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Compensating dissatisfaction in the job by turning to the family? The impact of current occupation on timing of first births in Germany

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ABSTRACT

The current study analyses the impact of occupational activity on the timing of first births in Germany. Empirical evidence on the topic in a country with a standardized education system and a credential labor market is still rather limited, despite several recent studies. Moreover, previous research usually lacks the theoretical explanation of why women working in certain occupations are more likely to give birth. This study aims to close these gaps. Using the German Life History Study, occupations are grouped according to characteristics deduced from theoretical considerations using a cluster analysis. In the next step, exponential rate models are estimated to investigate the effect of the clusters on fertility timing. The estimations reveal an accelerated transition to parenthood for women and men working in occupations with unfavorable working conditions. Individuals thus seem to compensate for dissatisfaction with the job by turning to the family. However, for women these occupational differences can completely be explained by differences in educational level, while the effects remain if we look at men.

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Most industrialized countries face fertility rates below replacement levels, which confronts them with the problem of aging societies, often linked with threats to social security systems (European Commission, 2009a). Female employment has long been discussed as a pivotal factor in this trend, given the improved levels of female education and qualified employment in the last decades. The current study aims to investigate this relationship in more detail and examine the impact of current occupational activity on the timing of first births. Occupations have far more potential to explain fertility patterns than level of education. They differ in flexibility and length of working hours, opportunities for reconciling work and family life, potential income and subjective welfare gains

like social status and stimulation. These characteristics of occupations do not necessarily resemble each other, even though individuals working in these occupations have the same educational certificate. The impact of occupation, however, is mediated by the institutional setting of the labor market and educational system as Hoem, Neyer, and Andersson pointed out (2006a). In their study based on Sweden as well as in studies on the Netherlands and Greece, typical female occupations are usually connected to higher birth rates (Bagavos, 2010; Begall & Mills, 2013). However, the theoretical explanation of why women working or having been educated in these fields have higher rates of giving birth is still rather limited. The objective of the present study is to analyze why occupations should influence fertility and to embed the topic into core sociological theories.

The starting point for these theoretical considerations is the interaction between the two life domains of family and

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employment. Both domains can compete for resources (time) or provide resources for each other (money). Furthermore, subjective welfare gained in one domain can either spillover into or compensate for deficits in the other domain.

Germany was chosen as research setting for the study. This provides the opportunity to investigate the influence of an educational system and labor market that are different to the well-researched societies of the Northern European countries. Additionally, the question of employment and fertility is especially essential, given Germany's problematic reconciliation situation resulting in both low fertility and low female employment rates.

The article is structured as follows: before developing the theoretical arguments in detail, the state of the art will briefly be outlined. In the method section, the German Life History Study (GLHS) and the *IAB/BIBB-Strukturerhebung* are introduced. The GLHS observes individual's life courses, including their employment and fertility history and is especially suitable for analyzing the impact of certain occupations on fertility behavior. The *IAB/BIBB-Strukturerhebung* from the Institute of Employment Research (IAB) and the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) provides detailed information on objective and subjective characteristics of employment. We use this data set to generate aggregate occupational characteristics, which we then merge with the individual data from the GLHS.

In the first step of the data analysis the occupations are grouped by means of clustering. This provides an opportunity to group occupations according to characteristics deduced from theoretical considerations instead of grouping occupations from similar sectors. The impact of occupational clusters on the timing of first births is estimated using event history methods. First, exponential rate models are estimated to investigate the effect of the clusters on fertility timing and then a simultaneous modeling of the transition to first birth and the probability of working in an occupation of a certain cluster is performed. The simultaneous model allows a correlation of error terms. A significant correlation indicates an unobserved factor that influences both employment and fertility behavior. This enables us to investigate whether the influence of occupation on fertility is an outcome of a selection into certain occupations by women and men.

The article finishes with a summary and discussion of results as well as an outlook on future research.

1. Occupation and fertility in previous research

There is a growing number of studies on the effect of working in certain occupations on fertility in several European countries. [Bagavos for instance \(2010\)](#) detects heterogeneous fertility patterns related to occupations in Greece. Teachers are less often childless compared to legal professionals. This is explained by different occupational characteristics, especially regarding employment opportunities in the private and public sectors. [Zabel \(2006\)](#) finds positive effects on family formation of working in teaching, craft or manufacturing in West Germany, [Ekert-Jaffé and colleagues \(2002\)](#) describe

higher transition rates of teachers and managers to higher order births in France, and of teachers to the first birth in the UK.

Recently, [Begall and Mills \(2013\)](#) analyzed this relation in more detail using data from the Netherlands. They find higher transition rates for women working as health professionals, personal services workers, agricultural workers and machine operators compared to clerks. In order to investigate why these occupations lead to motherhood, the authors use a categorization of occupational resources by [van de Werfhorst and Kraaykamp \(2001\)](#). Occupational skills are divided into cultural, economic, technical and communicative skills. Begall and Mills find a positive impact of occupations using communicative skills compared to those which require technical and economic abilities.

Additionally, a number of studies investigated the effect of educational field, i.e. the occupation trained for, on childlessness as well as number and timing of births. Studies on Sweden, Norway, and Spain find effects of the educational field on the percentage of childlessness and the ultimate number of children. Interestingly, this effect exceeds the effect of educational level. After controlling for educational field, these studies find no effect of level of education. For instance, women trained in the health or teaching sector are less often childless and have more children independently of their educational level ([Hoem et al., 2006a; Hoem, Neyer, & Andersson, 2006b; Kravdal, 1994; Låppegard & Rønsen, 2005; Martin-Garcia & Baizan, 2006; Tesching, 2012](#)). For Austria and Greece, however, the findings are slightly different. Less childlessness in the health and teaching sector is found for those countries too, but there is also a persisting differentiation according to level of education ([Bagavos, 2010; Neyer, 2009; Neyer & Hoem, 2008](#)).

All these studies give important insights into the topic of fertility and occupation and come to similar results: there is variance in the data across occupations and educational fields. In some countries, their impact diminishes the effect of educational level, while in others both effects remain. However, in all these studies the discussion of the reasons for the effects is rather ad hoc and lacks a thorough theoretical background. Usually, the differences found between educational fields are explained by the socialization in certain fields, occupational characteristics of careers following education (gender segregation in the labor market), and different preferences. Apart from the aforementioned study by Begall and Mills, there is little research on these characteristics. Another important exception is the multilevel analysis of 21 European countries by [van Bavel \(2010\)](#). The study identifies three occupational characteristics that accelerate or delay family formation. Whilst traditional attitudes of employees in an occupation as well as a female dominated occupation increase birth risks, a job with high potential income postpones the transition.

The aim of our study is to investigate in more detail *why* occupations should influence fertility behavior. For this purpose, we embed the topic into core sociological theories as well as utilizing detailed data on individual employment biographies and occupational characteristics. We will

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