Topic 3: Fertility, families and households

Session 315: Labour market changes and their impact on family formation

Preferences to reconcile family and professional life versus reality – An international comparison

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Introduction

Numerous cultural forces have contributed to a nowadays-existent polarisation of working place and family life. As a dual-earner family becomes increasingly normative, many men and women are managing a complex configuration of roles as workers, parents and partners. An increasing amount of research suggests that a substantial proportion of men and especially women experience conflict between work and family roles. Research on attitudes and preferences concerning work and family life has focused mostly on women as carers, particularly on mothers with young children, however less attention has been given to men. Previous studies reveal that there are significant relations among the expressed preferences and socio-demographic characteristics such as age, education, and income. To explain the conflicting nature of existing behavioral patterns (actual combination of working time and the number of children) and expressed preferences more broadly, additional attention must be given to values and norms as explanatory factors for the

observed changes. The relationship between the actual combination of these roles and the expressed priorities of their reconciliation in order to improve the quality of both the family and working life have not been fully explored, especially not within an international framework.

The contribution of this paper will be focused on the respondents' actual and desired combination of working time (full- or part-time) and the number of children. Due to the intercultural diversity of family and work-time arrangements it is necessary to observe the dynamics of those processes within an international framework.

Data and methods

The analysis will be carried out on the sample of n=34,214 respondents from 13 European countries (Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Poland, Romania and Slovenia) participating in the Population Policy Acceptance (PPA) Study in the period 2000-2003. The data were collected using a comparative core questionnaire and using face-to-face personal interviews. Some variation in the questionnaire existed among the participating countries and thus a selection of viable countries for the analysis will have to be assessed.

In the first stage of the analysis the combination of the current working time and the number of children will be compared to the ideal one. The ideal combination was measured directly through a posed question, while the actual one will be artificially constructed from the reported number of children and working time. A transitional combination will also be specified signifying the tendency of an individual to move from the actual situation towards the desired one. The preliminary analyses indicate a wide variety of possible transitions.

In the second stage attitudes, beliefs and values pertaining to the family and children will be analyzed. The measured variables include: opinions on the change of living arrangements, attitudes towards family formation, and children and general values on important issues in the course of an individual's life course. An exploratory cluster analysis will be run in order to determine the existence of distinctive groups of individuals. A sequential approach of hierarchical clustering and K-means local

optimization method will be used in the process. Both methods will be based on the Ward criterion function with the squared Euclidean distance as the dissimilarities measure. The distribution from the hierarchical clustering will be used as an initial solution for the local optimization method to clarify the structure. The process will be carried out separately for each country included in the analysis and then the results will be compared and consolidated.

In the final stage the empirical clusters based on the respondents' value system will be compared to the work-time and children transitional combination. A comparative analysis will unveil the relationship between the choice for the consolidation of work and family life and the individual's value system, which underlies this decision.

Expected results

The expected results will present an important step towards understanding the reasons for the decision to change either the work time or adjust the number of children to suite the needs of contemporary style of living. They will enrich the concurrent understanding of the phenomenon with the inclusion of opinions and values as underlying concepts that drive the shift in the preferences to reconcile family and professional life. Furthermore an international comparative analysis will explore the stability of the acquired results by consolidating results based on country specific situations of family and work-time combinations as well as differences in their value and opinion orientation.