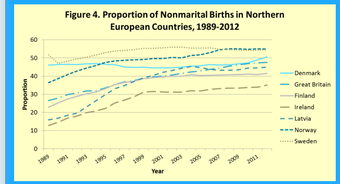
	1994	2002	2012		1994	2002	2012
Eastern Europe				*Northern Europe*			
Bulgaria	17.8	17.7	29.9	Denmark		38.8	47.6
Czech Republic	14.3	22.5	19.3	Finland		36.3	41.5
Hungary	27.0	35.8		Great Britain	26.4	30.1	34.5
Poland	14.7	16.8	25.4	Ireland	19.3	34.2	46.8
Slovakia		13.9	15.3	Latvia		22.9	24.0
Western Europe				Norway	30.7	38.2	44.3
Austria	29.0	37.9	36.4	Sweden	35.9	41.6	
France		44.8	50.7	*North America & Australia*			
Germany	32.2	35.2	46.9	Australia	17.3	19.9	35.8
Netherlands	53.8	57.0		Canada	36.8		27.7
Switzerland		39.5	38.7	U.S.	16.4	18.9	20.1
Southern Europe							
Slovenia	45.9	49.1	59.8				
Spain	40.9	55.4	69.5				

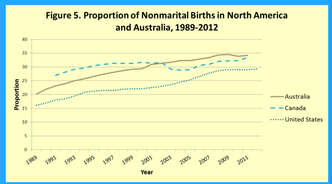
Nonmarital Birth Ratios Over Time by Region











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

Correlations and Multivariate Results

Table 2. Correlations between NMBRs and Attitudes

	1994 Attitudes	2002 Attitudes	2012 Attitudes
NMBRs five years earlier			
NMBR 1989	.17		
NMBR 1997		.18	
NMBR 2007			.33
NMBRs same year			
NMBR 1994	.15		
NMBR 2002		.21	
NMBR 2012			.25
NMBRs ten years later			
NMBR 2004	.23		
NMBR 2012		.22	

- Correlations are not statistically significant

Table 3. Regression Models Predicting Supportive Nonmarital Childbearing Attitude for Total Sample (n=57)

	Model 1		Model 2	
	B	SE	B	SE
Baseline NMBR	0.28*	0.14	0.24†	0.14
Time				
Slope	0.10	1.41	-0.10	1.13
Year				
1994 (ref)				
2002	3.18	2.07	3.89†	2.15
2012	5.99*	3.04	5.52	4.15
Demographic Characteristics				
Female			0.80**	0.29
Age			-0.62*	0.30
Rel. Attendance			-0.22*	0.11
Education			0.20	0.11
Employed			0.08	0.11
Married			-0.09	0.12
Constant	22.23***	4.43	9.85	25.70
R^2	0.13		0.15	

Limitations

- No direct measure of support for nonmarital childbearing
- Lack of information on nonmarital unions, (i.e., cohabitations)
- Limited availability of measures to account for compositional differences across countries
- Not controlling for policy measures or other economic/ institutional/structural factors

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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