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Domestic gender equality and childbearing in Sweden

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Abstract

Background: Sweden, which is among the most gender-equal societies in the world, combines 'modern' family patterns such as unmarried cohabitation, delayed parenthood, high maternal labor force participation, and high break-up rates - all usually linked with low birth rates - with relatively high fertility. Sweden also has a high level of shared parental responsibility for home and children.

Objective: After decades of late 20th century research showing that increasing gender equality in the workplace was linked with lower fertility, might gender equality in the home increase fertility?

Methods: Using data from the Swedish Young Adult Panel Study (YAPS), we use Cox regression to examine the effects on first, second, and third births of 1) holding attitudes about sharing equally in the care of the home and children, and 2) actual sharing in these domestic tasks.

Results: Our analysis shows that, measuring attitudes before the transition to parenthood and actual practice four years later, it is inconsistency between sharing attitudes and the actual division of housework that reduces the likelihood of continued childbearing, especially on second births among women.

Conclusions: As women are most likely to confront an inconsistent situation, with egalitarian ideals in a household without equal sharing, it is clear that having a partner who does not share housework is depressing Swedish fertility.

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