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Using the Theory of Planned Behaviour  
to study fertility intentions in Romania

Raluca Caplescu<sup>a\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Piața Romană nr. 6, Bucharest 010374, Romania

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**Abstract**

Fertility intentions are considered an important determinant of behaviour. Using binary logistic regression on a sample of 1851 women aged 18-44 years from the Generations and Gender Survey 2005 wave in Romania, the present paper analyses the factors influencing intentions to have a child on the short-term. The results indicate that age and the number of children already born to a respondent, together with her attitude and the woman's perception of her significant others' attitude towards having a birth in the near future are important in determining the odds that a woman will intend to perform the analysed behaviour. Also, the use of contraception plays an important role, but its impact is complex.

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*Key words:* fertility intentions; the Theory of Planned Behaviour; Romania; logistic regression;

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**1. Introduction**

One of the focuses of demographic research in the present is the difference between the intended and the actual number of children. Although for an overwhelming proportion of European countries the average intended number of children has been for a long time around two (OECD, 2010; Testa, 2006, 2012), the actual average number of children is, in many cases, much lower. According to EUROSTAT, only three countries had, in 2011, a total fertility rate above 2.0 (Ireland, Iceland and France), while there were ten countries with a TFR of 1.36 and lower. Although

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\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +40-725-291-229.  
E-mail address: [raluca.caplescu@gmail.com](mailto:raluca.caplescu@gmail.com).

the TFR may be biased by postponement (Haragus, 2008; Sobotka, 2004), there is little doubt that fertility levels are low in many European countries.

The demographic change is increasingly more often analysed with focus on micro level fertility intentions and the behaviour they generate. Having the possibility to decide upon their fertility levels allows for the analysis of readiness and desire to have children at various points of the life cycle. A theory which may be employed to study such factors is the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1969; Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010), used for underlining the link between beliefs and behaviour.

Under these circumstances, the main question raised is which factors increase the odds of having children, more precisely, what would determine a woman to have a child on the short term. The present paper aims at focusing on the specific context of Romania in order to shed some light on the mechanisms behind reproductive behaviour by analysing the influence of various categories of factors on fertility intentions.

Further the paper is structured as follows: first, a description of the conceptual framework employed is made based on the existent literature on the topic. Next, the data used and the model are specified together with a short description of the sample. Results and final remarks conclude the paper.

## **2. The Theory of Planned behaviour as a framework for studying fertility intentions**

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is the most used framework in the category of behavioural models (Morgan & Bachrach, 2011). The main assumptions of the TPB are that intention is a strong predictor of behaviour and intention may be assessed by evaluating general attitudes, beliefs and preferences.

An important feature of the TPB is that it is not discipline-specific, or as its authors call it, it is a ‘content-free’ model of human behaviour (Ajzen, 2011). This gives TPB both advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side, it can be applied to various different domains that study human behaviour, because it is based on assumptions that are common across domains. It also allows for great flexibility in defining the variables to be used and the macro-level context in which the micro model is developed (Philipov, 2011). On the other hand, the variables must be very carefully chosen and they should either rely on previous research or on alternative models for hypotheses generation, since there are no a priori specifications (Ajzen, 2011; Liefbroer, 2011).

According to Klobas (2011), the main issue regarding the usefulness of the TPB concerns the cases in which it may be appropriately used, rather than if it is appropriate to use the TPB and her conclusion is that it should be applied to decisions regarding fertility about which the individual in the target population is likely to have reasoned. The ideas of the TPB have been applied by Liefbroer to various demographic topics, such as leaving home (Billari & Liefbroer, 2007), union formation (Liefbroer & De Jong Gierveld, 1993) and fertility (Liefbroer, 2005).

In demography, fertility is seen as the result of rationally taken decisions, based on the assessment of costs and benefits. This, however, does not imply that rational behaviour in the sense of economic rationality is required in order to work within the TPB framework (Ajzen, 2011; Klobas, 2011; Liefbroer, 2011; Philipov, 2011). As both Ajzen (2011) and Philipov (2011) point out, beliefs are subjectively held information, possibly even incomplete and/or biased, but the TPB is not concerned with the process through which the individuals arrive at their beliefs, so whether this is a rational process or not does not affect the results obtained. What matters is how these beliefs shape the attitudes, norms and perception of behavioural control with which the TPB operates, thus also the intention to perform the behaviour.

The greater control individuals have on their fertility, ranging from effective contraceptive methods to fertility treatments, combined with increasing social acceptance of choices regarding fertility, renders necessary the understanding of how decisions about childbearing are made (Klobas, 2011) and the impact these decisions have on fertility patterns. Under these circumstances, the occurrence of an unintended birth for example is more likely due to ineffective actual control than to (i)rationality issues (Barber, 2011; Philipov, 2011). In other words, within the TPB framework the focus is on the intention and not on the outcome.

Various factors may lead to impeding the individual to behave as they intended. If pregnancy occurs due to ineffective control, the context, as well as the actual behaviour of the individual need to be taken into account. Barber (2011) refers to three possible reasons why the initial intention to avoid pregnancy by using adequate protection may not be translated into behaviour. One of them is sexual arousal, which increases the risk of a person to ‘get carried away’ and put aside the initial intention. Also, it may be that one has a stronger desire to please their

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