Family building in the UK: Insights from combining retrospective and panel data

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Understanding Society: Workshop on family formation & change
29th November 2016
British Academy, London, UK
Overview

1. Fertility and partnership data – structure of the UKHLS

2. Increasing socioeconomic differences in family experiences
   - **Example 1:** Socioeconomic differences in the timing and level of fertility
   - **Example 2:** Socioeconomic differentials in the partnership context of first birth
   - **Example 3:** Childbearing within cohabitation across countries

3. Summary

4. What don’t we know?

5. How could new questions in UKHLS provide additional insights?
Fertility and partnership in UKHLS: data structure

Fertility histories & Partnership histories

Fertility intentions

Wave 1 2009-10

Wave 2 2010-11

Wave 3 2011-12

Wave 4 2012-13

Wave 5 2013-14

Wave 6 2014-15

Annual events

Annual events

Annual events

Annual events

Annual events

Changes in marital status & co-residential partnerships

Household grid

Household grid

Household grid

Household grid

Household grid

Household grid

Relationships between household members
New births within the household

Collected in subsequent waves for new entrants
Example 1:
Socioeconomic differences in the timing and level of fertility

• Educational differences in completed family size

• Women’s current circumstances and transitions to higher order births
Completed family size calculated from retrospective fertility histories.

**UKHLS fertility histories** + **CPC General Household Survey time series**

- Repeated cross-sectional surveys from 1979-2009

Fertility histories & Partnership histories

Wave 1 2009-10

Wave 1 interview: Highest educational qualification
## Educational differential in completed family size

Table 1: Women’s overall completed family size by educational attainment. Britain, 1940-49, 1950-59 and 1960-69 birth cohorts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth cohort</th>
<th>Completed family size by highest educational qualification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less than ‘O’ level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940-49</td>
<td>2.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950-59</td>
<td>2.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-69</td>
<td>2.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Who has higher order births?

• Although the UK has high levels of childlessness, many women still have third and fourth births in comparison with other European countries.

• Do government policies, welfare, housing explain patterns of social polarisation in timing and level of fertility?

• Prospective panel data from UKHLS allows us to look at factors associated with the likelihood of having a higher order birth.
Factors associated with third birth: time-varying measures UKHLS panel data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Housing</th>
<th>Other Socioeconomic</th>
<th>Social/cultural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woman’s age</td>
<td>Housing tenure</td>
<td>Highest education qualification</td>
<td>Sex of existing children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership status</td>
<td>Space within dwelling</td>
<td>Economic activity</td>
<td>Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Household income</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Receipt of child tax credit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Method

Monthly data on fertility reconstructed using information from annual events module and household grid.

Covariate information updated at each panel wave.

Discrete-time hazards model predicting transition to a third pregnancy leading to a live birth.

Sample=Women aged 20-44 years.
4,132 women, parity 2 at baseline, 108,149 person-months of data.
Control variables held at baseline: Woman’s current age, sex of existing children, partnership status, religion, highest education qualification, economic activity, household income, receipt of child tax credit.
Example 2: How have educational differences in the partnership context of motherhood changed for recent cohorts?
Partnership context of first birth by age 35 years: women born 1960-1979

Birth cohort by highest educational qualification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth cohort by highest educational qualification</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Cohabiting</th>
<th>Unpartnered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GCSEs or less</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'A' levels or equivalent</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UKHLS retrospective fertility and partnership histories plus panel waves 1-5. Author’s analysis.
Example 3: Fertility and partnership histories in comparative context

HARMONIZED Partnership and fertility histories for:

- United Kingdom
- Austria
- The Netherlands
- Belgium
- Norway
- Bulgaria
- Poland
- Estonia
- Romania
- France
- Russia
- Germany
- Spain
- Sweden
- Hungary
- Switzerland
- Italy
- United States

Sources: BHPS (UK), GGS, FFS, NSFG
http://www.nonmarital.org/
Increase in childbearing within cohabitation

Source: Harmonized Histories Database
http://www.nonmarital.org/

What are the key messages from UKHLS?

• Relatively large family size in comparison to other European countries

• Widening educational differences in timing of childbearing, childlessness

• Women who enter motherhood later do not appear to catch up fertility at older ages.

• Age at entry to motherhood is the strongest predictor of completed family size, but there are other important factors associated with childbearing behaviour including housing market.

• The partnership context of births is also becoming more socially polarised

• Cohabiting families are the fastest growing family type, but the likelihood of entering motherhood whilst cohabiting has not increased for female graduates (who marry first).
What don’t we know?

What are the mechanisms underlying continued social polarisation in patterns of family formation?

• Postponement among higher educated women
  – Lack of recuperation or different preferences/intentions?

• Socioeconomic disadvantage and parity progression
  – Unplanned childbearing / risk taking behaviour
  – Parenthood as ‘meaning-making’ for disadvantaged women

• Partnership context of childbearing
  – *Why* is fertility within cohabitation increasing among more disadvantaged groups?  Barriers to or rejection of marriage?
How could we improve data on partnerships and fertility?

• Fertility intentions – currently asked in waves 1 and 5.
  – More detail about timing?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you intend to have a/another child during the next three years?</th>
<th>Supposing you do not have a/another child during the next three years, do you intend to have any (more) children at all?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• definitely not</td>
<td>• definitely not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• probably not</td>
<td>• probably not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• probably yes</td>
<td>• probably yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• definitely yes</td>
<td>• definitely yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender and Generations survey, wave 1
How could we improve data on partnerships and fertility?

- Partnership intentions/attitudes
  - Survey includes information about intentions for co-residence with currently non-resident partners.
  - Intentions to marry cohabiting partner?
  - Attitudes to cohabitation?

Do you think there are any advantages/disadvantages in living as a couple, rather than being married?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages:</th>
<th>Disadvantages:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trial marriage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No legal ties</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improves relationship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prev. bad marriage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal independence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial advantages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial insecurity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No legal status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effects on children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social stigma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

The United Kingdom Household Longitudinal Survey (UKHLS) is conducted by the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) at the University of Essex. UKHLS data were accessed via the UK Data Archive. Neither the original data creators, depositors or funders bear responsibility for the further analysis or interpretation of the data presented in this study.

The Centre for Population Change GHS time-series data file was constructed by Prof. Máire Ní Bhrolcháin, Prof. Ann Berrington and Dr. Eva Beaujouan, with assistance from Dr. Mark Lyons Amos.

The ESRC Centre for Population Change (CPC) is a joint initiative between the Universities of Southampton, St Andrews, Edinburgh, Stirling, Strathclyde, in partnership with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the General Register Office Scotland (GROS). The Centre is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) grant numbers RES-625-28-0001 and ES/K007394/1.
Centre for Population Change

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Third births: UK in the EU context

THIRD BIRTHS AS A PERCENTAGE OF ALL LIVE BIRTHS, 2013

Source: Eurostat
**Fertility postponement**

**Figure 1:** Median age at entry into motherhood according to mother’s education. Britain, 1940-49, 1950-59, 1960-69 birth cohorts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Educational Level</th>
<th>1940-49</th>
<th>1950-59</th>
<th>1960-69</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than O level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The bar chart shows the median age at entry into motherhood for different highest educational levels across three birth cohorts: 1940-49, 1950-59, and 1960-69.
Childlessness

Figure 2: Percentage childless by birth cohort and highest level of education. British women aged 40-49 born 1940-49.
Recent cohorts not more likely to catch up at older ages

Figure 3: Proportion of mothers who have a second and third birth according to age at first birth and cohort