EARLY CHILDBEARING AND SUBSEQUENT ECONOMIC WELL-BEING: A CROSS-NATIONAL COMPARISON
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This cross-national comparative study describes relationships between early childbearing and women’s subsequent economic well-being in a wide range of low-fertility countries. Building on a large body of related research in the U.S., we posit that early childbearing is associated with subsequent economic disadvantage across countries, but that the degree of disadvantage is inversely associated with the generosity of public policies to support children and facilitate women’s work-family balance. We also estimate the extent to which cross-national differences in the relationship between early childbearing and subsequent income is explained by selection into early childbearing and linkages between early childbearing and subsequent fertility and union stability. In preliminary analyses we have used data from 14 countries, most of which are included in the Generations and Gender Survey program. In subsequent extensions, we will incorporate data from 5 or 6 additional countries. This is an understudied area outside of the U.S. and this extension to a wide range of countries has the potential to shed important new light on the generality of findings from the U.S. and to provide new insights into the ways in which linkages between early family formation and subsequent economic well-being are shaped by context. This evidence will, in turn, facilitate informed speculation about the ways in which changes in family behaviors across a wide range of countries may be increasing stratification and inequality, both within and across generations.