EPC 2014 (Extended Abstract)

Fertility after Separation: Second Births in Higher Order Unions in Eastern and Western Germany

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Short Abstract (max 150 words)

This paper uses recent data from the German family panel (pairfam) to examine the fertility behavior after separation. More specifically, we focus on the transition to the second child and compare the behavior of respondents in ongoing partnerships (couples who are still partnered with the mother/father of their first child) with those who have experienced family dissolution after the first birth. The investigation reveals strong gender differences in post-separation fertility behavior, with men being more reluctant to have a second child in a new partnership than women. We also find large differences between eastern and western Germany which we attribute to differences in institutional contexts that still prevail between the formerly two parts of Germany after reunification.

Introduction

The image of the family of the 21st century is shaped by high separation and divorce rates. Men and women are more likely than before to dissolve a union, enter a new partnership, and have children with a new partner. Family sociologists have often approached this theme by studying the fertility, marriage and separation processes of stepfamilies (e.g., Thomson et al., 2004; Juby et al. 2001). Recently, studies on "multi-partnered" fertility have been conducted that investigate the degree to which men and women have children across different unions (e.g., Carlson and Furstenberg 2006; Guzzo and Furstenberg 2007a, 2007b). This paper contributes to this discussion by providing recent evidence on the fertility behavior of couples in higher order unions. We focus on the transition to the second child and compare the behavior of respondents in ongoing partnerships (couples who are still partnered with the mother/father of their first child) with those who have experienced family dissolution after the first birth. We have chosen

to focus on second birth behavior because having a second child is a very regular event. Most people aspire to have two children, and those parents who have a second child tend to do so around three years after their first child is born. Therefore, first-time mothers and fathers who experience union dissolution not only see a breakdown of their partnership, but also a potential disruption of their fertility career. How a union dissolution affects birth spacing, and how the impact varies by education, gender and region (East and West Germany), are the prime themes of this investigation. The data used in this study come from the German Family Panel (pairfam).

Theoretical Background

Much of our knowledge about post-separation behavior comes from research on the demographic behavior of stepfamilies (Brown, 2000; Jefferies et al., 2000; Juby et al. 2001; Allen Li, 2006; Heintz-Martin et al. forthcoming). For Europe, stepfamily research has mainly drawn on data from the Family and Fertility Surveys, which were conducted during the 1990s (Vikat et al., 1999; Buber and Prskawetz, 2000; Oláh, 2001; Henz, 2002; Prskawetz et al., 2003; Thomson, 2004; Vikat et al., 2004). The main findings from this strand of research were that stepfamilies (defined as couples in which at least one of the children in the household stems from a prior partnership) have higher dissolution rates than couples with children in nuclear families. Furthermore, the fertility behavior of couples in stepfamilies has been found to be elevated. This pattern has been explained by a "commitment hypothesis," which states that a couple may seek to cement their new relationship by having children together (Griffith et al. 1985; Holland and Thomson 2011). Another reason for the elevated birth risk among these couples is that having a "common child" not only creates a link between the parents; it also creates a biological link between all members of the stepfamily, as the new child is a half-sibling of the children from prior partnerships.

While stepfamily research has greatly advanced our knowledge of post-separation family behavior, this type of research has so far been limited in scope. The main shortcoming of stepfamily research has been that it has ignored "linkages and interactions that occur across households" (Teachman and Tedrow 2008: 4). Stepfamilies are commonly defined as couples who reside with children from prior partnerships. Biological children who do

not live with the respondent are not taken into account. Since children usually co-reside with their mothers after separation, this definition means that the fertility histories of male and female respondents have been treated systematically differently. Thus, the perspective of stepfamily research has remained limited to understanding the relationship between union dynamics and fertility behavior across the life courses of men and women.

Another recent body of literature addresses how fertility evolves across partnerships (Carlson and Furstenberg 2006; Guzzo and Furstenberg 2007a,b; Manlove et al 2008; Scott et al. 2010). In this context, the term "multi-partnered fertility" has been coined to highlight the fact that women and men may have children with various partners across the life course. This research has mainly been motivated by social policy concerns about "serial fatherhood," in which parents who "are parenting across multiple households likely face even greater obstacles to investing both time and financial resources in their children" (Guzzo and Furstenberg 2007a: 584). This type of research has paid particular attention to the correct allocation of children to different partnerships. However, less attention has been paid to the timing and spacing of births across the life course.

In this paper, we take a life course perspective in studying the role of union dissolution on second birth spacing in Germany. Our main research questions are as follows: How does union dissolution after the first birth affect the length of the interval between the births of the first and second children? How do these intervals vary by gender and region (eastern and western Germany)? How rapidly do couples in a new union make the transition to having a second child? Do they have higher second birth rates than comparable couples in "ongoing" partnerships?

Data and Methods

Data for this investigation come from the third wave of the German Family Panel (*pairfam*) (Huinink et al. 2011). The German family panel is a multi-actor dataset. In addition to the anchor respondents, the partner, the children and the parents are interviewed. The first round of the survey was conducted in 2008/09, and included anchor respondents from the cohorts 1971-73, 1981-83 and 1991-93. A special feature of these datasets is that they contain complete fertility and partnership histories. The survey

also provides retrospective information on periods during which the respondents were in "living-apart-together" (LAT) arrangements. Furthermore, children can be clearly linked to partnerships because the names of all of the fathers of all of the children, as well as the names of all of the partners, are recorded (see www.pairfam.de).

For our investigation, we have selected data from the third wave (2011/12), and have chosen to limit the investigation to anchor respondents of the cohorts 1971-1973 and 1981-1983. Since we are interested in second birth spacing, our sample has been limited to respondents who have at least one biological child. Respondents with multiple births have been deleted from the sample. Respondents whose first child had died were also omitted. Our analytical strategy consists of two parts. In a first step, we provide descriptive statistics on the birth intervals of respondents who remained partnered with the mother/father of their first child, and those who separated after the birth of their first child. In a second step, the investigation has been limited to episodes in partnerships. For individuals who separated after the first birth, the investigation has been restricted to the first partnership episodes after separation. Using event history modeling, we investigate the transition to the second child. Three main "clocks" are accounted for in this investigation: age, duration of the partnership and the age of the first child (for a similar specification, see Holland and Thomson 2011).

Descriptive Findings

In a first step, we provide simple statistics on birth intervals. For this descriptive investigation, the sample has been restricted to respondents of the birth cohort 1971-73 who were age 38 or older at the time of the interview. Furthermore, to calculate a mean duration between the first and second births, this descriptive investigation has been limited to individuals with at least two children. The table compares respondents in ongoing partnerships (respondents who were still partnered with the father/mother of the first child) and respondents who were separated from the father/mother of the first child. The mean duration between the first and second births in ongoing partnerships is 3.25 years in West Germany and about four years in East Germany. The table shows that "separated parents" (parents who were separated from the mother/father of the first child) had rather long birth intervals. This was particularly true of West German men: on

average, a West German man who was no longer partnered with the mother of his first child had his second child 6.2 years after the first birth.

Table 1: Mean duration between first and second birth, men and women with at least two biological children, birth cohort 1971-1973[1]

	Respondents in ongoing partnerships	Respondents who separated from mother/father of first child	t-test
West Germany			
Women	3.25	4.86	***
	(857)	(213)	
Men	3.25	5.30	***
	(564)	(88)	
East Germany			
Women	4.29	5.56	***
	(263)	(134)	
Men	3.93	6.19	***
	(226)	(71)	

Note: *** p<0.01; ** p<0.05; * p<0.10.
Source: German family panel (pairfam/DemoDiff), Release 3.0 (2011/2012)

Multivariate Findings

Table 2 contains the results of the event history model. The dependent variable is the transition to the second child. The results suggest that separated parents had a lower transition rate to the second birth than parents who were still partnered with the mother/father of their first child. Compared to men who were still partnered with the mother of their first child, men who were in a new partnership had a 48% lower risk of having a second child. Women who were in a new partnership had a 28% lower risk of having a second child than women in an ongoing partnership. The table also shows strong differences in second birth behavior between respondents in eastern and western Germany. East Germans had a significantly lower second birth risk than West Germans. This finding corresponds to prior research on this topic, which has shown that East Germans are rather reluctant to have second children.

[1] Please note that Table 1 includes persons who have remained single after separating from the father/mother of their child. In the multivariate analysis, these episodes have been eliminated.

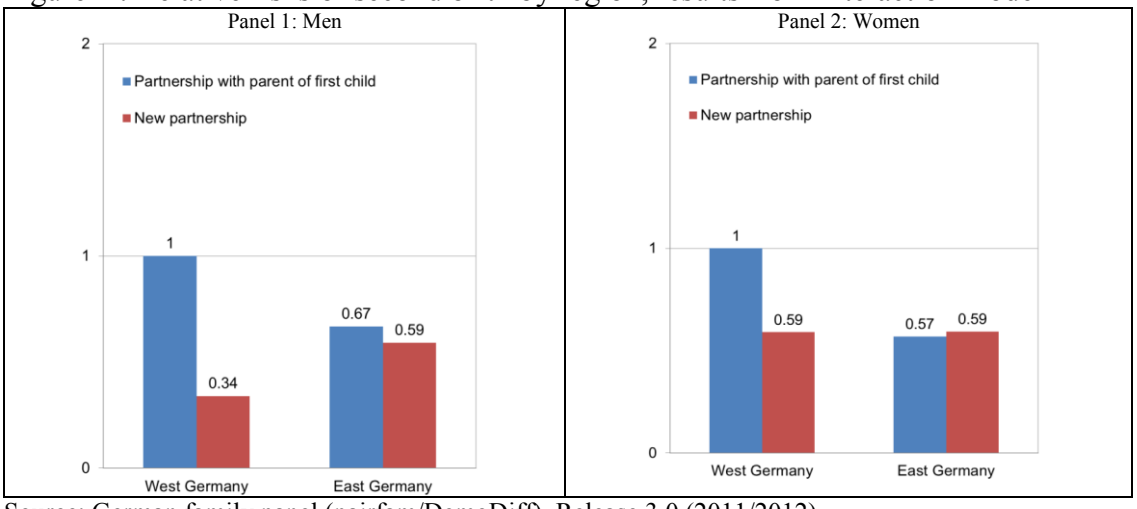
Table 3: Results from event history model (piecewise constant baseline hazard), Dependent variable: Transition to second birth

	Men		Women	
Partnership				
…with parent of first child	1		1	
New partnership	0.52	***	0.72	***
Region				
West Germany	1		1	
East Germany	0.73	***	0.62	***
Exposure (failures)	79,832	(1,011)	129,913	(1,741)

Note: *** p<0.01; ** p<0.05; * p<0.10. Controlled for: Age, duration of partnership, age of first child, migration status, number of siblings and education.
Source: German family panel (pairfam/DemoDiff), Release 3.0 (2011/2012)

Figure 1 further explores the East-West differences in second birth behavior. It gives the results from interaction models between region and partnership status. The results indicate that the second birth rate among West German men in a new partnership was 66% lower than among men who were partnered with the mother of their first child. Among West German women, the risk of having a second birth was reduced by 41%. A comparison of East and West Germans shows that West German men in new partnerships had a lower second birth rate than their East German counterparts. Their birth risk was reduced by 42% (1-0.34/0.59). For women, we did not find any East-West differences.

Figure 1 : Relative risks of second birth by region, results from interaction model



Source: German family panel (pairfam/DemoDiff), Release 3.0 (2011/2012)

Conclusions

Much of the prior research on higher order births in second unions has been motivated by the idea that stepfamilies have elevated fertility because couples want to cement their partnership by having further children together. Our study, which focused on second birth timing across the life course among both men and women, provides a more nuanced picture. The descriptive findings revealed that union disruption after the first birth leads to rather long intervals between the births of the first and second children. The multivariate analysis that studied the transition to the second child and compared couples in ongoing partnerships and couples in new partnerships showed that the latter group have a much lower second birth rate. We also found strong regional differences in post-separation fertility behavior, with western German men being very reluctant to have a second child in a new partnership. This result may be related to the financial obligations that West German men have toward their first family. These obligations are much weaker in East Germany, where alimony payments are less relevant due to the insignificance of the homemaker model. Overall, these results suggest that context and gender may be quite important in understanding fertility behavior after separation.

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