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Can a good mother work fulltime? Concept of Motherhood and Fertility in Cross-European Comparison

The level of fertility in Germany is very low in comparison to other European countries. In 2002 the total fertility rate in Germany was 1.34 which is distinctively lower than the TFR of 1.46 of the European Union (25). Among other reasons like social structure and family policy a very conservative concept of motherhood is often said to be responsible for this (e.g. Onnen-Isemann 2003; Dienel 2003, Habich u. Berger-Schmitt 1998). High professional commitment combined with adherence to a conservative understanding of motherhood leads to a problem of reconciliation, often resulting in a delay in childbearing. The possibilities for child care, especially for children in younger ages, are strongly restricted, a situation which makes child care and fulltime employment with children up to the age of 3 already rather difficult. On the other hand institutional child care is refused by a majority of women themselves. In the PPA survey of 1992 in Western Germany about 50% of the women in the sample agreed that women who want to engage in an occupational career should abstain from having own children (Roloff, Dorbritz 1999, 188). There is a contradiction between the increase in education, qualification and orientation towards employment on the one hand and the traditional concept of motherhood on the other, combined with restrictions in infrastructure and other unfavourable conditions. Because of this, women are rather kept off family foundation (Onnen-Isemann 2003, 34).

In this paper the concept of motherhood and its consequences for fertility is to be analysed in an European context to check out its weight in explaining the reasons for low fertility. The hypothesis is, that there is to be found a cross-national relation between concept of motherhood and fertility. This relationship can be strengthened or weakened by measures of family policy. To test this hypothesis, the relation between concept of motherhood and fertility is analysed on the individual level, the database being restricted to women only. Nevertheless the analysis starts on the macro level. First of all an index is constructed on a national level and correlated with other indicators on the macro level. In the next step in every national sample homogenous subgroups of women having the same concept of motherhood are composed. In order to prevent wrong conclusions by combining societal macro and micro level in a wrong way, individual attitudes have to be combined with the individual number of children.

Subsequently the weight of the factor "concept of motherhood" has to be put in relation to other factors of influence. Especially important in this regard are measures of family policy,

being able to enforce or weaken such concepts. Apart from the individual concept of motherhood general attitudes and orientations have to be considered in the analysis to evaluate its influence. Basis of the analysis is the individual level, i.e. orientations and attitudes can be linked directly with the individual number of children.

Database of the analysis is the Population Policy Acceptance Survey (PPAS), an international survey of 13 European countries which has been carried out between 2000 and 2002. Among the participants are quite a lot of Eastern European countries, so that results concerning late consequences of socialism can be expected. The sample consists of people between 20 and 70 years of age (with minor national deviations). The overarching objective aims at practices, attitudes and opinions concerning demographic changes, fertility behaviour, intergenerational exchange of resources and services, and population related policies (see homepage). Analysis is going to be based mainly on questions concerning adequate childcare, value of children and gender roles. Multivariate statistics will be used in the analysis.

References

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