

CALL FOR PAPERS

International Seminar

The Intergenerational Transmission of Reproductive Behavior: Comparative Perspectives

Leuven, Belgium

9-10 June 2011

Organized by the Scientific Research Community on Historical Demography

Research Foundation Flanders – FWO (Belgium)

The aim of this international seminar is to examine the intergenerational transmission of reproductive behavior from new perspectives: comparing social-environmental and genetic factors (and their interplay), and comparing the familial transmission of reproductive behavior across subgroups and contexts.

Comparing the social and the genetic

Over the last few decades, several scholars have argued that integration of biological and genetic factors into theories and models of population processes and demographic behavior is crucial to the production of innovative research (e.g. Freese et al. 2003; Hobcraft 2006). In the intergenerational transmission of reproductive behavior, both genetic and social-environmental mechanisms play a role. Genetic inheritance may work through the ability to have children, i.e. the fecundity and fecundability of women (Pearson et al. 1899; Pluzhnikov et al. 2007), and/or through the desire for children or childbearing motivations (Kohler et al. 1999; Miller 1986). Fertility behavior may also be transmitted through socialization, meaning that preferences and attitudes regarding family formation are instilled in the younger generation when growing up in the parental home (Duncan et al. 1965).

So far, few studies have addressed both social and genetic factors, and their interactions, in the transmission of reproductive behavior (Kohler et al. 1999). An important reason for

this empirical lacunae is the problem of disentangling genetic effects from shared environmental effects. However, as Murphy (1999) has suggested “one possible way to address this issue in addition to the classical twin and adoption studies would be to look at the outcomes for sibs of different levels of genetic similarity if there are sufficient numbers who are brought up in different environment”. Thus, not only comparisons between monozygotic and dizygotic twins can be used to unravel the genetic from the social components, but comparisons between full siblings, half-siblings, and step-siblings can be useful as well, as long as these pairs represent different socialization contexts and degrees of genetic relatedness.

Historical databases with micro data from population registers and vital registers are particularly well suited to address these issues. While modern demographic surveys (e.g. Gender and Generations Project) contain measures of fertility behavior of individuals and their parents, data on the fertility behavior of siblings are hardly ever available, except in twin databases. Information on the reproductive histories of siblings are more widely available in historical databases containing micro data on life courses. Moreover, because of higher levels of adult mortality, the extent to which individuals experienced a range of full siblings, half siblings and step siblings was much larger during the nineteenth century than during more recent periods. By providing researchers with rich multi-actor data on different aspects of reproduction covering both pre-transitional, transitional and post-transitional societies, historical databases offer many opportunities for unraveling the interface of genetic and social components of fertility behavior.

Comparing across contexts

At the same time, research increasingly calls for studies that address how and why the intergenerational transmission of reproductive behavior – whether it is socially or genetically transmitted – differs across cultures, regions, and social groups. Further progress can be made by evaluating the interplay of social-environmental and/or genetic effects in tandem with other covariates that are known to influence the transmission of reproductive behavior.

First, the climate of socialization in the parental home and the transfer of norms and values might be different depending on the gender and parity of children. It has been noticed that the strength of the intergenerational relationship has tended to be stronger for women than for men (Pearson et al. 1899; Murphy 1999). There is also some evidence that birth order might be related to intergenerational transmission, with inheritance of fertility behavior being more pronounced for eldest-born children (Johnson & Stokes 1976; Reher et al. 2008).

Practices of socialization of children in the parental home depend on the quality and kind of parent-child and extended kinship ties, which differ between social groups, religious denominations, regions, and family systems. Previous research has shown that familial transmission of fertility behavior varies across social classes (Van Bavel & Kok 2009), religious groups (Van Bavel & Kok 2009), and regions (Van Poppel et al. 2008). In individualist societies with a relative absence of strong social norms, the social transmission of fertility might have been weaker. Thus it might be expected that social mechanisms of

transmission were relatively more important in Southern than in Northern Europe, and more so in stem or joint family systems than in nuclear family systems.

Special attention is also in order with respect to the temporal variation in the social and/or genetic correlates of the intergenerational transmission of fertility. A number of authors have shown a general linear increase in its strength over time, both for the nineteenth (Van Poppel et al. 2008; Reher et al. 2008; Anderton et al. 1987) and twentieth centuries (Steenhof & Liefbroer 2008; Murphy & Wang 2001). Kohler et al. (1999) found for Denmark both increases and declines of genetic effects during the period 1870 to present, and that these temporal variations differed by gender. So far, however, research on the covariation of social and/or genetic effects with other important variables determining the transmission of reproductive behavior over the generations is scarce.

Submission procedure

In this international seminar, we aim to study the familial inheritance of reproductive behavior by focusing on a broad array of behavioral aspects, including age at marriage, age at first birth, completed fertility, spacing (birth intervals), specific parity transition risks (e.g. from zero to one child), and age at stopping. Authors should address one or both of the two mentioned themes.

- The comparison and interplay of social-environmental and genetic factors;
- Comparing intergenerational transmission of reproductive behavior across contexts (social classes, religions, countries, regions, family systems etc.).

We encourage authors to be creative in identifying new “experimental” settings that facilitate comparative analyses of individuals with different levels of genetic relatedness and/or socialization environments. When interested in presenting a paper at this seminar, you are invited to submit a one-page summary stating the main research question, the relation to central themes, theory and hypotheses, data, and methods of analysis before June 30th 2010. We intend to publish a selection of the presented papers as a special issue of an international peer-reviewed journal.

For further information, please contact Hilde Bras (haj.bras@fsw.vu.nl).

Organizing Committee

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