

Generation x and generation z: mother- daughter pairs

[Family](#), [Mother](#)



This study examines how the familial context, more specifically, mother-daughter relationships, affects one's stance towards childbearing and willingness to start a family of their own. It shows the extent of how a mother's attitudes towards childbearing may affect her daughter's, in the sense where the similarity of views towards having children for both parties will be examined and closely compared. As such, women of two groups of subjects, born into Generation X (1961-1982) and Generation Z (1995-2012) respectively, have been chosen to reflect the development in point of view over successive generations.

INTRODUCTION

One's perception of childbearing may be affected by family because the socialisation of attitudes concerning sexuality and the learning of appropriate norms of sexual behavior are heavily influenced by the environment we grow up in (Camburn & Thornton, 1987). We grow up to subconsciously model after the values and belief system family instils in us, some of which include marital and childbearing behaviour. Parenting attitudes, cognitions and the resulting emotions have a powerful impact on their children's socioemotional and cognitive development (Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development). In this paper, it is argued that fertility intentions are transmitted intergenerationally from parents to children and young female adults may refer to their mothers' experience as a model - either to aim for or to be avoided - when forming their own childbearing decisions (Testa, Bordone, Osiewalska and Skirbekk).

Mothers are one of the main providers of immediate care, advice, and social support on reproductive issues for young women (Chan and Elder 2000; Dubas 2001; Pollet, Nelissen, and Nettle 2009). According to the Social Learning Theory (Albert Bandura, 1977), they act as influential models by providing children with examples of behaviour to observe and imitate from. Therefore, they are able to assert their fertility orientation unto their children and reinforce it early in life as well as through the course of life. To illustrate this point better through an example, it was reported that women whose mothers were working during their teenage years learned from their mother's experience and formed reproductive intentions in a different way than peers whose mothers remained at home (Testa, 2014). This could, however, lead in both positive and negative directions of association, depending on whether or not the mother imparted a successful work-life balance model on her daughter (Testa, Bordone, Osiewalska and Skirbekk). At the heart of the framework, a child learns by taking into account the consequences – be it punishing or rewarding – of their parents' behaviour (McLeod, 2016).

Point Research Questions

- What are the societal factors that have influenced women's attitudes towards childbearing from mother (Generation X) to daughter (Generation Z)?
- How have the significance of these factors consequently shaped women's perceptions towards having children?

- How does familial context/environment affect one's level of inclination to bear children?

Intergenerational patterns of reproduction are of special interest because they can reveal possible similarities between mothers' and daughters' childbearing decisions. Moreover, this study hopes to find out the extent of impact family has on a woman's fertility intentions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Setting the Social Context of Women's Roles in Society

A comparative study between four European countries – Norway, Bulgaria, Austria and Italy – which differ in terms of economic opportunity, employment level, welfare system, and family policy was conducted in September 2016. The paper examines the socio-economic policies adopted in each country and their implications on childbearing decisions for the bulk of the married female working class. Norway is characterised by a generous and egalitarian family policy whose supportive welfare system incentivised women's continuous employment and enabling parents to combine parenthood with paid work (Lappegård 2010). A family-friendly and supportive social environment contribute to both female employment and childbearing, as seen from its Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of 1.85 in 2017. In Bulgaria, women have a central role in the family, but as opposed to Italy and similar to Norway, the dual-breadwinner model is far more present (Naldini 2003).

The female employment rate has also declined in subsequent decades due to increasing unemployment, Bulgaria's TFR as of 2017 stands at a figure of 1.56. In Austria, tax and benefit policies have long discouraged married women's participation in the labour market (Morgan 2006). However, more recent flexible working-time arrangements have allowed women to combine work and family life, and Austria has been experiencing a declining TFR - 1.47 as of 2017 - as a result of the pursuit for employment opportunities. The Italian context, based on a 'familistic' welfare system and relying on the central role of women as principal caregivers (Esping-Andersen 1999), is characterised by a rigidity in the labour market that simultaneously increases the costs of having children and discourages the labour market participation of married women (Del Boca 2002). Italy faced a TFR of 1.44 in 2017.

Based on these differences, it can be inferred that the socio-economic status of a mother affects her predisposition towards childbearing, and considerably, combining employment and motherhood has costs for women in the above mentioned countries. In such contexts, daughters may not learn the skills required for combining work and family life through the example of her mother or mothers in general. Additionally, countries with limited institutional support for families with children and work policies that heighten the undesirability of fertility intentions lowers the inclination levels of couples from having children, because they lack a compelling-enough incentive to do so.

Stepping into Singapore's Shoes: The State, Family and Fertility

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In *The Three Paradoxes: Working Women in Singapore* by Jean Lee S. K., Kathleen Campbell, and Audrey Chia, women in Singapore who have joined the workforce are confronted with the challenges of balancing their traditional and modern-day roles in society. First, they are burdened with the expectation to become creative and prolific corporate workers who are expected to play the role of wife and mother in the household. Second, Singaporean women are conflicted between choosing either work or family to prioritise in their life, as a result from them becoming high-attaining members of the working population. Over the past two decades, the Ministry of Social and Family Development has introduced a slew of measures in the form of schemes and programmes aimed at creating a total social environment conducive to family formation and the strengthening of family ties. However, a limited positive correlation has been observed between the promotion of a pro-family support system and increase in birth rates. Moreover, In 2017, it was announced that Singapore's TFR reached 1.16, making it the second lowest figure ever recorded since 1.15 in 2010 (Justin O., 2018). The 1.16 mark succeeds a declining trend of 1.25 in 2014, 1.24 in 2015 and 1.20 in 2016., which in brief overview, are a result of educational expansion, employment opportunities undiscriminating of gender and an increasing ambivalence towards the desirability of marriage as a result of the first two factors (Jones, 2012)

METHODOLOGY

Questionnaires and interviews were conducted to support the research, providing quantitative and qualitative data respectively. The age of

Generation X respondents ranged between 43 and 47 years old, while the mean age of Generation Z respondents was 14. 2 years (median age of 14. 5 years).

Phase 1: Questionnaires

Respondents for the survey were obtained through a process of convenience sampling. A total of 42 private messages were sent individually to potential candidates on WhatsApp, asking for theirs and their mothers' permission to participate in a series of questionnaires and interviews. After shortlisted candidates had confirmed their participation, emails were sent out to them, containing 2 sets of questionnaires for Generation X and Generation Z participants respectively. Respondents were assigned serial numbers from 1 to 38 to ensure anonymity. The questionnaire mainly consisted of statements that required responses on a Likert scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being Strongly Disagree and 5 being Strongly Agree) while Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs) took the minority. 38 sets of replies were received at the end of the questionnaire phase. After data from the first phase of results had been collated and organised, the second phase of data collection, the interviews, proceeded in order.

Phase 2: Interviews

Out of the 38 participants, 6 pairs of participants were enlisted to be interviewed. They were chosen as their background information and responses collected in the first phase would provide a diverse database. 2 sets of interview questions, similar in terms of scope yet specifically tailored

to the context of each generation, were created. All interviews were conducted individually through phone call. Transcripts were produced as a result of recording the phone calls.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Finding 1: Level of Education is Inversely Related to the Importance of Motherhood

In the questionnaire phase of data collection, women desirous of higher educational attainment such as entering University or obtaining a diploma and professional qualification reported low figures for their ideal number of children, mostly ranging from 0 to 1. Similarly, respondent Z1 hopes to graduate from University and cites her ideal number of children which she would want as because “[she] does not feel the need to have children after years of education and thinks that “ it is more important to support [herself] when [she] grows up”. Her mother, X1, who also received a degree from University, mentioned how “ making advancements in the workforce was a natural process for [her] after graduation” and that she felt like it was “ necessary to get a good job after graduation”. Z41, who listed her ideal number of children as 0, also wishes to graduate from University. She feels that “ because [she] studied so hard for university, [she] wanted to start a career first before thinking of starting a family”. Her mother, X41, a graduate from University who ideally wanted 1 child only, shares the same sentiments and feels that “[her] years of studying ultimately pinpointed to stepping out into the workforce”. Respondents are hence seen prioritising entering the

workforce over settling down as a natural transition after receiving years of education.

According to the Ideation Theory where new ways of thinking are diffused through a community by means of social interaction among individuals and groups, more educated women may learn about different ideas of desired family size and composition through school, society, and exposure to global communication networks. As they are being introduced to various concepts of marriage and childbearing, their ingrained view of a stereotypical family, which differs for everyone due to the vastly disparate methods of upbringing we have each gone through, is being challenged and they might start to explore a whole new realm of possibility. Moreover, from an economic point of view, better educated women have greater economic opportunities and higher opportunity costs of bearing children in terms of lost income (The World Bank, 2015). Thus, women are presented with the dilemma of having to assign top priority to either climbing up the corporate ladder or settling down and starting a family of their own. Reason being, as human beings, we are simply deprived of having infinite resources and are unable to execute both aspects of life simultaneously and flawlessly without having to compromise on the fulfilment of one of the two areas as well as our psychological well-being (Peters., 1997). The Household Bargaining Model also suggests that women who have received higher education are generally better able to stand up for themselves and their rights and possess more negotiating power, especially on family size (World Development Report, 2012).

Finding 2: Positive Association between Family Size and Fertility Intentions

In the questionnaire phase of data collection, respondents with large family sizes of 9 to 10 or more immediate family members reported desires for a higher number of ideal children, ranging from 3 to 4 or more. Z6 has an immediate family size of 10 and would ideally like to have 4 children or more. Her mother X6, has an immediate family size of 12 and stated her ideal number of children as 3. Both generations had relatively large family sizes, and had a relatively high number of desired children. In contrast, Z4 and X4 both have 8 immediate family members and would ideally want 1 child only. These results link back to the hypothesis where fertility intentions may arise from the family-of-origin domain, and that observational learning of the mother's experience may contribute to shaping childbearing decisions of the daughter.