

Fertility From a Couple Perspective: A Test of Competing Decision Rules on Proceptive Behaviour*

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Introduction

Fertility decisions typically involve two persons. We therefore analyze how *individual* desires for further children transform into *joint* proceptive or contraceptive behavior.

Previous research has proposed different approaches to answer this question, emphasizing either gender, joint utility, consensus, or bargaining power as key elements.

We use data from the German Family Panel (PAIRFAM) to test competing hypotheses derived from existing models.

Theory, Hypotheses & Results

Patriarchal and Matriarchal Model

H1 (H2): The man's (woman's) desire for children has an effect on the couple's proceptive behavior, but woman's (man's) does not.

Result: Not supported. Effects of woman's and man's desires are equally strong (Figure 1 & Figure 2).

Joint Utility Model

H3a: Both partners' desires (yes/no) for children affect the couple's proceptive behavior.

Result: Supported. The probability of proceptive behavior increases with each partner's desire for a child (Figure 1).

H3b: The stronger each partner's desire for a (further) child, the higher the probability of proceptive behavior.

Result: Supported. The higher each partner's net utility associated with a (further) child, the more likely is proceptive behavior (Figure 2).

Veto-player Model

H4a: Mutual desire (yes/no) for children is a necessary antecedent of proceptive behavior. Statistically speaking, there is a positive interaction effect between a husband's and a wife's desire for children.

Result: Not supported. Figure 1 shows a negative interaction effect. However, the dyadic measure does not capture the strength of the uttered desire. Therefore:

H4b: If one partner strongly opposes to have a (further) child, proceptive behavior becomes highly unlikely (positive interaction effect between man's and woman's strength of desire).

Result: Supported. If one partner has a strong interest in not getting a child, the probability of proceptive behavior sharply decreases (Figure 2).

Power-rule Model

H5a: The partners' bargaining power moderates the effect of the desire (yes/no) for children: the impact of desire is stronger for the more powerful partner.

Result: Supported. Women desiring a child are more likely to enforce their claim against their partners if the sex ratio is in women's favor (Figure 3).

H5b: The partners' bargaining power moderates the effect of utility expectations: The impact of the expected utility is stronger for the more powerful partner.

Result: Not supported. There is no interaction effect. When the strength of desires is considered, bargaining power plays no role (No figure shown).

Data & Methods

Data: PAIRFAM (Germany, first wave, collected 2009).

Dependent Variable: Proceptive behavior, i.e. non-use of contraceptives.

Explanatory Variables: Both partners' desires for children (yes/no). Expected net utility of a child (tokens allocated to competing fields of life). Bargaining Power (differential in local, age-specific sex-ratios).

Method: Cross-sectional logistic regression models with age, marriage, religion, education etc. as controls.

Figure 1: Effect of both partners' desires to have a child

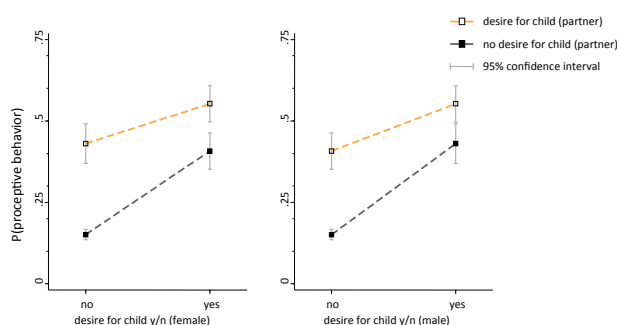


Figure 2: Effect of the strength of both partners' desires

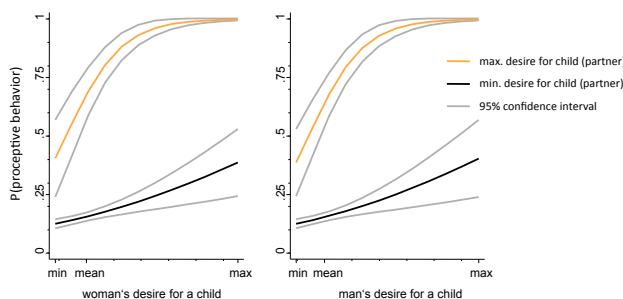
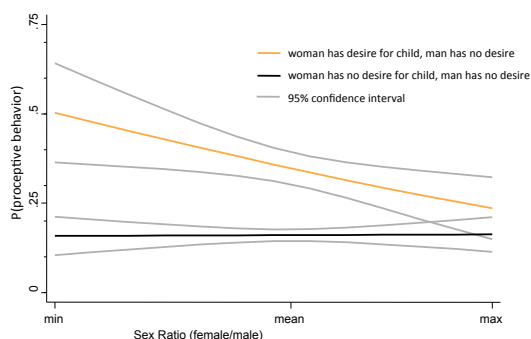


Figure 3: Sex ratios and women's desires for children



Discussion

Our results show symmetrical effects of both partners' desires and expected utilities on proceptive behavior, indicating that neither women nor men dominate fertility decisions per se. A 'veto' is only exercised if the expected loss of utility from a further child is very high for one partner. In case partners do not both have strong, but opposed desires, bargaining power due to advantageous partner market conditions can play a pivotal role for imposing ones will on the partner: Powerful women can easier persuade their partners to beget a child while powerful men tend to insist on the status quo. Future research may look at the transformation of desires into childbirths, also taking separations as competing risks into account.

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