

Fertility and work: between desire and reality

Presentation

This work forms part of a research project to study the relationships between maternity, female employment and family policy in Navarre (Spain). The population characteristics and the existence of a pioneering *Family Support Plan* make this region, located in the north of the Iberian Peninsula, an ideal scenario for conducting an in-depth study of the complex relationships existing between the three spheres mentioned above.

The theoretical framework for the project is based on the Second Demographic Transition theory, particularly with regard to its explanation of the causes and reasons accounting for the low fertility levels experienced in Western Europe, and also on the Welfare State development theories, in its analysis of the role of the State as a promoter of the family.

We would highlight the following principal aims of the study: to examine the circumstances giving rise to the problems of reconciling work and family life; to analyse the occupational and demographic consequences of these problems; to assess the current family policy measures existing in Navarre; and to prepare a dossier containing recommendations and proposals for improving work and family life, directed at the Navarre Government and the region's business world.

The project will be developed along two parallel lines. One is to study those women that have benefited from aid received from the Navarre Government through a quantitative analysis of the information obtained from the survey entitled "Between Nappies and the Office", which was specifically designed for this research. The other line adopts a qualitative focus and is centred on those women who, for varying circumstances, cannot apply for this aid.

Themes and structure of the paper

The text proposed for the XXV International Population Congress presents the first results of the "Between Nappies and the Office" Survey. The reference population is the population recorded in the aid database of the Navarre Government General Directorate for the Family (7.636 people). This database records those people that have received

family support aids on one or more occasions (paid leave, multiple birth, large family, etc). The Survey is being conducted on 1.038 people (3% sampling error) and it has a statistical significance at a geographic level (6 zones of Navarre). The data handling and statistical analysis shall be carried out using the SPSS.11 software package.

For this paper, we have centred the analysis on one of the least studied aspects of this subject: the triangle formed by “children desired – desire to work away from home – reconciliation strategies”.

In the first part of the paper we address the reasons to account for the difference between the individual fertility level and the number of children desired. With regard to this difference between desire and reality we will place particular emphasis on the role played by the problems of reconciling work and family life. What are the reasons behind the difference between the desired number of children and the real level of fertility? In the event of a negative imbalance between the number of children desired and the actual size of the family, what causes are susceptible to being made to disappear (or lessen) as a result of state action?

In the second part of the paper, in addition to a study on the degree of freedom of choice both at a fertility and career level, we will focus the analysis on occupational strategies related to fertility. Do women with the desired number of children choose to stop work? Or do they have to stop work, as they cannot reconcile both areas? Is a career and a family an option or an “imposition”?

Finally, we will describe the social and family profile of women based on the effectiveness of the reconciliation strategies defining as a successful strategy the one that coincides with a woman’s aspirations. What are the family and social circumstances that enable a person to choose, both with regard to the number of children as well as the working situation? What are the most effective strategies?

We cannot yet advance the results of this study given the fact that the fieldwork is currently being concluded.