

Culture, uncertainty, and expected social support: a comprehensive perspective on what's behind young adults' fertility preferences

Francesca Luppi, Andrea Bonanomi, Alessandro Rosina

High-income countries have been grappling with a declining fertility for decades, along with an increasing incidence of childlessness. This has raised questions about the factors behind these trends, which have been partially addressed by pointing to cultural, economic, and institutional explanations. Most of these mechanisms have been explored separately. What is still lacking is a comprehensive study that considers the potential joint impact of all these dimensions. In this study, we used unique survey data collected in 2022 on a representative sample of childless young adults (aged 25-34) living in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the UK. We construct an ideal continuum of combinations of fertility preferences, ranging from people who desire, intend, and are motivated to have children in life to childfree individuals. By running a stepwise multinomial logistic regression model, we show that while economic issues and family support are crucial for positive fertility intentions, especially among motivated people, general uncertainty and perceived low support from the welfare state and family are associated with higher likelihood of being on the other side of the continuum, i.e., being childfree or unmotivated and not intending. Finally, anticipated low support from the local community is detrimental to fertility motivation.