

The roles of American women both in the family and in the larger society have undergone dramatic changes in the past several decades. The rates of women in the paid labor force have increased dramatically over the second half of the twentieth century, to the point where now the majority of all women and mothers are employed (Spain & Bianchi 1996). At the same time, women are postponing childbearing to later ages than ever before (Martin 2000). These dramatic changes in women's lives in recent decades necessitate research on the multitude of ways that work impacts women's lives. Despite a well-documented negative employment-fertility relationship and continuing increases in the age at first birth for women, little is known about how work affects women's childbearing decisions. Do some occupational characteristics demand fertility postponement or discourage women from wanting (additional) children altogether?

The primary goal of this study is to examine the impact that work characteristics have on fertility decisions. Specifically, this research proposes to assess the relationship between occupational characteristics and fertility intentions and examine how occupational characteristics differ for women who are postponing childbearing. Due to the substantial lack of information regarding racial/ethnic differences on these topics despite widely varying labor force participation and family formation patterns, an emphasis will be placed on examining these patterns for women of differing racial/ethnic group status.

Employment/Fertility Relationship

Evidence is clear that women in the paid labor force face lower fertility outcomes (Budig 2003; Cramer 1980; Smith-Lovin & Tickamyer 1978; Stolzenberg & Waite 1977; Waite & Stolzenberg 1976). The negative employment/fertility relationship is commonly explained by Becker's (1981) theory that the opportunity costs of women taking time out of the labor force in

terms of time and lost wages discourage childbearing. Despite the relatively large body of evidence noting the relationship, few studies have been conducted on factors that actually contribute to the relationship. Budig (2003) explored the impact of women's work status on the likelihood of pregnancy and found that both part-time and full-time employment reduced women's odds of becoming pregnant. However, a dearth of information on the relationship remains.

Conceptual Framework

The life course perspective is the guiding framework of the proposed study. Several aspects of this perspective are integrated in this study of the impact of work characteristics on fertility intentions, including the timing of major life events and the importance of role identity (Bengston & Allen 1994).

Family and work are the two most important aspects of life to Americans (England 1991), but the timing of the transition to parenthood is often a difficult decision for women to make. The life course perspective focuses on the social organization of major life transitions and allows for interpretations of their social meanings (Elder 1991). Understanding the meaning of work using the life course perspective involves incorporating relationships with family, timing decisions, and historical period (economic conditions and social norms). Women's decisions about work can be viewed both on a micro level as individual agents making decisions, and on the macro level because there are differences in the incidence, duration, rate, and timing in different cultures (Moen & Wethington 1992).

Although parenthood is expected in society, the timing of when people should become parents is more ambiguous. By delaying fertility, women are more likely to achieve higher education and occupational attainments (Elder 1998). Though the incidence and timing of

childbearing are documented, little is known about the actual decision-making processes that lead people to have children. Family decision-making appears not to be guided exclusively by economic needs, but by cultural values as well, influenced by factors such as family history and ethnic origins (Hareven 1991). Therefore, a number of factors must be considered in any study of the employment/fertility relationship.

Data and Methods

Data for this study come from a large ($n > 2,500$) random digit dialing (RDD) survey of women and their partners that enable family researchers to examine a number of family issues with an emphasis on (in)fertility, along with a variety of psychosocial outcomes. Data were collected from fall 2004 to spring 2006. The sample is nationally representative, with an oversample of minority respondents and people with infertility problems. Estimates indicate that around 40% of respondents are members of racial/ethnic minority groups. Two advantages of using this dataset for the proposed study are that: 1) open-ended responses regarding employment allow for coding as many occupations as were listed (>400); and 2) the recency of the data collection provides the most current information possible regarding women's employment, including variables such as occupational characteristics, work status, and work satisfaction.

The research question proposed here requires detailed information regarding the characteristics of respondents' jobs. For these analyses, I will be utilizing the Occupational Information Network, or O*Net. O*Net was developed by the Department of Labor to replace the outdated Directory of Occupational Titles and was first released in 1998. O*Net is continually updated on skill requirements and job characteristics for over 950 jobs in the United States and is available as an online resource (<http://online.onetcenter.org/>) (Peterson 2001). The

primary strength of O*Net for research purposes is the rich information provided about jobs.

While O*Net provides hundreds of work characteristics, the present study will focus on several constructs of occupational characteristics that have been suggested by previous research to impact dimensions of individual and family well-being, such as complexity, routinization, autonomy, stressful working conditions, and workplace support.

Binary logistic regression models will be used to estimate the relationship between work characteristics and fertility intentions. Additionally, comparisons will be drawn between those who have postponed their fertility and those who have not. These comparisons will include determination of the most common occupations for each group, differences in work characteristics, and differences in fertility intentions.

Expected Findings

Numerous studies have examined the relationship between women's labor force participation and fertility. While research largely finds a negative relationship, a dearth of information remains on the reasons for the relationship. The current study proposes to explore for the first time the effects of specific occupational characteristics on both fertility postponement and fertility intentions. Although no research currently exists on why work lowers fertility, I expect to find significant differences in the occupational characteristics of those who postpone fertility and do not intend to have children in the near future. Positive characteristics such as complexity may lower fertility intentions because the enjoyment of work is an acceptable substitution for childbearing. On the other hand, negative characteristics such as lack of workplace support may also lower fertility intentions due to fear of repercussions or difficulty in balancing work and family. Findings have important policy implications as women's labor force participation and postponement of childbearing continue to increase.

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