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Couples' childbearing intentions and actual childbearing

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Abstract: This study investigates how childbearing intentions of both partners in couples affect actual childbearing the coming years, with the intention to investigate whether women's or men's intentions may be more important. The study is set in Sweden, a country known for ranking high on gender equality and also a country with relatively high fertility. We use the Young Adult Panel Study (YAPS) which gives information about both partners' attitudinal orientations and childbearing plans in 2009, and we then follow these couples for five years with register data on childbearing. In 30 percent of the couples both partners plan to have a child, and out of these about three quarters get a child. A fair share of the couples where partners do not completely agree also have a child. The results show that in general both partners need to agree on intentions for the couple to have a child, but that women's intentions are more important among the couples who already have become parents, that is for continued childbearing.

Keywords: Childbearing intentions, couples dynamics, Sweden, childbearing



Introduction

Family dynamics, the idea of what is a family, and who decides in the family have unarguably changed in the last decades. In one of the forerunning countries, Sweden, the generations born in the late 1960s to early 1980s are the first generations who have grown up with two working parents, unmarried parents, and parents who have often both separated and met new partners. We have considerable knowledge about how family dynamics have changed over time (see for example Andersson och Kolk 2011; Sobotka och Toulemon 2008), but less about in what way power dynamics and negotiations are shaping family patterns in the generation of adults of today. Women's and men's roles have also changed, primarily as many women have become economically independent by labour force participation and men get access to childcaring, not least facilitated by family policy oriented to gender-neutral caring. We are in this study interested in whether the current context leads to gender equal interaction in couples and an equal bargaining position of women and men in Sweden. We focus on the perhaps most crucial and life altering decision for a couple, to have a child or not.

The fertility question has been connected to development of gender equity on the societal level (McDonald 2006). It has been pointed out that the societal context will matter for childbearing intentions, where for example economic uncertainty may have different importance in different gender regimes (Fahlén 2013). The societal context may also matter for how likely childbearing plans are to be carried out (Thomson and Hoem 1998). Sweden is often considered as a relatively gender equal context, especially regarding women's economic independence, indicated by a high rate of female employment, and by a generous family policy supporting an earner-carer model (Ferrarini and Duvander 2010). Also, fertility is relatively high in Sweden with a TFR of about 1,9 since the beginning of the 2000s.

Childbearing is in addition relatively equally distributed over the population with a strong two child norm and relatively few women and men ending up childless.¹ It is often claimed that gender equality is a major reason to Sweden's relatively high fertility, as both women and men have the possibility to combine work and family. This is an ideal setting for investigating whether priority may be given to any of the partners' childbearing intentions. However, we should also remember that gender equality remains incomplete in many

¹ *The proportion women ending up childless are about 14 percent, and less than 30 percent of the parents have more than two children (Statistics Sweden 2011).*

dimensions, not least the family. An indicator of this is that men only use 25 percent of the parental leave (Swedish Social Insurance Agency 2015) and the gender wage gap is substantial and only slowly decreasing over the last decades (Statistics Sweden 2016).

This study examines how couples' long term childbearing intentions are related to realized childbearing in the near future. This question originates in a strand of research on the relation between intentions and behavior (Ajzen och Fishbein 1980) and our main aim is to increase the knowledge on how decisions are made within the couple. We relate this question of decision making in the couple to the development of gender equality in the last decades and therefor ask "*Whose plans are most decisive?*"

We use survey data where we measure childbearing intentions of both partners in a couple in 2009. Thereafter we link this data to population register data in order to follow the same couple and investigate whether their intentions actually were realized. We thus investigate the interaction of the childbearing intentions of the woman and the man, in order to find out whose intentions are most decisive (if any). Our focus on the interaction in the couple will give important indications of how gender equality is practised today. As it is assumed that the generations in Sweden who grew up with the gender equal norms may take certain aspects of gender equality for granted, such as mothers' economic independence and fathers' participation in childcare, it is vital to investigate whether decisions are made in the same gender equal way. The study will give insights into the dynamics of couple relations, in particular which power relations and gender aspects matter.

How do intentions matter for childbearing?

Childbearing intentions and their outcomes are part of the research field relating intentions and behavior (Ajzen och Fishbein 1980; Ajzen and Klobas 2013). The relationship between childbearing intentions and outcomes of such intentions have been examined in numerous studies (see for example Thomson and Hoem 1998; Jansen and Liefbroer 2006; Bauer and Kneip 2013; 2014; Stein, Willen and Pavetic 2014; Testa 2012). The mechanisms for how couples' decisions play out can be understood in various ways, and a number of rules or models are suggested in the literature. First, the *golden mean rule* predicts that both partners have the same say (Jansen and Liefborer 2006). If both partners agree this is obviously no problem, but the couple's behavior is not necessarily the consequence of the same wish of the two partners. If partners disagree, the golden mean rule predicts that nothing will happen, that

is, the partner who does not want the situation to change decides. *The social drift rule*, also referred to as the *veto rule* then indicate that if partners do not agree, nothing changes. Consensus is needed for a joint action (Jansen and Liefbroer 2006; Bauer and Kneip 2014). These rules all give the same predictions, see summarized in Table 1.

However, the distribution of resources as well as norms of typical female and male areas of decision making may affect the actual outcome and the partners may have different negotiation power (Agarwal 1997). In the *joint utility model* the influence on decisions is seen as in proportion to utility and cost (Bauer and Kneip 2014), and is in essence gender neutral. For example, a child oriented partner who intends to take a major share of childrearing will have a stronger say than a partner who is less engaged, as the engaged part will bear more of the cost and perhaps have a higher utility of the child.

A related idea about decision making, is the *sphere of interest* model which predicts that the one most affected by childbearing they will have a stronger say in the decision, which is most often the woman (Jansen and Liefbroer 2006). This may be translated into a *matriarchal rule*, where women always have a stronger say (Bauer and Kneip 2014), an idea that is based on gendered norms and gendered decision making as dominating in this area. The gender neutral version of the sphere of interest model will give equivalent predictions as the joint utility model, and the gender of who has the greatest interest is not important. Nevertheless, in both versions, it is mostly predicted that women have the main say in decisions on childbearing.

The other side of gendered mechanisms is the *power rule*, where the one with most socio-economic resources, that is, most often the man, will have the greatest say in the decision about children. This may be translated into a *patriarchal rule*, where men always decide, or a gender neutral idea where the one with resources, regardless of gender, is most influential (Bauer and Kneip 2014). Both the matriarchal and patriarchal rules are considering the normative context, whereas the gender neutral versions consider interests, as well as socio-economic resources.

Our main interest in this study is to contrast the woman's and the man's intentions. From these suggested mechanisms, we may thus expect that childbearing intentions have to be in consensus for them to be realized, or that the woman's or the man's intentions are more important. If the woman's intention is more important, this may be due to gendered ideas

about childbearing decisions, but also because children more often is the woman's sphere of interest and she more often have utility of a child. If the man has a stronger say it may be due to that decision making within couples is dominated by men in general, in line with that he has more power based on often more (economic) resources. In this study the matriarchal and patriarchal rules may not be distinguished from the sphere of interest, joint utility and power rule, but we attempt to approximate these distinctions by a number of control variables (see Table 1).

Table 1: Summary of theoretical expectation on who decides over childbearing

| <i>Theory</i> | <i>Expectation</i> | <i>Decision-maker</i> |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Golden mean, social drift, veto rule | Both have equal say, if disagreement nothing happens | Both, or the one for no changes |
| Joint utility | The partner with most cost and utility will decide | Woman decides, but when control for division of care, no difference |
| Sphere of interest | The partner with most child interest decides | Woman decides, but when control for both partners' child orientation, no difference |
| Power rule | The one with most resources decide | Man decides, but when control for both partners' educational levels, no difference |
| Matriarchal rule | Woman decides | Woman, also after controls |
| Patriarchal rule | Man decides | Man, also after controls |

Early studies on couples' childbearing intentions indicate mixed results regarding whether the woman or the man has a stronger say (see review in Thomson and Hoem 1998) while more recent studies often indicate an equal say, often resulting in a veto decision (Thomson and Hoem 1998; Bauer and Kneip 2013; 2014; Jansen and Liefbroer 2006; Testa 2012). It is thus indicated that both partners have to agree for a child to be born. Research has spelled out how the individual characteristics, the couple characteristics, as well as the partner characteristics will lead up to the childbearing intentions of the couples (see Stein, Willen and Pavetic 2014). It is for instance emphasized that couple interaction is of major importance. Thomson and Hoem (1998) used the 1992 Swedish Survey of Family and Work where plans of both partners in a couple were stated, and then followed these couples in register data (similarly as in the present study, but for an earlier time period) for two years. They focused on ambivalence and dissonance between plans and find that about two thirds of all couples agree

in their plans and in the rest of the cases one of the partners often exercised a veto for the outcome, independent of their gender. Bauer and Kneip (2013) use German cross-sectional data (Pairfam) to measure childbearing desires and preferences in the couple and used the use/non-use of contraception as a proxy for childbearing desires. They find that neither partner dominates the decision but that veto may be exercised as a strategy to preserve status quo. In a follow-up study of actual outcomes, that is a birth or a pregnancy measured one year after the survey, Bauer and Kneip (2014) found that the conclusion on both partners' veto was mainly driven by the situation of childless couples, and that men's influence erodes by parity. This is interpreted to mean that children are increasingly by parity becoming women's sphere of interest. Testa (2012) also found disagreement in intentions to be resolved in different ways by parity, mainly towards avoiding pregnancies at higher levels. Childless women however seem also to be more decisive than childless men. It should be noted that desires and preferences are not the same as intentions, and they may be considered more distanced to realized behavior.

In addition, attitudes, not least to career and work, clearly influence people's plans and expectations regarding family and relationships (e.g. Greenglass and Devins 1982; Manning et al. 2007). However, most earlier studies indicate that attitudes and norms influence childbearing through intentions but have no independent explaining power (see for example Thomson 1997; Thomson and Hoem 1998; Mencarini, Vignoli and Gottard 2015). According to the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen 1991) the commonly used background variables of childbearing, such as age, education, labor market situation, couple duration, parity and housework division, would influence attitudes and norms which in turn influence intentions. However, empirical evidence suggests that background variables indeed have independent effects on both intentions and on actual childbearing, contradicting the theory of planned behavior. In Mencarini et al. (2014) such findings for the Italian case indicate limits to the theory of planned behavior regarding childbearing. In addition, a comparative study points out that the individual decision processes interplay with the societal context where for example the importance of economic uncertainty on childbearing intentions vary by parity, educational level and societal context (Fahlén 2013). Also, other studies support that fertility seems to be directly linked with gendered behavior in the couple regarding housework and childcare (Goldscheider et al. 2013; Aassve et al. 2015; Buber-Ennsner 2003).

Data and methods

We use the Young Adult Panel Study (http://www.suda.su.se/research/demographic_data/survey_projects/yaps-in-english) which includes individuals born 1968, 1972, 1976 and 1980. It is constructed to investigate the interrelationship of attitudes, plans and behavior regarding work and family. The main respondents are a nationally representative sample of women and men with two Swedish-born parents and a smaller sample of women and men with at least one Polish- or Turkish-born parent. The survey was carried out by a postal- or web questionnaire and respondents were interviewed in 1999, 2003 and 2009. The data for this study is based on the 2009 wave and includes main respondents and their coresidential (cohabiting or marital) partners who were also asked to fill in a questionnaire with similar content. The survey-answers are augmented with longitudinal register data on demographic events such as births, marriage and divorce, up to the 31st of December 2014.

We can thus consider both partners' childbearing intentions and follow all respondents' actual childbearing with register data from 2009 to 2014, meaning that we investigate whether intentions were carried out or not.

We use a subsample of opposite-sex couples with 0 to 2 children. Our working sample contains a total of 864 couples; 23.8 percent with no children, 28.3 percent with one child, and 47.9 percent with two children at the time of the survey. Couples with more than two children (193 cases) are excluded from the sample as it is quite rare to have more than three children, and only four couples with three children in this study had an additional child during the follow up, that is, obviously too few to draw any conclusions from.

We conduct cox regressions models, estimating the time from survey to event (or end of year 2014 if no event before that), and we conduct a pooled analysis, containing all couples, as well as separate analyses for childless couples, one-child couples and two-child couples. The dependent variable is based on registered births of the respondent between 2010 (the year after the survey) and 2014. Among the couples, 97 couples were expecting a child when the interview took place and those were coded as belonging to the parity they were at the time of the survey, as they have not yet experienced the reality of the higher parity. A note of caution is that our data only includes information about the respondents' births and within the five years following the interview, some couples may have split up and the birth may actually be by a new partner. We therefore performed additional analyses where we only included births

during 2010 to 2012. The results are not sensitive to a shorter follow up period and we therefore decided to use data from the whole five year period. We censor 74 couples who dissolve their unions, but we only have access to this information if they 1) are married or 2) have at least one common child. Such censoring and the possibility to observe couples only during the exposure to an event is a major reason to use event history analysis in this study. However, this means that among the childless (who are mainly cohabiting) we are probably following some couples for a longer duration than they are in reality exposed to the risk of childbearing in the union.

Our main independent variables of interest are the childbearing intentions of the man and the woman. Childbearing intentions are based on the question *Do you think you will have (more) children in the future?* Response alternatives were Definitely yes, Probably yes, Probably not, and Definitely not. The first two response alternatives are coded as wanting more children while the last two as not wanting more children. The answers of the woman and the man are combined into the variable couples' childbearing intentions with four categories the following categories: 1) woman wants/man does not want (more) children , 2) woman does not/man wants (more) children, 3) both want (more) children, 4) neither want (more) children. The cases of non-responses and don't know-answers are coded as not wanting more children as we judge them closer to a negative response than a positive response. After sensitivity checks it was obvious that these answers tended towards the negative answers. In addition, our main interest here is to find out who (if any) drives an outcome of another child and therefore this coding makes the positive intentions cleaner. The present study thus concerns the Swedish context about two decades later than the study by Thomson and Hoem (1998), but with another approach of attempting to distinguish whether any of the partners' have a stronger say. We interpret the question to measure intentions, but acknowledge that the intentions in this case is closely linked to expectations. We argue that expectations and intentions are highly related and distinction is not important in countries with high and efficient use of contraceptives, in line with Thomson (2001).

To control for who will carry the cost and who will have the most utility of the child, we control for who the respondent expects will take the main responsibility for childcare. The question reads *"How do you think you and your partner will divide the responsibility?(If you already have children, state present circumstances)"*, and the response alternatives are 1) the woman does most, 2) we share equally, and 3) the man does most. The answers from

the men and the women in the sample give different effects on the outcome, but they influence the intentions variable in the same way. We therefore keep only the woman's answer in the model.

To control for sphere of interest we use child orientation of the partners. Child orientation is a mean index based on the answers to the questions *To have children is part of what gives life meaning*, with response alternatives on a five graded scale from Don't agree at all, to Agree completely, and *How important is it for you to have children* with response alternatives on a five graded scale from Unimportant to Very important. The Cronbach's alpha for the responses to the two indicators of women is 0.81, and 0.82 for the responses of men. The summarized scale ranges from 0 to 5 and is dichotomized at less/more than about 4.2 for each partner to get as much distribution in the variable as possible. The dichotomized indicator is then combined into couple's child orientations: 1) woman positive/man less positive, 2) woman less positive/man positive, 3) both positive attitudes towards children, and 3) both less positive towards children.

To control for power relations in the couple, which might apply to decisions about childbearing, we include the partners' educational levels. Educational level is categorized into less than tertiary level and tertiary level, and combined into couple's educational level; 1) woman have tertiary/man less than tertiary level, 2) woman less than tertiary/man tertiary level, 3) both have less than tertiary education, 4) both have tertiary level, and 5) at least one partner's education unknown.

In addition, we control for a number of background variables; woman's age, whether the couple is married or cohabiting, the duration of the relationship, and age of the youngest child (if any). In the pooled analysis we control for number of children. The description of the sample is found in Table 2.

Descriptive findings

In the descriptive table of the sample (Table 2) it is obvious that most couples agree in their intentions to have or not to have a(nother) child. Over 4/5 of all couples agree in their childbearing intentions, which must be considered high. It is about as likely that both intend or not intend to have a(nother) child. Among childless couples, as many as 2/3 agree that they intend to have children while less than 1/5 agree that they do not intend to have children.

Among one-child couples, an even higher share intends additional children while as many as 3/4 of all two-child couples agree not to have more children. Among the childless couples, it is somewhat more common that the man, but not the woman, intends to have a child, while for couples with children, especially two-child couples, it is more common that the woman, but not the man, intends to have more children.

Table 2: Sample description (%)

| | All couples | Childless couples | One-child couples | Two-child couples |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Couple's childbearing intentions | | | | |
| Woman wants/Man does not want | 8.1 | 6.3 | 7.8 | 9.2 |
| Woman does not want/Man wants | 4.6 | 8.7 | 3.3 | 3.4 |
| Both want (more) children) | 41.4 | 66.5 | 69.4 | 12.3 |
| Neither want (more) children | 45.9 | 18.4 | 19.6 | 75.1 |
| Woman's attitude towards child responsibilities | | | | |
| Woman does most | 32.1 | 23.3 | 33.1 | 36.0 |
| Share equally | 60.0 | 59.7 | 61.2 | 59.4 |
| Man does most | 1.7 | 2.4 | 1.2 | 1.7 |
| DK/NA | 6.1 | 14.6 | 4.5 | 2.9 |
| Couple's attitudes towards children | | | | |
| Woman positive/Man less positive towards children | 22.8 | 18.4 | 21.6 | 25.6 |
| Woman less positive/Man positive towards children | 14.3 | 13.6 | 15.5 | 14.0 |
| Both positive attitudes towards children | 38.0 | 15.5 | 42.9 | 46.4 |
| Both less positive towards children | 24.9 | 52.4 | 20.0 | 14.0 |
| Couple's educational attainment | | | | |
| Woman tertiary/Man less | 20.8 | 20.4 | 20.0 | 21.5 |
| Woman less/Man tertiary | 8.4 | 6.8 | 9.0 | 8.9 |
| Both less than tertiary | 26.9 | 15.5 | 25.7 | 33.3 |
| Both tertiary level | 41.2 | 54.4 | 42.9 | 33.6 |
| DK/NA either partner | 2.7 | 2.9 | 2.4 | 2.7 |
| Woman's age | | | | |
| <30 years | 24.5 | 50.5 | 27.8 | 9.7 |
| 30-35 years | 38.7 | 30.6 | 44.9 | 39.1 |
| >35 years | 36.8 | 18.9 | 27.3 | 51.2 |
| Partnership status | | | | |
| Married | 45.7 | 19.9 | 41.2 | 61.1 |
| Cohabiting | 54.3 | 80.1 | 58.8 | 38.9 |
| Partnership duration | | | | |
| <4 years with partner | 14.9 | 33.0 | 15.9 | 5.3 |
| 4-7 years with partner | 25.8 | 33.0 | 35.5 | 16.4 |
| >7 years with partner | 59.3 | 34.0 | 48.6 | 78.3 |
| Family composition | | | | |
| No children | 23.8 | | | |
| One child | 28.3 | | | |
| Two children | 47.9 | | | |
| Age of youngest child | | | | |
| <4 years | - | - | 79.6 | 49.5 |
| 4+ years | - | - | 20.4 | 50.5 |
| N= | 865 | 206 | 245 | 414 |

In most cases, it seems that women and men expect to, or share, the child responsibilities. Nevertheless, among the parents a higher share reports that the woman does most. Very rarely the man is expected or reported to take the main responsibility for their children. It is also clear that over the parities it is increasingly common that within the couple, the woman has a stronger child orientation than the man. In addition, it is most common that both the woman and the man have tertiary education, but somewhat less common among the two-child couples, probably both as two-child couples are older and the older cohorts more often have lower educational level, and as the highly educated had not had time to have two children at the time of the survey.

Regarding the other control variables we see that as expected, women are older at higher parities, less than half of the respondents are married, but it is positively related to parity. Most couples are in long-term relationships, for instance a third of all childless couples have been together for more than seven years. About a quarter of the sample has no children and about half already has two children, indicating that the sample represents a situation in the middle of the reproductive years, when different couples are at different steps in their family-formation process. A large share of the parents have children younger than four years.

In Table 3 we present the outcomes of the couples' combined childbearing intentions over the coming five years. Among childless couples where both partners want children almost 4/5 had a child within five years. This is even slightly higher in couples with one child, but only true for half of all couples with two children. Also, within couples where no one expects to have children this occasionally happens, and in this study as many as 1/5 of the childless couples where no one intends to have a child will end up with a child. The focus of this study is what happens when the woman and the man have different childbearing intentions and we can see that for both childless, one-child and two-child couples, couples more often end up with a child when the woman wants a(nother) child but not the man, compared to the other way around. Note however, that the small number of cases should make us cautious with interpretations. Nonetheless, the pattern in the outcomes depending on the woman's and man's intentions is the same for all parities, even if two-child couples less often have another child than couples with no children or one child.

Table 3: The proportion within different couple intention categories who had a child between 2010 and 2014

| | All couples | Childless couples | One-child couples | Two-child couples |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Woman wants/Man does not want | 47.1 | 61.5 | 57.9 | 36.8 |
| Woman does not want/Man wants | 30.0 | 38.9 | 37.5 | 14.3 |
| Both want (more) children) | 75.7 | 78.8 | 81.8 | 47.1 |
| Neither want (more) children | 8.8 | 21.1 | 16.7 | 6.1 |
| Total number of couples | 865 | 206 | 245 | 414 |
| % births among all couples | 40.6 | 63.6 | 65.7 | 14.3 |

Analytical results

In Table 4 we present the analyses of the likelihood of a birth in a pooled model and in Table 5 to 7 we divide the sample by parity. Our main interest is the couple's childbearing intentions and there are both similarities and differences between parities, and it is important to note that the smaller n in the parity specific models may restrict the possibilities of attaining statistical significance. The first column in all the tables present the model of childbearing intentions only with the basic control variables, while the second column in addition controls for child responsibilities (the utility rule), the third column controls for child orientation (the sphere of interest rule), the fourth column controls for educational level (the power rule). Lastly in the fifth column we add all controls in a full model.

The reference category is that the woman intends to have a child but not the man, and in all models (Table 4) we find a lower chance of having a child if only the man intends to have a child. Not surprisingly, the couples where both want a child are the most likely to have a child in the following five years. However, these cases are not statistically different from the cases where only the woman intends a child in the last, full model. As expected, couples where none intend a child are the least likely to have a child within five years. The first model indicates that there is a lower chance of having a child if only one of the partners intend to, compared to if both do. The second model indicates that when child responsibilities are controlled, there is no clear change in the estimates, which is also true for the third column where child orientation is added. When couples' educational level is added in the fourth column, the gendered distinction between only the woman or the man intending a child becomes statistically significant. The expectation was that the gendered distinction would vanish when controls were added, but we instead see that the gendered pattern becomes somewhat clearer with controls. In the last model with all controls, there is no statistically significant difference between couples where both partners intend to have a(nother) child and

couples where only the woman intends to have a(nother) child, even though the estimates differ. Couples where only the man wants a(nother) child, or none of the partners, have the lowest probability of having a child, but also there the estimates differ. These results indicate that women more often have a stronger say in childbearing decisions. We base this conclusion mainly on the much lower estimates when only the man wants another child.

There are also differences between the parity-specific models. First, in Table 5 the childless couples are studied, and we do not see the gendered distinction of who intends to have a(nother) child. With and without added controls it is the couples where both partners intend to have a(nother) child that stands out as having the highest chance of having a child within five years. Neither when only the man, or none intends to have a(nother) child differ significantly from couples where only the woman intends to have a child. There is thus less of a difference between decision power for women and men among childless couples, perhaps indicating a veto rule, especially as it is only couples where both want a child that distinguish themselves with a higher risk of a child.

Table 6 and 7, including couples with one or two children, indicate patterns similar to each other. Couples where none intends a child clearly have the lowest chance of having another child compared to when only the woman intends a child (or when both want a child). The difference between couples in which only the woman intends to have another child and couples where both intend to have another child is not statistically significant although the category of both wanting more children has a higher estimate of a child in all models. In the models of one-child couples (Table 6), there is no evident change to the pattern when controls are added, that is, only couples in which none intend to have another child is statistically different from the other categories.

In both table 6 and 7, couples where only the man wants another child have constantly lower estimates than when only the woman wants another child, but this is not consistently significant. We obviously cannot say whether this difference would be clearer in a larger sample. For the two child-couples (Table 7) we see a similar pattern as indicated in the pooled model (table 4), where the full model indicates that couples where only the woman intends to have another child are similar to couples where both intend another child, while couples where only the man intends to have another child are similar to couples where none

intend to have another child. This differences between categories become significant at 10 % when educational level is added to the model.

Table 4: The chance of having a child in the future among all parents. Cox regression, hazard ratios

| | Model 4:1 | Model 4:2 | Model 4:3 | Model 4:4 | Model 4:5 |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Couple's childbearing intentions | | | | | |
| Woman wants/Man does not want | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> |
| Woman does not want/Man wants | 0.59 | 0.58 | 0.59 | 0.55 * | 0.54 * |
| Both want (more) children) | 1.56 * | 1.46 * | 1.51 * | 1.35 | 1.24 |
| Neither want (more) children | 0.20 *** | 0.20 *** | 0.20 *** | 0.21 *** | 0.21 *** |
| Woman's attitude towards child responsibilities | | | | | |
| Woman does most | | <i>ref.</i> | | | <i>ref.</i> |
| Share equally | | 1.22 # | | | 1.18 |
| Man does most | | 0.53 | | | 0.51 |
| Couple's attitudes towards children | | | | | |
| Woman positive/Man less positive | | | <i>ref.</i> | | <i>ref.</i> |
| Woman less positive/Man positive | | | 0.98 | | 1.04 |
| Both positive attitudes towards children | | | 1.00 | | 1.03 |
| Both less positive towards children | | | 0.88 | | 0.92 |
| Couple's educational attainment | | | | | |
| Woman tertiary/Man less | | | | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> |
| Woman less/Man tertiary | | | | 0.90 | 0.92 |
| Both less than tertiary | | | | 0.64 * | 0.65 * |
| Both tertiary level | | | | 1.44 ** | 1.45 ** |
| Woman's age | | | | | |
| <30 years | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> |
| 30-35 years | 0.79 * | 0.80 # | 0.80 * | 0.72 ** | 0.74 * |
| >35 years | 0.34 *** | 0.35 *** | 0.35 *** | 0.33 *** | 0.34 *** |
| Partnership status | | | | | |
| Married | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> |
| Cohabiting | 0.73 ** | 0.74 * | 0.73 * | 0.73 * | 0.74 * |
| Partnership duration | | | | | |
| <4 years with partner | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> |
| 4-7 years with partner | 0.84 | 0.82 | 0.83 | 0.81 | 0.79 |
| >7 years with partner | 0.43 *** | 0.42 *** | 0.43 *** | 0.43 *** | 0.42 *** |
| Family composition | | | | | |
| No children | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> |
| One child | 1.98 *** | 1.97 *** | 1.91 *** | 2.34 *** | 2.25 *** |
| Two children | 1.21 | 1.19 | 1.15 | 1.35 | 1.28 |
| No. of subjects | 864 | 864 | 864 | 864 | 864 |
| No. of failures | 351 | 351 | 351 | 351 | 351 |
| Time at risk | 92313 | 92313 | 92313 | 92313 | 92313 |
| LR chi2 | 490.6 *** | 496.7 *** | 491.46 *** | 519.4 *** | 525.1 *** |
| Log likelihood | -1935.0 | -1932.0 | -1934.6 | -1920.6 | -1917.8 |

***p≤0.001; **p≤0.01; *p≤0.05; #p≤0.1

Note: Categories with non-response included in the analysis but omitted from the table

Table 5: The chance of having a child in the future among childless couples. Cox regression, hazard ratios

| | Model 5:1 | Model 5:2 | Model 5:3 | Model 5:4 | Model 5:5 |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Couple's childbearing intentions | | | | | |
| Woman wants/Man does not want | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> |
| Woman does not want/Man wants | 1.09 | 0.85 | 1.19 | 0.84 | 0.80 |
| Both want (more) children | 2.99 ** | 2.59 * | 2.76 ** | 2.26 * | 2.05 # |
| Neither want (more) children | 0.55 | 0.50 | 0.64 | 0.49 | 0.55 |
| Woman's attitude towards child responsibilities | | | | | |
| Woman does most | | <i>ref.</i> | | | <i>ref.</i> |
| Share equally | | 1.64 * | | | 1.51 # |
| Man does most | | 1.24 | | | 1.34 |
| Couple's attitudes towards children | | | | | |
| Woman positive/Man less positive | | | <i>ref.</i> | | <i>ref.</i> |
| Woman less positive/Man positive | | | 0.83 | | 0.92 |
| Both positive attitudes towards children | | | 0.77 | | 0.80 |
| Both less positive towards children | | | 0.56 * | | 0.61 # |
| Couple's educational attainment | | | | | |
| Woman tertiary/Man less | | | | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> |
| Woman less/Man tertiary | | | | 1.38 | 1.20 |
| Both less than tertiary | | | | 0.55 # | 0.57 |
| Both tertiary level | | | | 1.05 | 1.00 |
| Woman's age | | | | | |
| <30 years | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> |
| 30-35 years | 0.83 | 0.86 | 0.94 | 0.78 | 0.90 |
| >35 years | 0.84 | 0.83 | 0.88 | 0.84 | 0.86 |
| Partnership status | | | | | |
| Married | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> |
| Cohabiting | 0.88 | 0.89 | 0.94 | 0.89 | 0.95 |
| Partnership duration | | | | | |
| <4 years with partner | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> |
| 4-7 years with partner | 0.48 *** | 0.46 *** | 0.45 *** | 0.47 *** | 0.41 *** |
| >7 years with partner | 0.09 *** | 0.09 *** | 0.08 *** | 0.09 *** | 0.08 *** |
| No. of subjects | 206 | 206 | 206 | 206 | 206 |
| No. of failures | 131 | 131 | 131 | 131 | 131 |
| Time at risk | 24061 | 24061 | 24061 | 24061 | 24061 |
| LR chi2 | 131.3 *** | 136.7 *** | 137.0 *** | 136.9 *** | 145.5 *** |
| Log likelihood | -548.1 | -545.4 | -545.2 | -545.3 | -541.0 |

***p≤0.001; **p≤0.01; *p≤0.05; #p≤0.1

Note: Categories with non-response included in the analysis but omitted from the table

Table 6: The chance of having a child in the future among one-child couples. Cox regression, hazard ratios

| | Model 6:1 | Model 6:2 | Model 6:3 | Model 6:4 | Model 6:5 |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| Couple's childbearing intentions | | | | | |
| Woman wants/Man does not want | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. |
| Woman does not want/Man wants | 0.38 | 0.41 | 0.38 | 0.48 | 0.49 |
| Both want (more) children) | 1.08 | 1.12 | 1.27 | 1.18 | 1.35 |
| Neither want (more) children | 0.30 ** | 0.31 * | 0.29 ** | 0.40 # | 0.37 * |
| Woman's attitude towards child responsibilities | | | | | |
| Woman does most | | ref. | | | ref. |
| Share equally | | 0.93 | | | 0.83 |
| Man does most | | 0.00 | | | 0.00 |
| Couple's attitudes towards children | | | | | |
| Woman positive/Man less positive | | | ref. | | ref. |
| Woman less positive/Man positive | | | 0.92 | | 1.06 |
| Both positive attitudes towards children | | | 0.60 * | | 0.67 # |
| Both less positive towards children | | | 0.97 | | 1.03 |
| Couple's educational attainment | | | | | |
| Woman tertiary/Man less | | | | ref. | ref. |
| Woman less/Man tertiary | | | | 1.06 | 0.94 |
| Both less than tertiary | | | | 1.06 | 1.03 |
| Both tertiary level | | | | 1.86 ** | 1.71 * |
| Woman's age | | | | | |
| <30 years | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. |
| 30-35 years | 0.60 ** | 0.61 ** | 0.54 ** | 0.53 *** | 0.51 *** |
| >35 years | 0.58 # | 0.60 # | 0.49 * | 0.57 # | 0.52 * |
| Partnership status | | | | | |
| Married | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. |
| Cohabiting | 0.83 | 0.81 | 0.77 | 0.91 | 0.80 |
| Partnership duration | | | | | |
| <4 years with partner | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. |
| 4-7 years with partner | 0.56 ** | 0.56 * | 0.50 ** | 0.55 ** | 0.50 ** |
| >7 years with partner | 0.41 *** | 0.40 *** | 0.40 *** | 0.41 *** | 0.39 *** |
| Age of youngest child | | | | | |
| <4 years | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. |
| 4+ years | 0.03 *** | 0.03 *** | 0.03 *** | 0.03 *** | 0.02 *** |
| No. of subjects | 245 | 245 | 245 | 245 | 245 |
| No. of failures | 161 | 161 | 161 | 161 | 161 |
| Time at risk | 22840 | 22840 | 22840 | 22840 | 22840 |
| LR chi2 | 200.4 *** | 203.48 *** | 207.46 *** | 213.29 *** | 221.3 *** |
| Log likelihood | -680.9 | -679.4 | -677.4 | -674.5 | -670.5 |

***p≤0.001; **p≤0.01; *p≤0.05; #p≤0.1

Note: Categories with non-response included in the analysis but omitted from the table

Table 7: The chance of having a child in the future among two-child couples. Cox regression, hazard ratios

| | Model 7:1 | Model 7:2 | Model 7:3 | Model 7:4 | Model 7:5 |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Couple's childbearing intentions | | | | | |
| Woman wants/Man does not want | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> |
| Woman does not want/Man wants | 0.31 | 0.30 | 0.30 | 0.26 # | 0.25 # |
| Both want (more) children | 1.29 | 1.26 | 1.27 | 1.12 | 1.08 |
| Neither want (more) children | 0.16 *** | 0.16 *** | 0.17 *** | 0.16 *** | 0.15 *** |
| Woman's attitude towards child responsibilities | | | | | |
| Woman does most | | <i>ref.</i> | | | <i>ref.</i> |
| Share equally | | 1.15 | | | 1.09 |
| Man does most | | 0.74 | | | 0.52 |
| Couple's attitudes towards children | | | | | |
| Woman positive/Man less positive | | | <i>ref.</i> | | <i>ref.</i> |
| Woman less positive/Man positive | | | 1.92 | | 1.50 |
| Both positive attitudes towards children | | | 1.54 | | 1.36 |
| Both less positive towards children | | | 1.35 | | 1.18 |
| Couple's educational attainment | | | | | |
| Woman tertiary/Man less | | | | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> |
| Woman less/Man tertiary | | | | 0.69 | 0.70 |
| Both less than tertiary | | | | 0.95 | 0.93 |
| Both tertiary level | | | | 2.17 * | 2.15 * |
| Woman's age | | | | | |
| <30 years | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> |
| 30-35 years | 0.59 | 0.58 | 0.60 | 0.49 * | 0.51 # |
| >35 years | 0.47 # | 0.46 # | 0.47 # | 0.41 * | 0.41 * |
| Partnership status | | | | | |
| Married | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> |
| Cohabiting | 0.77 | 0.77 | 0.76 | 0.78 | 0.76 |
| Partnership duration | | | | | |
| <4 years with partner | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> |
| 4-7 years with partner | 1.14 | 1.11 | 1.05 | 1.09 | 1.00 |
| >7 years with partner | 0.76 | 0.72 | 0.72 | 0.73 | 0.67 * |
| Age of youngest child | | | | | |
| <4 years | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> | <i>ref.</i> |
| 4+ years | 0.20 *** | 0.20 *** | 0.20 *** | 0.19 *** | 0.20 *** |
| No. of subjects | 413 | 413 | 413 | 413 | 413 |
| No. of failures | 59 | 59 | 59 | 59 | 59 |
| Time at risk | 45412 | 45412 | 45412 | 45412 | 45412 |
| LR chi2 | 113.5 *** | 113.9 *** | 115.8 *** | 124.3 *** | 126.3 *** |
| Log likelihood | -281.3 | -281.1 | -280.2 | -275.9 | -275.0 |

***p≤0.001; **p≤0.01; *p≤0.05; #p≤0.1

Note: Categories with non-response included in the analysis but omitted from the table

Summary and conclusion

Sweden is in the forefront of the gender revolution, where women and men increasingly participate on equal terms in the private and public sphere, have similar roles, and are economically independent. In this setting, gender equality is a strong norm, often assumed to also be reflected in behaviour. In this study we investigate whether this new setting is related to more equal decision making in the couples. We focus on how the woman's and man's intentions to have a(nother) child influence the actual outcome of having a child within five years. Not surprisingly, we find that it is most common to have a child when both partners intend to have a child. However, we are mainly interested in what happens in case the partners have different intentions. The most important result from this study is that we find that women's intentions of childbearing are a stronger predictor of fertility than men's are, in particular at higher parities. This indicates a matriarchal rule as it applies also after controlling other related factors. For the childless, we instead see a veto rule indicated, where both partners have to want a child for the couple to become parents.

We refer back to earlier studies and theoretical models which essentially indicate that either two partners are needed for the decision of a child (golden mean rule and veto rule); that the woman has a stronger say (joint utility, sphere of interest or matriarchal rule), or that the man have a stronger say (power rule, patriarchal rule). We attempt to control for utility, sphere of interest, and power in the models to distinguish these theoretical expectations. However, there is no indication that attitudes towards children, child responsibilities or socioeconomic resources reduce the gendered aspect of decision-making, rather, when couples' educational level is controlled we find stronger gendered differences. Our findings differ by parity and we interpret this to mean that decision-making is different depending on circumstances. For the childless couples, it seems as if both partners' intentions for children are needed, which appears to corroborate the veto rule (or the golden mean rule), where childbearing will only happen if both agree. For the couples with children this is not true and in particular for the one-child couples it is couples where none intend to have another child who differ from the other categories. The results indicate that in couples with children the man's intention to have another child, have a relatively lower chance to materialize, compared to couples where only the woman intends to have another child, though this difference is only statistically significant in some models. In addition, among one-child and two-child couples, it seems to matter less whether only the woman or both partners want another child. This indicates

support for the matriarchal rule among the couples with children, also in line with Bauer and Kneipp (2014) who find that women have a stronger say at higher parities.

The control variables all had expected results on childbearing, but did not affect the association of intentions and outcomes in expected ways. We acknowledge that our measures of child responsibilities and child orientation in the couple are only partial dimensions to measure the utility and sphere of interest, and other more refined controls may give different results.

Women's stronger say in realizing fertility intentions may thus indicate a matriarchal rule where the reproductive area is still a woman's decision area, in particular for couples who already become parents. It may also indicate that women still carry the largest costs for childbearing and will be mostly affected, and thus have a larger say in the decision. We were expecting that fathers in Sweden would have an equal say in the decision as they are more involved in childcare today and as gender equal ideals are widespread. For example, almost 9 out of 10 fathers use part of the parental leave and in cases of dissolution of parental unions, joint custody is the standard, and increasingly arrangements of shared residence custody are chosen (Lundström 2009). We may interpret the indications as gender equal decision making of this among the childless couples. However, there are also a number of indicators that women carry most costs, and do most substantial changes in their lives when they have children. For example, the income development of women and men after childbearing is still unequal, and women still take the major part of the parental leave (Duvander, Ferrarini, Johansson 2015). In addition and perhaps most important, it is the woman who carries the child and thus inevitably bear a higher cost, alternatively have highest utility during the first period. Even in a completely gender equal society, this biological factor remains. Perhaps this is an obvious reality for couples first after they entered parenthood.

Other reasons for our findings could be that childbearing intentions may change easier for men than for women and five years is a long follow-up. By the time the actual decision is taken many men who responded that they were not intending to have a child, may have changed their mind when faced with the new family member. The female partner's influence on this change would then be what we pick up here. The results may be interpreted to mean that a female partner is more successful in convincing a male partner of having a child, than the other way around.

These results should be interpreted in the the Swedish context; the decision to have children may be easier as the “cost” of children in a generous welfare system is relatively low, both in terms of time and money, and may therefore be considered less as an obstacle for other domains in life, such as work. Sweden has a low rate of child poverty, and strong enforcements of shared economic responsibility for children, a universal subsidized public childcare system; perhaps this makes the decision to have a child less dramatic and percieved as less of a risk for both women and men.

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