

Educational gradients in unrealized fertility in Spain

Spain has the second-highest maternal age at childbearing among the OECD countries (32.1 years) and the highest proportion of births to mothers aged 40 or above (8.8% in 2017, INE). At the same time, over the last two decades, desired fertility has remained stable, around the value of two children per woman (Adsera 2006), suggesting Spain is one of the countries with the largest fertility gap, i.e. the difference between desired and achieved fertility. High levels of unrealized fertility might suggest a society is not able to support individuals in reaching their fertility ideals; at the individual level, not achieving one's fertility desires might have consequences for wellbeing.

While there is evidence that the traditional negative educational gradient in fertility is still present, although reduced, in Spain, very little is known about gradients in unrealized fertility. If more educated women are more likely to be voluntary childless or have lower number of desired children, it is also true that they are the most likely to postpone childbearing, thus being at risk of not being to achieve the desired fertility. On the other hand, it is argued that women with higher resources might be more able, despite a late entry into motherhood, to achieve their fertility goals. Material reasons related to lack of economic resources and work-family conflict are often suggested as main reasons for not achieving fertility desires in Spain.

In this study, we use data from the Spanish Fertility Survey (2018) to analyze educational gradients in unwanted childlessness and fertility gaps. Using, for the first time, data from the Basque Demographic Survey (1986-2021), we study how intended and realized fertility, as well as their educational gradients, have evolved over time. Our preliminary results show, overall, a positive educational gradient in unrealized fertility: highly educated women are more likely to have less children than desired. However, while highly educated women are more likely to be childless, they are not more likely to be involuntarily childless. Over cohorts, we observe convergence in the educational gradient in intended childlessness. For most cohorts, the fertility gap is slightly higher for highly educated women.