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On the structural value of children and its implication on intended fertility in Bulgaria

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Abstract

Personal networks are receiving increasing recognition as structural determinants of fertility. However, the network perspective also helps to explain personal motivations for having children. Using theories of interpersonal exchange, social capital, and the value of children, it is argued in this article that children can substantively improve their parents' social networks. Individuals perceive this potential advantageous development as a structural benefit and consider this value in their reproductive decisions. This argument is empirically explored with data from Bulgaria, collected in 2002. The results document the presence of structural evaluations among subjectively perceived child-related benefits. Moreover, structural evaluations matter for the reproductive decision-making of Bulgarian citizens. Women's fertility intentions are supported by the prospect that a child will bring their parents and relatives closer or will improve their security at old age. Males' intentions are closely associated with the expectation that a child will provide support when they are old.

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