Gendering Occupation and Fertility

A comparison between women's and men's childbearing behavior by occupational branches

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Recent demographic research has shown remarkable differences in childbearing outcomes by women's educational field. Women with an education in a health or teaching profession remain less childless and have more children on average than women educated in other professions (Hoem, Neyer and Andersson 2006a, 2006b; Lappegård and Rønsen 2005; Neyer and Hoem 2008; van Bavel 2010; Bagavos 2010). This raises three questions: First, are the results for the educational fields produced by the occupations which women have over their life course? Second, do we find similar patterns of childbearing behavior among men, and if so, how are these patterns related to the sex segregation in occupations? Third, how does the development of occupational branches affect childbearing behavior of women and men?

To our knowledge there exists no comprehensive study which has investigated these three questions. Our study thus provides some empirical insight into the links between occupational branches and childbearing behavior from a gender perspective; the results also offer the opportunity to contribute to a better theoretical understanding of the relationship between gender, employment, and fertility.

Theoretical assumptions:

Most studies which have looked at the effects of educational fields or of occupations on childbearing concentrate on women. They usually come to the conclusion that a higher share of women in a field is associated with higher childbearing risks. It is argued that female dominated jobs offer better opportunities to combine work and family. Such areas therefore attract women who want to or who have children. It is, however, much more difficult to formulate theoretical assumptions about fertility and occupational branches for those fields, which do not correspond to the high share of women - high fertility pattern. Hoem, Neyer, and Andersson (2006a) have argued that fertility patterns by fields may be influenced by occupational factors related to job security, job content and job prospects, potential skill deprivation through child-related absence, and gender dominance on the job. As regards the latter, they argue that the sex segregation of the occupation alone is not sufficient to explain the fertility levels of women employed in these occupations. Deducing from their educational results, they suspect that there are (at least) five clusters of occupation with different linkages between the gender distribution in the occupation and fertility outcomes. We explore whether we find empirical evidence for these assumptions about the relationship between gender aspects of the occupational branch and childbearing. As regards the relationship between men's occupation and their fertility, empirical analyses of a link between their educational or occupational field and their childbearing intensities are missing. We assume that some occupational characteristics, such as job security and job stability work in the same direction as for women. Following the theory of the culture of reproduction, we also assume that men working in female

dominated jobs have higher fertility than men working in male dominated jobs. Given the highly gender segregated labor markets (Nermo 2010; Estévez-Abe 2006), we may also expect differences in the relationship between occupational field and women and men's childbearing behavior.

Data and Method:

Researchers who want to investigate the effect of occupation on childbearing are usually confronted with the fact that the number of respondents in different surveys is too small to study the fertility impact over an array of occupations (Martín García 2011). For our study, we could access Danish register data which comprise information on the childbearing histories of all women and men born since 1945 and residing in Denmark for at least some time of their lives during 1981 and 2001. These data were linked to registers which contain information on these women's and men's employment and occupational histories for the years 1981 to 2001. For our study, we selected all women and men who were of childbearing and working ages, that is between 20 and 45 years old. We grouped the occupational branches into 49 occupations following the Danish classification and the ISCO-08 coding of occupations, and assuring that there are sufficient numbers of women and men in each occupation to allow us to study childbearing. Since during the 1980s and the early 1990s the Danish labor market underwent significant restructuring (Benner and Vad 2000), we also explored whether the expansion of occupational branches had any effect on women's and men's childbearing behavior. All results are based on event-history methods.

Results:

As expected, the Danish labor market, as many other labor markets, is highly sex segregated (Nermo 2010; Estévez-Abe 2006; Charles and Bradley 2009). Women are more often employed in the public sector, men in the secondary (industrial) sector. Women also have a higher concentration in a smaller number of occupations than men do. Within the female dominated occupations, about 20% of all women work in the health- and social care sector, but only 3 to 4% of all men. Within the male dominated occupations, about 10% of men work in the metal industry and in construction, but only about 1-3% of women is in these occupational fields.

These sex segregations have different effects on women's and men's childbearing behavior. Women in female dominated occupations and women in highly male dominated occupations have higher childbearing risks than women in other occupational fields. While high fertility was also reported in all studies on the link between female dominated educational fields and fertility, this was not always the case for the link between male dominated educational fields and fertility. Contrary to the assumption that female dominated occupations with high fertility might also increase the childbearing intensities of men in these occupations, we find that men occupied in female dominated branches have lower childbearing intensities than men in other occupational sectors (Figure 1). The highest childbearing risks among men are found for men employed in the metal industry and production. This may indicate that a high-fertility occupational surrounding or a "family-friendly" occupational branch per se does not affect childbearing behavior as such, but that it is rather a gender-homogenous surrounding which may affect childbearing behavior.

Similar to our findings on the impact of educational fields on fertility, we find the lowest childbearing risks among women and men who work in libraries, in the beauty-business and personal services, in restaurants, in job centers, in higher education and in media. This supports the assumption that working

conditions or job requirements in these occupations are not conducive to childbearing, neither to that of women nor to that of men.

Childbearing risks of women were also lower for women occupied in expanding occupational branches (Figure 2). Surprisingly, there is no clear link between men's childbearing intentions and the development of the occupational branch. The branches that expanded most during the years which we investigated comprised occupations which are regarded as little conducive to family life (IT, lower service sector, cleaning, advertisement, research and development). This suggests that although Denmark is a country with very high childcare coverage, such working conditions nevertheless exert gendered effects on the childbearing of women and men.

In summary, our results suggest that in order to understand the relationship between occupational branch and childbearing, we need to interpret the results from a sex-segregated as well as from a gender-comparative perspective. Only such a combined approach can explain some of the puzzling results of our analysis.

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Appendix: For this abstract, we have only selected two results and to for space reasons, we have transformed the branches into circles which represent the strength of the occupational branch (with regard to the share of women in the branch resp. the increase in employees in the branch over the 20 years of investigation). The x-axis relates to the occupational branches, the y-axis to the relative risks of first birth.

Figure 1:

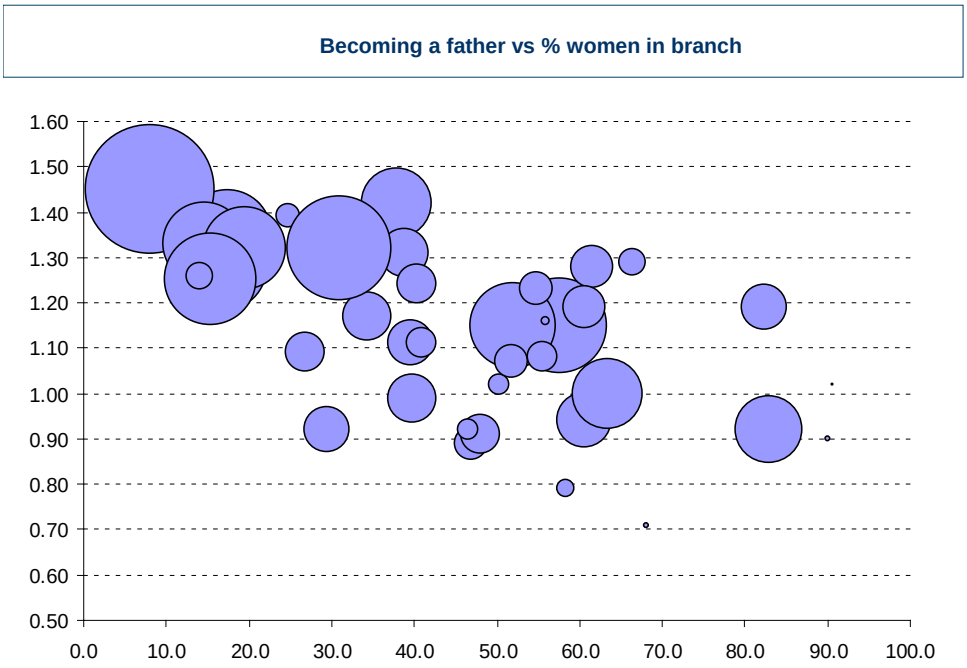
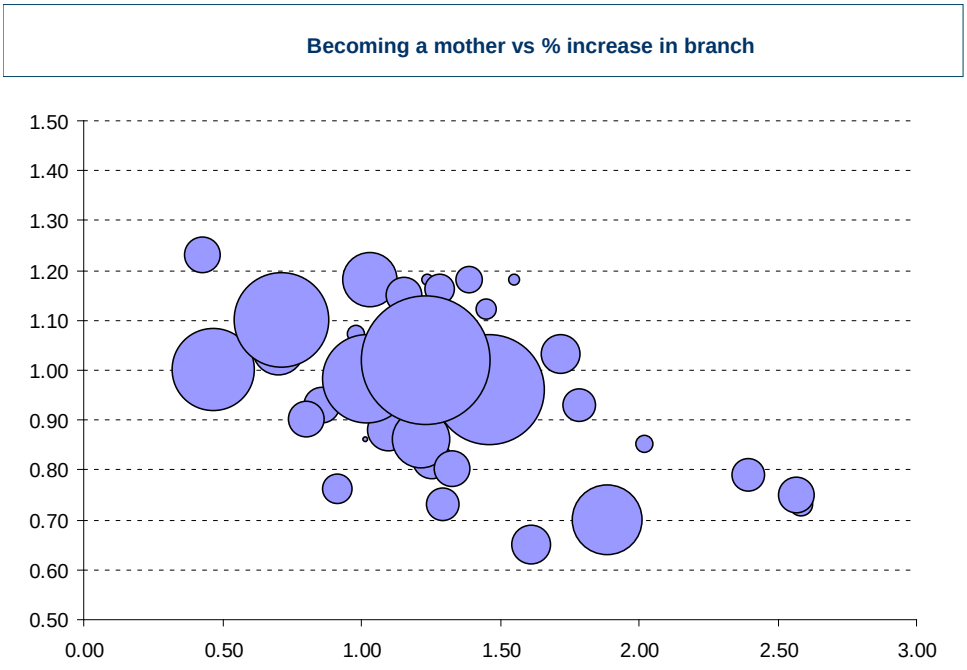


Figure 2:


Becoming a mother vs % increase in branch
1.50
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1.30
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