



VOLUME 31 - ARTICLE 27 | PAGES 813-860

Varying association between education and second births in Europe: Comparative analysis based on the EU-SILC data

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DATE RECEIVED: 21 Nov 2013

DATE PUBLISHED: 08 Oct 2014

WORD COUNT: 11438

KEYWORDS: **comparative analysis, education, Europe, fertility, hazard modeling, second births**

DOI: **10.4054/DemRes.2014.31.27**

Abstract

Background: Previous research has shown considerable variation in the relationship between women's educational attainment and second births in contemporary Europe. A negative association is found in some countries, while a positive or non-negative relationship is reported in others. Existing studies come mainly from single-country perspectives, which renders the results not strictly comparable.

Objective: We investigate the association between women's and their partners' educational attainment and transition to second births comparatively in regions and sub-regions of Europe.

Methods: The data come from the 2005 and 2011 waves of the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC). We estimate separate discrete-time event history models for regions and sub-regions and multilevel models for all EU-SILC countries.

Results: Northern Europe exhibits a positive association between women's and their partners' education and second childbearing. Western Europe features a positive relationship among partners but demonstrates a U-shaped pattern among women. This pattern occurs due to German-speaking countries where women's educational attainment appears inversely related to second births. A negative relationship between women's education and second childbearing also prevails in Eastern Europe; in some sub-regions it extends to male partners. Except for in Eastern Europe, the time-squeeze adds to the positive effect of women's high education. In Northern Europe it enables highly educated women to wholly catch up with their counterparts with medium and low education as regards the proportion having second births. In Southern Europe, by contrast, the educational gradient turns negative following the consideration of the time-squeeze effect.

Conclusions: We conclude that the relationship between educational attainment and second births varies not only by individual country but also by larger geographical area in Europe. Although smaller in scale than among women, the variation also extends to male partners.

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