



Reproductive decision-making
in a macro-micro perspective

*From Intentions to Behaviour:
Reproductive Decision-Making in a Macro-Micro Perspective
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A child?... Maybe: Uncertain fertility intentions and subsequent behavior

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Fertility Intentions

- **Fertility intentions and their realization.**

Predictive value of questions on intentions:

- Certain intentions predict behaviour accurately.
- What about uncertain intentions?

- **Surveys:**

- strength of intentions?
- *don't know?*

- *probably yes / probably not* – frequently grouped with certain answers

- *probably yes / probably not* – stand for a half of all answers on childbearing intentions in GGP surveys (Testa 2010)



Fertility Intentions

- Qualitative evidence on the sources of uncertainty: Previous work by Bernardi & Mynarska 2009 on a typology of fertility intentions

- Based on 261 open ended interviews from various case studies

- 101 cases of *certain* intentions

61 *surely yes* and 40 *surely no*

- Remaining 160 cases of uncertain of different kind:

a) structural or context conditions (labour market, length of education, housing conditions, etc.)

**Realization of
uncertain
intentions?**

b) Individual motivation (not being emotionally ready, having alternative goals, etc.)



Fertility Intentions

- Interest on *uncertain* intentions: why?
 - Often behind the procrastination of decision-making
 - Explain the meaning of intended / unintended births in contexts where contraceptive availability and information is high
 - Crucial for the childbearing timing
 - Realization far less predictable (and therefore its usefulness as predictor of fertility low) if the cause of uncertainty remain uncovered



Data & Analysis

- Intentions dynamics – how intentions shift from certain to uncertain and *vice versa*:

- 15 individuals (CH)
- 2 to 3 interviews in approximately 2 years
- All pregnant of their first child in the first wave

- **Realisation of uncertain intentions:**

- 22 individuals (IT and PL)
- 2 waves: 2004/2005 and 2009
- different parities

In all cases

- Most respondents aged 20-40 at wave 1
- Variety of marital status and education levels from secondary education upward



Realization of Fertility Intentions

Certain intentions

Surely yes
4 cases

Birth of a child
all cases

Surely no
2 cases

No child
all cases

**Different levels and sources
of uncertainty - 16 cases**

Behavioral control
6 cases

Birth of a child
5 cases

Personal motives
5 cases

Birth of a child
3 cases

Both
5 cases

Birth of a child
2 cases



Realization of Fertility Intentions

Tatiana, 30 at wave 1, LAT, childless

October 2004:

I would like to have a child, but I want to get married and to find a permanent job before having a baby; these are real preconditions for me.

Pregnant at wave 2

In July 2009 she says:

Well, many things have changed in these years [...]: we got married three years ago and after one year I started my own [business] activity [...], but what really has changed – as you can see – I am pregnant at the moment.

Obstacles were solved and the intention was realized



Realization of Fertility Intentions

Anna, 25 at wave 1, married, childless

December 2004:

You need to have a baby, but I don't know how it's going to be (laughs), I'm not convinced...

Child born in December 2006

In January 2009 she says:

Together with my husband, we both wanted and we made attempts to have this child!

No apparent changes in conditions (controls). A shift in respondent's attitude towards having a child.



Realization of Fertility Intentions

Irene, 30 at wave 1, cohabiting, mother of 1 child

December 2004:

I am thinking about a second child but not now, not now yet...

No child before wave 2. Her intention shifts to: *surely no* (never in the future!)

In January 2009 she says:

We realize our dreams, but at the same time we have less time for our child. There is always one thing at the expense of the other...

Other life goals became more important than a second child

- **Intentions change over time period shorter than 4 years.**
This is mostly the case for *uncertain* intentions.
- **Most of the changes of intentions over time in our study could have been attributed to one of the components of TPB:**
They were caused by a shift in attitudes, norms or aspects of perceived behavioural control.
- **Predictable outcomes of uncertain intentions:**
When sources of uncertainty – as expressed at wave 1 – dissolved (structural reasons)
- **More information about the source of uncertainty may improve the predictive power of questions on fertility intentions**



Conclusion & Discussion

- **How to modify the survey questions in order to increase their predictive value?**
 - Adding a direct follow up question in case of “probably” answer asking what the uncertainty depends on?
(qualitative data as a source of possible answers)
 - Separating the measurement of fertility intentions in a two step-question aimed at capturing the intended goal and the intended timing.
 - Checking certainty of respondent’s claims on attitudes, subjective norms and aspects of perceived control.

Thank you for attention!