

Gendered Family Preferences: Higher Education and Inter-generational Divergence in Eight Low Fertility Countries

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With educational expansion, fertility decline, changing partnership structures, and women's emancipation, this study investigates how men and women compare themselves with their parental generation in terms of family ideals. Our study argues for an identity motivated shift in family ideals, especially among highly educated women, who actively distinguish their family preferences from the parental generation. They increasingly prioritize family communication, financial stability, and gender equity over traditional markers like marriage and child-rearing. There is no parallel transformation among men. At the aggregate level, cohorts with larger educational gains compared to their parental generation, tend to perceive a more substantial generational difference both in parenthood and in the two-child fertility ideal. Once again, this association is observed only among women. These findings derive from a factorial survey experiment implemented in urban China, South Korea, Japan, Singapore, Spain, Italy, Norway, and the US. The study underscores the interplay between socioeconomic development and changing family ideals, yet pointing to a distinct inter-generational identity difference, especially among women, a feature likely to have profound implications for future demographic trends.