

## **Parenthood and Changing Gender Role Attitudes in Sweden**

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- extended abstract -

Within the last 50 years, family life in Western countries has changed dramatically. Family forms have diversified, marriage has lost importance, the numbers of divorces, out-of-wedlock births, re-partnered couples, single mothers and patch-work families are growing while fertility levels are declining. Simultaneously, gender roles have undergone considerable changes with a rising share of women in the labor force and a shrinking educational gap between men and women. These phenomena are subsumed under the term Second Demographic Transition which is coined by an increasing individualization and a liberalization of family values in society.

Family and gender role values - as we understand it - describe the normative picture of how the “perfect” family should be organized and how paid and unpaid work is distributed over males and females. Macro-level values vary along national as well as generational lines (Scott 2006). On a personal level, attitudes are connected to living arrangements and family formation: singles have the least traditional attitudes while married couples with children that have never cohabited show most traditional attitudes (Surkyn and Lesthaeghe 2004). However, the dynamics of individual gender role attitudes are difficult to detect. Most European surveys that focus on attitudes allow only for cross-sectional investigations inappropriate to identify attitudinal changes over time. Using panel data collected in Sweden, this paper investigates the relation between different parities of young adults and their ideals concerning work-family arrangements.

Values are influenced by a multitude of factors. Some studies address the relationship between institutional settings and specific family ideals on the societal level (McDonald 2000; Sjöberg 2004). However, preferences are not necessarily stable over an entire life course. Based on more than 60 interviews with female US-Americans, Gerson (1985) concluded that women adopt contextually sensible attitudes about gender equality that fit with their work-life arrangements. The author identifies a number of factors which induced formerly home oriented women to turn to the labor market. Others prioritized the home and the family after getting increasingly involved in the relationship with their new partner. Also the entry into parenthood exerts a strong impact on a person's everyday life and might also coin

his or her attitudes toward gender roles. We expect that parents change their attitudes after having a(nother) child. Fathers face a growing economic pressure promoting more traditionalist gender role attitudes in families with one or more children. As women still do more care work than fathers, they adopt more egalitarian gender attitudes after entry into parenthood. Some US-studies analyzed these two hypotheses showing that the number of children has a conservative effect on men's attitudes although the findings for women are inconsistent (Kroska and Elman 2009).

However, to our knowledge little attention has been paid to attitudinal changes in Europe. In our analysis, we focus on Sweden where the Second Demographic Transition has proceeded to a comparably great extend (Oláh and Bernhardt 2008). The answering patterns to the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) from the year 2002 presented as aggregate numbers in table 1 indicate normative differences between European countries. In Sweden, 62.5% of the respondents agreed to the statement "having a job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person" while 23.7% think that "a pre-school child is likely to suffer if his/her mother works" (DiPrete et al. 2003). This shows strong general support for freedom of choice for females and indicates egalitarian gender roles within the Swedish society.

	TFR 2008	"Having a job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person."	"A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his/her mother works."
Spain	1.31	80.4%	52.2%
West Germany	1.39	77.7%	55.6%
Sweden	1.91	62.5%	23.7%
UK	1.96	55.3%	38.4%
France	2.02	80.7%	32.4%

Table 1: Answering patterns in the 2002 ISSP survey.

Source: ISSP 2002. Percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed to the statements. TFR for the year 2008 taken from national statistical offices.

Using the individual level data set "Family and Working Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century"<sup>1</sup>, we plan to detect changes of individual level attitudes before and after births. The survey follows 2,089 respondents (below age 41) over 3 waves and we expect to find changes in answering patterns between the waves according to number of children.

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<sup>1</sup> The survey was designed by Eva Bernhardt at Stockholm University with Statistics Sweden in charge of the field-work. Data are provided by the Swedish Social Science Data Service (SSD) and are available at <http://www.ssd.gu.se/>.

In order to capture several dimensions of gender role attitudes and family ideals, we investigate answering patterns to the following questions “What is the best arrangement for a family with pre-school children?”, “Spending time with the family is more rewarding than work.”, “Something is missing if a couple never has children.”, “It is important to me to have children.”, “It is important to me to be successful in my work”. Our analyses start with describing sequences of attitudinal changes to identify trajectories of gender attitudes over time and births. In a second step, we apply ordered logistic regression analyses to measure the influence of parity progressions on gender role attitudes expecting conservative effects for men and egalitarian effects for women.

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