

To what extent family planning can be seen as a rational decision making process?

Yve Stöbel-Richter, Markus Zenger, Hendrik Berth & Elmar Brähler

Due to the continuous decline of the birth rate as well as the demographic aging of the German society, questions emerge about the abilities and possibilities to govern or rather to increase the birth rate. Beside these demographic aspects, also norm and ethical values were spotlighted by politicians, social scientists and the general public. A central concern is the compatibility of family and career, especially for women. In addition to the more beneficial or more inhibiting general conditions of the society, mainly individual decision processes, including the weighting of many different aspects, contribute to the final decision of starting a family. From a sociological point of view the question raises, whether people act more based on structural constraints of the society or more on grounds of individual self-government and autonomy respectively (Burkart, 2002). Basically, we can act on the assumption that both aspects influence decision-making processes, because the final decision is made by the individual, but based on the existing circumstances of the society. The decline of the birth rate in the eastern part of Germany between 1990 and 1995 can be seen as an example of this assumption. The decision (not) to have a child was mostly influenced by motivational and emotional aspects. On the other hand, the determining influence of greater social changes existed, including insecurities derived from the abolition of social securities compared to the time before the reunification.

1 Methods and theoretical framework

The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 1991) was taken as the theoretical framework to examine contributory aspects for taking the decision of starting a family. This theory seems to be appropriate, because it focuses decision-making processes and predicts behaviour. Former studies showed that first of all attitudes towards the wish for a child determines the decision for starting a family (e.g. Stöbel-Richter, 2010; 2000). In context of starting a family, without having longitudinal data it is not possible to clarify causal relationship between attitudes, intention and behavior, as postulated by Ajzen. Therefore, the following analyses are focused on this relationship only. Further explanations and results to other determinants are described in Stöbel-Richter (2010).

The "Attitude" factor summarizes the advantages and disadvantages, which were associated by the participants with "having children". This factor was operationalized through the application of the "Leipziger Fragebogen zu Kinderwunschmotiven" (LKM), which consists of four sub-scales, two each for positive and delimitating aspects of having children (see also Stöbel-Richter, 2000 and Brähler, Stöbel-Richter & Schumacher, 2001).

The "Intention" factor of the model was operationalized by asking the participants for the present wish for a child, the intention to have a child during the next two years and for their ideal number of children. Furthermore, the "Behaviour" factor was represented through the realised number of children and gravity during the last two years.

2 Study and sample characteristics

The Saxony Longitudinal Study ("Sächsische Längsschnittstudie", cf. Berth, Förster, Brähler & Stöbel-Richter, 2007; <http://www.wiedereremigung.de/sls/>) was already launched in 1987 in the former GDR. A sample of 14-year-old students at that time ($N = 1.281$) was selected as a representative group for the East German cohort of 1973; they were interviewed repeatedly until spring 1989. In spring 1989, after the third poll, $N = 587$ of these participants consented to take part in further surveys. It has been possible to continue the study after the German reunification until today. In 2009, the twenty-third survey was conducted. The main focuses of the study are political and social questions and since 2002, the processes of starting a family. The following analyses include data from the polls 20 till 23, from the years 2006 to 2009.

The $N = 364$ respondents of the twenty-third survey (2009) of the Saxony Longitudinal Study were aged 36.2 years on average (homogeneous in age). Of these participants, 54.4 % were female. Most of the study participants finished their vocational or professional education; only 2.4 % did not have a completed vocational training. More than 85 % lived in a partnership, 49.2 % were married, and 72.4 % had children.

3 Results

3.1 The wish for a child

Despite the decline of the birth rate and macro social changes that happened in the eastern part of Germany, it is still a high valued and temporal stable aim in life to raise children. However, only a small proportion of the participants has

currently a wish for a child "How strong is your wish for a child at the moment?", rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 = not at all to 5 = very strong): 17% had a strong or very strong wish, 16% were more or less ambivalent, and 67% had a very small or no wish at all for a child. Regarding childless people, the wish for a child is significantly stronger ($M = 2.74$) than for participants that already have at least one child ($M = 1.79$; T-test: $df = 337$; $p \leq .001$).

3.2 Realised number of children – longitudinal perspective

Since the age of 19, the study participants were asked whether they have children and how many children they finally want to have. Nowadays, in the age of 36, a total of 72% of the participants are parents, 33% each have one or two children, 6% have three or four children, and 28% have no child.

Regarding men and women separately, the following trends emerge: Women have children significantly earlier in their life course and also have more children than men. At the age of 25, 16.1% of the women but only 5.4% of the men have one or two children. Aged 36, 22% of the women and 34% of the men are still childless.

3.3 Ideal and realised number of children

The data generally show that the ideal number of children is higher than the realised one. Until now, 52% have already realised their ideal number of children. More than half the participants (51 %) favour two children as their ideal number, 27% favour to have only one child.

3.4 Relationships between attitudes, intentional and behavioral variables

To analyse several relationships between the different factors of the model mentioned above, multiple and logistic regressions were conducted. The results show a marginal influence of "Attitude"-factors (LKM-scales 1-4) on "Intention" (planning gravidity during the next two years: Adj. $R^2 = .006$; $F = 2.9$; $p(F) = .089$; present wish for a child: Adj. $R^2 = .033$; $F = 7.35$; $p(F) = .001$). A higher influence was found between "Attitude" and the ideal number of children (Adj. $R^2 = .262$; $F = 63.85$; $p(F) = .001$). Regarding the relationship between "Attitude" and "Behaviour" (realised number of children), the Adj. R^2 ranges between .144 after one year and .172 after two years.

Concerning the relationship between intentional and behavioural variables, the data show on the one hand and as expected, a high influence of the aspect "planning of gravidity" and actual wish for a child and its realisation (Adj. $R^2 = .256$; $F = 52.00$; $p(F) = .001$). 16% of the participants and their partners respectively have been pregnant in 2009 or during the two years ago. A total of 73% of these people considered in 2007 gravidity as likely or most likely and therefore

probably intended to have a child. In contrast, just under one third of them did not plan gravidity.

Further analyses showed a great influence of intentional variables on starting a family in the subgroup of childless participants.

Discussion

Concerning the results of this study the question arises, to what extent at all the attitudes towards having children have a direct effect on behaviour. Especially the correlation between attitudes and intention seems to be very low. It is possible that people with positive attitudes towards having children do not automatically express their own wish for a child, but possibly leave gravidity to chance through a less active or no contraception at all. Furthermore, the question about the influence of already having children on the expressed attitudes of the study participants cannot be answered conclusively. However, parents in this study had more positive attitudes towards having children than childless participants. Beside this, additional analyses have shown that the reasons that lead to the decision for the first child differ from those leading to the decision for a second child (see also Stöbel-Richter, 2007). Regarding the intended gravidities in relation to the "realised" gravidities, the results provide evidence that the realisation of starting a family can not be exclusively seen as a rational decision-making process, because of several existing (also biological) uncertainty factors. Thus, the process of starting a family is not completely controllable. It may rather be the case that unconscious aspects as well as ambivalences play an important role.

Finally, to improve the predictability of the theory of planned behaviour, the model has to be expanded by the inclusion of external variables that allow not only for individual but also for important context variables of the present society.

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Introduction

Samuel Salzborn, Eldad Davidov & Jost Reinecke

Peter Schmidt is a leading figure in the fields of sociology, political science and methodology. On the occasion of his 70th birthday, his colleagues collaborated to present him this Festschrift. First and foremost, this is an expression of our deep appreciation of and gratitude to our colleague and friend, Peter Schmidt, for his wide-ranging academic achievements throughout his career, his intellect and expertise he was glad to share with us, his continuous productivity in empirical social research, and the inspiration as well as the many motivating ideas he provided us with. Throughout his extensive career, Peter has been interested (and still is) in many thematic and methodological fields, and we believe that such a volume should reflect this diversity. Not surprisingly, the number of collaborators who expressed their interest to contribute to this festschrift is very large and reflects Peter's productive and rich network of researchers, experts, and practitioners, leading us to consider a new, and in our view, innovative concept for the book. Instead of describing large, comprehensive studies, the contributors present brief research notes that report interesting research topics or questions, or contributions to open new perspectives for such studies. Thus, reflecting this diversity, the list of authors in this volume is composed of both younger and more experienced researchers.

The festschrift is a collection of 40 contributions on theoretical, methodological, and theoretically driven empirical studies about various topics of research in the fields of sociology, political science, and social psychology. The chapters cover up-to-date advances in theory, methods of data collection and analysis, structural equation modeling (SEM), models of rational choice, values, attitudes, and behavior, as well as empirical investigations of discrimination, nationalism, authoritarianism, identity, and social structure, all topics touched upon by Peter Schmidt throughout his extensive teaching and research career.

In this introduction we would also like to share some of our memories from our work with Peter by providing a few anecdotes. We have always experienced Peter as humane, sincere, supportive, motivating, constructive, loyal, helpful, and he has been an encouraging teacher, mentor, collaborator, and friend to so many individuals. He has been a true asset to any team he joined, he has brought many people together, and he has both the intellectual and emotional intelligence to lead teams effectively and to cooperate in easy and difficult situations brilliantly. His advice is always worth its weight in gold, and his optimism contagious. Throughout his career, his research has been original, inspirational