

Fertility Support During Tertiary Education ¹

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Ideal family size in Europe and similar countries is not related to education for women and men. Women with tertiary education have the same ideal family size as women with short/basic education (Phillipov et al. 2004, Symeonidou 2000, Van Peer 2002). Testa and Grilli (2006), Testa and Toulemon (2006) and Lühr (1991) even find a positive relation between preferred number of children and the educational level for European women.

However, women with tertiary education are less likely than other women to realize their fertility ideals. Table 1 shows an example of fertility differences by education, based on Lutz and Goujon (2001). Tertiary-educated women have the lowest realized fertility of all educational groups – this evidence is also supported by looking at cohort fertility measures, e.g., from Norway (Kravdal 2001), see Table 2.

Table 1. Total Fertility Rates, 1995-2000 (Lutz and Goujon 2001).

	Eastern Europe	Western Europe
No education	1.62	2.24
Primary education	1.64	1.71
Secondary education	1.44	1.64
Tertiary education	1.15	1.54

Table 2. Number of children to women at age 40 (born 1946-1950) in Norway (Kravdal 2001).

Years of Education	Children	Proportion Childless
9	2.37	7.1
11-12	2.04	9.8
15-16	1.95	13.2
17+	1.71	18.7

One reason for low fertility among tertiary-educated women is the long length of time it takes to finish schooling. Most women do not have children before the end of education, and the longer the education the later they have children (Table 3). Important reasons for this is that many women prefer financial security before having children, including getting a job with long term prospects and rights for child support, as well as being able to afford adequate accommodation (Blossfeld and Huinink 1991, Skirbekk et al. 2004).

Table 3. Mean age at first birth by education in Sweden, 1946-1962 Cohorts (Source: Skirbekk et al. 2006).

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	Number of Years
Primary school	22.7
Up to short secondary	24.1
Long secondary school	26.0
Tertiary education	27.3

How can education and family life be reconciled?

Economic uncertainty, relatively low levels of income, and low levels of wealth are important reasons behind low fertility among students. One way of helping young men and women reach their fertility wishes is to provide financial support for those who have children during their studies.

In countries with relatively high support for childcare, such as the Nordic countries (cf., Esping-Andersen 1999), more women choose to combine studies with childbearing (See Table 4).

Table 4. Share of women who have 1st birth before end of education (Billari and Philipov 2004).

Country	Percent
Finland	31
Norway	30
Sweden	41
Austria	12
Belgium	4
France	9
Germany	12
Switzerland	16
Greece	12
Italy	13
Spain	11

In most European countries little is done to focus public support on women who have children during tertiary education. Norway is one example of a country that has special benefits for students who have children. Extra financial support for students who become parents is available, and it is relatively generous, with paid time-off for students who have children while pursuing higher education. Additionally, special subsidized family apartments are available. General information on family support in Norway can be found in Appendix 1a; information on special student support can be found in Appendix 1b.

Lutz and Skirbekk (2005) argue that a more efficient school system could increase a woman's opportunities to realize her fertility ideals. Starting school one year earlier (e.g., starting at age 5 rather than the more common school entrance age of 6 or even 7) and shortening the duration of primary and secondary schooling (for example by reducing the overall length to 12 rather than 13 years) will decrease the age at exiting school. (These marginal changes to the ages of school entry and school duration are not likely to substantially affect the skill levels of the school leavers. Skirbekk (2006) compares Swiss students that due to canton-specific law needs 12 or 13 years to complete primary and secondary education, and finds no difference in their performance at the end of their schooling, and Skirbekk (2005) finds that variation in school entry ages for up to a year has

no substantial effect on subsequent performance.) Younger school leaving ages are likely to reduce the age at first and subsequent births, and make it easier for women to combine family and education/career plans.

Another policy option is to emphasize differential tracks based on education potential – women and men who want to pursue higher education could be helped into faster tracks from early age – as they then would be able to complete higher education at a younger age than the rest of the population. Those who would need more time to complete primary and secondary studies are less likely to want to attend tertiary education. A more flexible, skill-related selection could lead to younger school leaving ages, and more similar ages of ending education between women pursuing different study degrees. Younger school leaving ages is likely to lead to a younger age of labour market entry, younger childbearing ages and higher fertility, and also health and economic gains (Skirbekk 2005).

Conclusions

There is a substantial discrepancy between ideal and realized fertility for women with higher education. Although fertility preferences are not affected by education, women with longer education have considerably fewer children. In addition to the gap between preferred and actual number of children a problem, more educated women are also much more likely to conceive at older ages -- which is related to a number of health risks (including miscarriages and Down's syndrome).

Economic difficulties during one's study period is an important reason for late and low fertility. Better circumstances during childbearing years could be paramount to improve the financial situation and to increase childbearing opportunities for students. This includes offering housing support, increasing availability and access to kindergartens as well as giving financial aid through stipends and loans to student parents.

Encouraging fertility among the highly educated during education can help these women and men realize their fertility ideals and soften population ageing.

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Additional Sources

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Appendix 1a: Public fertility support, Norway.

(Values and exchange rate: 1 Euro = 8.15 NOK as of February 1, 2007)

1.a Cash benefit at birth/adoption (foreldrepenger): 33,584 NOK (4,124 Euros)

1.b Otherwise, if employed for the last six of the last 10 months, 100% salary for 44 weeks or 80% salary for 54 weeks while on leave. A salary of 40,000 Euros (326,000 NOK) would imply 32,000 Euros (260,800 NOK) in benefits for the 10-month duration.

2. Monthly cash benefits (Kontantstøtte): 3,303 NOK (405 Euros)

Total amount (23 months): 76,038 NOK (9,326 Euros)

Given for 23 months from baby to 3 years, if not in kindergarten. Gradual decline in amount if child attends kindergarten less than 33 hours per week. If child attends kindergarten for 33 or more hours per week, no money is given. Child must live in Norway.

3. Child support is given to the age of 18 years (Barnetrygd). Child must live in Norway (6 months abroad allowed). Amount is doubled if single parent.

Monthly benefits: 970 NOK (119 Euros)

Total (age 0 to 18): 209,520 NOK (25,714 Euros)

Appendix 1b: Additional benefits for childbearing during studies.

If the parent is a student, the parent is eligible for a birth stipend (Fødselsstipend) from the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund (Statens Lånekasse for Utdanning) for 42 weeks:

9,430 NOK (1,157 Euros) per month, or

8,140 NOK (998 Euros), depending on the financial situation.

There are other possibilities to help students who are poor or single:

- Low income parents with high living costs may be entitled to public housing financing (husbanken) which is provided by the state.
- Subsidized housing is available.
- Affordable kindergartens available. Price depend on income/wealth and university/college (e.g. student of Oslo university whose family study-year income is less than 150,000 NOK (18,405 Euros) would pay 620 NOK (76 Euros) per month.
- Additional benefits may be available from the social support offices.
- Substantial additional benefits are given to single parents.