Let's have a new baby or let's go back to work? Fertility decisions among one-child mothers in Hungary

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Abstract

According to the theory, the difference in the equality in the public sphere and the private sphere between men and women may explain the low fertility in several developed countries. If in the social sphere men and women have equal opportunities while the equality is reduced by the presence of children, then women tend to have fewer children and fertility rates tend to be lower.

In Hungary the position of women is similar to men's in the education system, and the employment rates of women without children are similar to that of men. However, inequality is important in the private life. This appears especially after the birth of children since most women quite labour market for several years after childbirth.

The aim of this study is to explain the effects of gender inequity, namely the effects of women's career interruptions after childbirth on subsequent childbirth. Our research question is the following: among mothers of one children, in which case is the probability to have a second child higher during the five years following the first birth: if they (re)enter labour market after the birth or if they stay at home and devote themselves to their first child. According to the theory we would expect that second births occur more often when women work after the childbirth instead of staying at home and reinforcing gender inequity. A long career interruption may indeed favour gender inequity in the family: women lose their income and it's them who are responsible for the household and the children while men are the breadwinner of the family. We analyse if this assumption is valid in Hungary, in a country where family policy encourages women to quit their job after childbirth and where most women indeed stay at home for two or three years.

Background and context

Several studies analyse the relation between fertility and women's employment on the macro and the micro level and they conclude that the possibility to conciliate employment and child rearing is an important explanatory factor of fertility rates in the developed world (Rindfuss and Brewster, 1996; Neyer, 2006; McDonald, 2006). The source of the conflict between employment and family comes from the incompatibility between the parent's role and the worker's role: in the industrialised countries where the working place is distinct from the home, the supervision of children cannot be accomplished at the same time as the working tasks (Bernhardt, 1993). However, role incompatibility affects only one of the parents since a single adult is capable to supervise the children and in the most of the cases it is the mother who is concerned: it's her duty to care for other people in the family and that's why it's her who takes additional responsibility after childbirth. To relax the conflict many women interrupt their working career after childbirth or go back to a part time job after maternity leave. In the same time, the working hours and the career of men are in general not negatively affected by the birth of a child (Pailhé and Solaz, 2006).

The proportion of women who interrupt their work after childbirth and the length of interruption differ from one country to another and are influenced by family policy and employment policy measures as well as by social norms. Family policy measures which may influence the decision are those which concern early childhood: paid or unpaid parental leaves and the existence of crèches or nurseries. Labour market measures can also have an impact on women's employment after birth by encouraging (e.g. by introducing part time jobs) or discouraging women to return to the labour market.

In Hungary women's activity rates and employment rates are strongly dependent on the number and the age of their children. While employment rates of men and women without children are similar (about 75%), women's employment rates fall by 10 points when they have one or two children and is only 38% if they have three or more children (Eurostat data). The fall in the employment rates of women after childbirth is a general tendency in most developed countries, however in Hungary the decrease is more important than in other countries and it is already significant after the birth of the first child.

How can cross-country differences be explained? According to the theory of McDonald, the difference in the equality in the public sphere and the private sphere between men and women may explain the low fertility in several countries. If in the social sphere men and women have equal opportunities while the equality is reduced by the presence of children, then women tend to have fewer children and fertility rates tend to be lower (McDonald, 2002). We see indeed that while the position of women is similar to men's in the education system (52% of university students are women (CSO, 2011) and the employment opportunities are better than in several developed countries (among managers, 35% are women while the average is only 33% in the OECD countries (OECD Family database), inequality is important in the private life. Women quit labour market after childbirth and they devote 36 hours a week to the care of other family members while men devote only 24.

Research questions

The aim of this study is to explain the effects of gender inequity, namely the effects of women's career interruptions after childbirth on subsequent childbirth. Our research question is the following: among mothers of one children, in which case is the probability to

have a second child higher during the five years following the first birth: if they (re)enter labour market after the birth or if they stay at home and devote themselves to their first child. According to the theory of McDonald we would expect that second births occur more often when women work after the childbirth instead of staying at home and reinforcing gender inequity. A long career interruption may indeed favour gender inequity in the family: women lose their income; it's them who are responsible for the household and the children while men are the breadwinner of the family. We analyse if this assumption is valid in Hungary, in a country where family policy encourages women to quit their job after childbirth and where most women indeed stay at home for two or three years.

Data, sample and methodology

We focus on women who already have one child and we analyse the probability of the birth of the second child during the five years after the first birth. We direct our attention to the second birth since in Hungary the dominant family model is that with two children, and two children are seen as the ideal number of children (S. Molnár, 2009). Those who have one child wish to have a second one in the most of the cases.

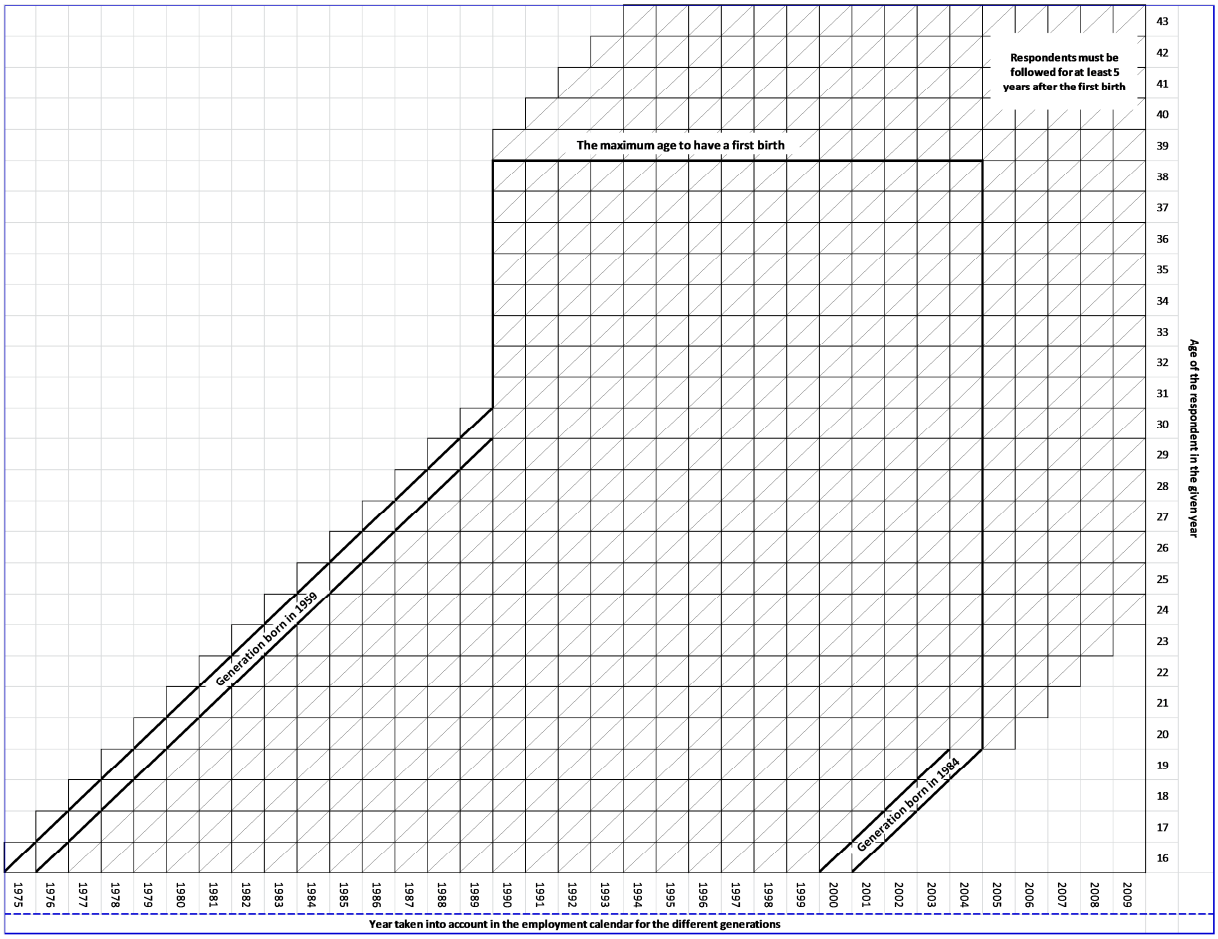
An interval of five years has been chosen for several reasons. First, most of the second births occur until this time and after four or five years the probability of having one more child tends to diminish. Second, we take into account the Hungarian family policy system, namely the parental leave system. Indeed, after every birth women are entitled to a paid parental leave of two or three years. Women who never worked receive a low fixed amount during three years and those who had a job at the time of birth get about 70% of their previous income with an upper limit for two years. The result of this rather generous system – and of the fact that only about 10% of pre-school children have a place in a crèche – is that most women interrupt their work for two or three years. This explains why we have to take into account a longer period if we are interested in the effect of the take up of work after the first birth on the birth of a second child.

We analyse the dataset of a longitudinal survey, the Hungarian Generations and Gender Survey which includes the activity and education history of respondents since their 16th birthday. This table was included in the third wave in Hungary in 2009. Respondents had to indicate precisely all activities they had and which lasted longer than 3 months with their beginning and ending date: studies, jobs and type of employment (employed or self-employed, full time or part time, etc.), as well as other status if the respondent was inactive (unemployed, on maternity leave, on parental leave, homemaker, etc.).

The whole survey included about 10 000 respondents. The youngest were born in 1984 and the oldest in 1926. However, the collection of activity and education history didn't concern all of the respondents and even the respondents who were concerned didn't have to enumerate their history from the same starting point. There were important differences according to their year of birth. The history of respondents born between 1944 and 1958 was only collected from the 1st January 1989. The younger generations who were born after 1958 were asked to describe their different situations since their 16th birthday. Age has a strong influence on the amount of collected information: while it concerns 34 years in the case of the generation born in 1959, it concerns only 9 years in the case of the youngest generation born in 1984.

The sample was designed as follows. First we selected the women who had at least one child and were born in 1951 or later. Indeed, the generation born in 1951 is the first for which the employment data during their childbearing years is available.
Then we examined for each generation the periods during which we know their employment history and we chose the year until which they had to give birth to their first child to be taken into account in our sample. The employment information during five additional years after the birth of the first child is required to be able to follow them. We also set an age limit until which first children had to be born so that we can study if a second birth occurred in the five years. This age limit was set to 38 years for the first birth. The Lexis diagram represents our sample.

Figure 1: Lexis diagram representing the sample



Our sample includes 2236 women. This sample is rather heterogeneous regarding generations and the length during which we follow their employment history. Table 1 shows the distribution of the sample according to the year of birth of the respondents and their age at the date of the interview.

Table 1: Distribution of the sample according to the year of birth and the age of the respondents

Year of birth	Age at the time of the interview	% in the sample
1952-1962	47-57	22,10 %
1963-1972	37-46	47,42 %
1973-1983	26-36	30,48 %
Total		100,00 %

Among our respondents 54,1% had a second child in the five years following the birth of their first child. Table 2 shows the distribution of the second birth in the five years as a function of the age of the mother. The interval of five years turned out to be a fine choice since 80% of women who had a second child had it in the five years after their first child. The median birth interval is 3 years.

Table 2: Proportion of respondents who had a second child in the five years

Year of birth	Age at the time of the interview	% who had 2nd child in the 5 years
1952-1962	47-57	59,1%
1963-1972	37-46	61,9%
1973-1983	26-36	48,4%
% of total		54,1%

We phase in a survival analysis to examine the effect of a possible return to work on the probability of a second birth and on the birth spacing.
First we describe with a Kaplan-Meier function the business activity of the women before and after the first birth and the occurrence of second births in the five years after the first. Then we make Cox models: the advantage of these regressions is the possibility to introduce dynamic variables such as return to work, the take up of studies, or a change in the partnership status.
We also take into account conventional variables, such as year of birth, age at the birth of the first child, type of partnership, level of education, employment status before the first birth and the take up of parental leave afterwards.

First results and further expected results

Our first results concerning work in connection with childbirth show that most women work before the first birth and that most of them leave their job after this event: 82,9% of women are on parental leave 6 months after the first birth and only 13% work. The length of job interruption is clearly influenced by family policy. Indeed, there are three waves of return to the labour market and these correspond to family policy measures. About 17% of women return to labour market after the maternity leave which is taken entirely by almost all women. The majority of mothers are still on leave when their child celebrates its second birthday, but the second wave of return to labour market just follows this event: about 12% of mothers return to work at this time, mainly those who have worked before the birth and who were paid according to their earlier salary during the two years. This allowance, the GYED terminates at the second birthday of the child. Mothers can return to work or spend an additional year on parental leave by getting the fixed allowance called GYES, which can be received until the third birthday of the child. This explains the third wave of return 36 months after birth: about 22% of mothers begin to work at this time. 3 years after a second or a third birth almost 40% of mothers are still inactive and 30% of mothers are after a first birth.

Most mothers stay at home for at least two or three years with their first child. We expect that in their case the probability of having a second child will be higher during the years of parental leave than afterwards. It may indeed make more sense to stay on parental leave with a subsequent child than to return to the labour market for a short time and to interrupt one's business activity again. Other studies suggest indeed that it is more difficult for women to quite twice the labour market than to pile up two parental leaves (Spéder and Kapitány, 2008).

Our other variables may also influence the birth of the second child: we expect that if the first birth occurs at higher ages than the probability of having a second child in a short time will be higher. Stable partnership status during the five years may also raise the probability of a second birth.

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