Cohort Fertility and Couple Educational Composition

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Measures of educational disparities in cohort fertility rates (CFR) serve as the primary starting point for analyzing the socioeconomic and gendered drivers of fertility. The measurement of both partners' educational levels is generally considered superior to measuring only one partner's educational level. However, no study has comprehensively analyzed the role of educational composition in cohort fertility. This study uses Finnish register data to provide the first analysis of cohort fertility rates from the perspective of educational composition. For the complete female birth cohorts from 1969 to 1975, we decompose CFR from births by educational composition. Additionally, we decompose CFR by dyadic educational characteristics, such as educational homogamy, hypergamy, and hypogamy, as well as the highest level of education. We also discuss and test the assumptions required to aggregate individual-level data for measuring CFR by couples' education. Our analysis reveals that completed cohort fertility in Finland— for the most recent cohorts from which such measures can be derived— is predominantly the result of births in educationally hypogamous or homogamous unions, as well as unions where at least one individual has tertiary education. We demonstrate that CFR by educational composition can serve as a conceptually valid measure of macro-level population patterns, but is not feasible as an approximation at the individual level, in the studied context. These findings provide a novel and population-level perspective on CRF as the result of the reversal in the educational gender gap and differential fertility across educational compositions.