Spatiality of normative fertility timings in urban areas: socioeconomic or contextual influence?

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Abstract

Introduction

The shifts in values and attitudes affecting partnership, reproduction and family (second demographic transition, Lesthaeghe and Van de Kaa, 1986), and the shift from incidental to planned parenthood, partly consequent to the availability of modern abortion and contraception methods (Bajos & Fernand, 2006; Knibiehler, 1997), contributed to easier completion of ideal fertility patterns. Timing is an important variable in women's fertility plan (Moguérou et al., 2011). In 2010, 60% of the births occurred between 25 and 35 years. Our societies extolling individual autonomy, self-realisation and social recognition shaped a new collective representation of an ideal family and family formation. Teenage and late mothers are often stigmatised for having made a non-normative choice. One could argue even scientific literature isn't objective naming them 'early' or 'late' pregnancies, as if happening before or after the expected time.

Few cross-country studies tackle fertility timing at the local level, but they seem to acknowledge an urban specificity, gathering the non normative fertility patterns. This paper study whether this is solely due to a compositional effect or partly explained by a weaker social disapprobation towards non-normative fertility calendars.

Literature review

The communication portrays the scientific literature dealing with teenage and "late" fertilities and their influencing factors in the western world especially. A double observation can be made. First, too often these fertility timings are perceived as problematic on a social and/or economic point of view if not considered as a health issue (Kearney & Lenive, 2012 ; Hobcraft & Kiernan, 2001 ; Mc Culloch, 2001). Secondly, teenage fertility studies too often lack a spatial outlook at the local level.

Among the factors cited in the literature: siblings and social environment, through their opinions, are believed to influence the fertility project and its fulfilment (Lyngstad & Prskawetzo, 2010 ; Bernardi et al., 2007) and eventually contribute to the transmission of a local norm. These local norms are spatially defined; could it be because of socio-cultural inertia (Lesthaeghe & Neels, 2002) affecting ideal family representations; constraints, may they be legislative (abortion laws), economic or material (housing stock); or because of the environment socio-economic composition.

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Data and methodology

We start by quickly mapping the fertility timings in North-western Europe. Using Cross-roads Bank for Social Security individual data on women between 15 and 49 years old in 2010, this study then uses Brussels' case to profile who are the women giving birth before their twenties and after 35 y.o.. Childbearing timing patterns and their coherence within socioeconomic groups, generations and neighbourhoods are portrayed in a first attempt to define the overriding variables of teenage and "late" pregnancies. This result is then used to build step-wise multiple regression models on individual characteristics. Finally, in order to study neighbourhood contextual effects, we use the complementarily of composition and contextual effects analysis (see Loriaux, 1987).

Results
This study presents the spatial distribution of teenage and "late" fertility both in relative and absolute terms in a North-western metropolitan area. It also defines driving socioeconomic characteristics related to non-normative fertility calendars.
But it also aims to go further the sole description by testing comprehensive hypotheses; here the existence of spatially defined norms directing and/or stigmatising habits and eventually leading to spatially differentiated fertility patterns. Most likely the greater occurrence of non-normative fertility timings in city centre is due to a combination of both compositional and contextual influences. For instance the results suggest for equal ethnic and economic background, women living in the suburbs have a lower teenage fertility.