

The gap between desired and achieved family size in Europe: The role of infertility

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In recent decades, research has identified a growing gap between individuals' ideal and achieved number of children. While life events often facilitate or hinder the realisation of an ideal family size, the contribution of biological factors to this gap remains poorly understood. Drawing on data from the second round of the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS), this study complements prior research by examining the role of infertility in explaining the unfulfillment of the ideal family size. The results reveal that, in most countries, approximately half of men and women underachieve their fertility aspirations. This group predominantly consists of childless individuals and parents with only one child, although a notable share of respondents with two or more children also report unmet fertility ideals. The underachievement of fertility aspirations is more prevalent among individuals who have experienced infertility. On average, around 60% of infertile respondents reported unfulfilled ideals, compared to 40% of those who never experienced difficulties conceiving. Infertility emerges as a significant barrier to achieving desired family size in recent cohorts.