

Having Fun or Having Kids? Human Values and Childbearing Attitudes in Europe

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The study examines whether hedonism and stimulation values are associated with attitudes toward late parenthood and voluntary childlessness, as well as the moderating role of gender and societal child-centeredness. The Second Demographic Transition suggests that, next to structural factors, individuals' ideational and higher-order needs can play a role in shaping fertility decisions. Despite being related to the needs, no previous study has investigated whether hedonism and stimulation values, the two human values that have become increasingly important for Millennials, are related to preference for delaying or opting out of parenthood. Moreover, while gender difference exists in household responsibilities and fertility clock, the degree of child-centeredness also varies by country. We used data from the European Social Survey conducted in 2018, which covers 29 countries in Europe, and conducted multilevel binary and multinomial logistic regression analyses ($N = 20,424$). Our results indicate that hedonism and stimulation values were associated with preference for late parenthood, but only among women, which may be attributed to the unequal gender division of childcare and household responsibilities. However, although hedonistic and stimulation-seeking women tended to prefer entering parenthood at later ages, they did not necessarily exhibit a strong preference for childlessness. We further observed that, when the societal child-centeredness level is high, both hedonistic and stimulation seeking men and women were at higher odds of choosing the "late & disapproval of childlessness" group, as opposed to the "not late & disapproval" category. This implies that when the societal pressure to become good parents is high, they may still feel the need to become parents, albeit at a later stage. The study offers insights into the complex interplay between human values and contemporary family planning, providing a nuanced and timely understanding of why some individuals perceive leisure and parenthood as compatible while the others do not.