



## Type of Occupation and the Transition to Parenthood in Sweden

Sofi Ohlsson, Stockholm University Demography Unit (SUDA), Sweden  
sofi.ohlsson@sociology.su.se

### Background and general purpose

Ever since large numbers of women have started to enter the labor market in the second half of the 1900s, much research has been devoted to the relationship between work and family life. The research has focused on reconciliation of family and work, and how having children is related to labor-market activity, especially from women's point of view. There are, however, still some dimensions of labor market activity and work conditions that have not been fully studied in relation to family dynamics. The aim of this study is to add to the theoretical understanding of the relationship between work and family life, and more specifically between type of occupation and the transition to parenthood. This paper proposes that men and women in the labor market might face quite different possibilities to reconcile family and work depending on the characteristics of their occupation and might therefore have differential transitions to parenthood.

This paper builds to a large extent on Swedish studies that show that educational *field* is more important for determining childbearing differentials than is educational *level*, which is commonly used in studies of family formation (Hoem *et.al.* 2006a; 2006b; see also Lappegård & Rønsen, 2005 for a Norwegian study). These studies have found large differentials in completed fertility and ultimate childlessness, among women across different educational fields. A central part of the authors' interpretations of the results are the diverse work conditions and experiences of women of different occupations. They mean that there might be differential possibilities to combine work and family life related to the security of the employments, the flexibility in work conditions and sex distribution in different sectors of the labor-market. They also address issues such as possible self-selection into labor-market sectors and family forms, as well as possible cultures of reproduction in different social groups. However, these studies use information on educational field and not occupational characteristics. There is hardly any research on the relationship between type of occupation and family dynamics (see e.g. Stanfors, 2009 for an example of a Swedish study on three specific "fast-track professions"). Therefore this study addresses this topic, with access to actual employment data.

### Sweden as a point of reference

It is particularly interesting to study the interplay between work conditions and family dynamics in a country like Sweden. This country, as well as its Nordic neighbors, often serves as a point of reference in studies on family dynamics and the relationship between family and work. There are several reasons for this. First, there is very rich and reliable register data, containing life histories on for example demographic events as well as socio-economic characteristics. Another reason is that a high level of female labor-force

participation is combined with relatively high levels of childbearing (see e.g. Billari & Kohler, 2004). Furthermore, labor-market attachment and childbearing are positively related at the individual level for both men and women (see e.g. Andersson, 2000; Hoem, 2000). This has generally been ascribed to policies promoting reconciliation of family and work, encouraging parent's labor-market attachment and promoting gender equality (for a general discussion see e.g. Neyer & Andersson, 2007; for discussion on Sweden, see e.g. Bernhardt 1993; Hoem, B. 1993). The Nordic countries are furthermore often seen as forerunners in the development of new family-demographic behavior (see e.g. van de Kaa 2002).

### **Central concepts and theoretical considerations**

The theoretical focus in this paper is mainly on possibilities to reconcile work and family life as well as gendered patterns in the relationship between occupational characteristics and childbearing. As in the studies on educational field and childbearing by Hoem *et.al.* (2006a; 2006b), some attention is paid to possible differential norms on work and family life, different cultures of reproduction, that are maintained or reinforced through interaction between people within a social group (Elster, 1991), in this case within an occupational group. Also addressed are issues related to the selection of individuals into labor-market sectors and family forms and the adaptation of behaviors related to family life and activity in the labor market.

When studying the transition into parenthood the question of postponement and timing of childbearing becomes central. Therefore a life course perspective is appropriate and issues related to the process of getting established on the labor market and perhaps also in a certain occupation. In Sweden it is common to re-enter education after having been active on the labor market for some time and also to combine part-time study and part-time work (Breen and Jonsson 2000). Partly as a result of that, occupations may vary greatly across different stages of life. Therefore not only the timing of childbearing but also the timing of labor-market activity and occupations is of relevance. Norms regarding the appropriate timing of childbearing is a related matter.

Gender is another central concept in this study. By including both men and women in the analysis, which has not been done in the studies on educational field and childbearing, more knowledge about the relationship between employment, family behavior and gender can emerge. By studying similarities or differences in patterns between the two sexes there can be a more valid theoretical discussion and evaluation of the validity of theoretical arguments in previous research on family and work.

### **Data and methods**

For the analysis I use Swedish population register data derived from the STAR (Sweden in Time – Activities and Relations) Database<sup>1</sup> that gathers data from various administrative registers. The data is longitudinal and at the individual level, containing relevant occupational

---

<sup>1</sup> The database is maintained at the Stockholm University Demography Unit (SUDA) and the Swedish Institute for Social Research (SOFI) at Stockholm University and is administered by Statistics Sweden.

and family demographic histories as well as a large amount of socio-economic and background data for the entire Swedish population in the years 1996-2007. Information on occupation is recorded yearly, while childbearing is covered with the accuracy of a month. There is information on occupation on different levels of detail and for this study around 40 different categories are created. This precise specification of occupational type is only possible when having as large data sets as in this register data. The occupational data combines information on type of work performed and level of qualification.

In the articles by Hoem *et.al.* (2006a; 2006b), childbearing is studied through completed fertility and ultimate childlessness. By using more refined measurements of childbearing, this study enables a closer understanding of the interrelation between the transition to parenthood and occupation. To maximally utilize the longitudinal character of available demographic and socio-economic data, the method of analysis used here is event-history analysis, which is a standard method for this kind of data (see Hoem, 1993 for an introduction). First birth risks among men and women in different occupational groups are studied. The propensity of becoming a parent is modeled as affected by the type of occupation and other characteristics of the occupation and workplace, as well as by a set of relevant control variables.

### **Expected results and implications of the study**

As in the studies on educational field and childbearing (*ibid.*), many of the interpretations are related to characteristics of the occupations. Here some of them, in addition to the actual occupation, can be measured such as sex distribution and private or public sector. For women, Hoem *et.al.* (2006a; 2006b) discuss that a combination of factors; security of the employments, flexibility in work conditions and sex distribution in different sectors of the labor-market seem to impact childbearing patterns. For example they found lower levels of ultimate childlessness and higher completed fertility among women with educations oriented towards the caring and teaching professions, while women with artistic educations had much higher childlessness and lower completed fertility than others. I expect quite similar results to be found for women when using data on actual occupation instead of education and transition to parenthood instead of completed fertility and childlessness. However, many men and women do not actually work in occupations related to the educational fields within which they have studied and this mismatch is more common for certain educational fields than others (e.g. Wolbers, 2003).

Regarding possible sex differences in the relationship between occupational characteristics and the propensity of entering parenthood, I expect the flexibility of work conditions to be of less importance for childbearing differentials among men than among women, as women in Sweden still do most of the caring for children and work part time to a much larger extent than do men (Sundström, 1997). On the other hand, I expect employment security to be of importance for both men and women, as usually both sexes provide for the family in Sweden (*ibid.*). Regarding sex distribution, I expect both men and women to have higher propensities of becoming a parent in female dominated occupations as in Hoem *et.al.* (2006a; 2006b) because these may be environments in which pregnancy and parenthood are relatively common and employers are accustomed to the needs of childrearing parents. However, it

seems likely that there might be significant gender differences in cultures of reproduction within occupational groups, as well as in self-selection processes into family forms and work life.

The main contributions of this study are that it further explores the relationship between work and family dynamics in a manner that fully takes advantage of the available data from Swedish population registers. By studying different occupational types, the heterogeneity of labor-market experiences and their associations to childbearing are taken into proper account.

## References

- Andersson, G., 2000. The impact of labor-force participation on childbearing behavior: Pro-cyclical fertility in Sweden during the 1980s and the 1990s. *European Journal of Population* 16: 293-333.
- Bernhardt, E., 1993. Fertility and employment. *European Sociological Review* 9: 25-42.
- Billari, F.C., and Kohler, H-P., 2004. Patterns of low and lowest-low fertility in Europe. *Population Studies* 58: 161-176.
- Breen, R. and Jonsson, J.O., 2000. Analyzing educational careers: A multinomial transition model. *American Sociological Review* 65(5): 754-772.
- Elster, J., 1991. Rationality and social norms. *Archive Européenne de Sociologie* 32: 109-129.
- Hoem, B., 1993. The compatibility of employment and childbearing in contemporary Sweden. *Acta Sociologica* 36: 101-120.
- Hoem, B., 2000. Entry into motherhood in Sweden: the influence of economic factors on the rise and fall in fertility, 1986-1997. *Demographic Research* [Online] 2(4). Available at <http://www.demographic-research.org/Volumes/Vol2/4>.
- Hoem, J.M., 1993. Classical demographic methods of analysis and modern event-history techniques. IUSSP: 22nd International Population Conference, Montreal, Canada, Volume 3: 281-291.
- Hoem, J.M., Neyer, G., and Andersson, G., 2006a. Education and childlessness: The relationship between educational field, educational level, and childlessness among Swedish women born in 1955-59. *Demographic Research* 14(15): 331-380.
- Hoem, J.M., Neyer, G., and Andersson, G., 2006b. Educational attainment and ultimate fertility among Swedish women born in 1955-59. *Demographic Research* 14(16): 381-404.
- Lappegård, T., and Rønsen, M., 2005. The multifaceted impact of education on entry into motherhood. *European Journal of Population* 21: 31-49.
- Neyer, G., and Andersson, G., 2007. Consequences of family policies on childbearing behavior: Effects or artifacts? MPIDR Working Paper 2007-021. Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, Rostock.
- Stanfors, M., 2009. Family commitment among fast-track professionals in Sweden, 1991–2005. Paper presented at the Annual meeting of the Population Association of America, Detroit, 2 May.
- Sundström, M., 1997. Managing Work and Children: Part-Time Work and the Family Cycle of Swedish Women. In Blossfeld, H-P., and C. Hakim (eds.): *Between Equalization and Marginalization. Women Working Part Time in Europe and the United States of America*. 272-288. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- van de Kaa, D.J., 2002. The idea of a second demographic transition in industrialized countries. Paper presented at the Sixth Welfare Policy Seminar of the National Institute of Population and Social Security, Tokyo, 29 January.
- Wolbers, M., 2003. Job mismatches and their labour market effects among school leavers in Europe. In Kogan, I. and W. Müller (eds.): *School-to-work transitions in Europe: Analyses of the EU LFS 2000 ad hoc module*. 89-120. Mannheim: Mannheimer Zentrum für Europäische Sozialforschung.