

Changes in Union Status Around the Birth of the First Child: A Cross-National Study on the influence of Parental SES

J. C. Koops, A. C. Liefbroer and A. H. Gauthier

Western societies are characterized by changing demographic behaviour regarding family formation. A prominent observation is the increase in births to cohabiting couples at the expense of marital births. Cross-national research have studied the effect of own and parental educational attainment on the partnership status at first birth in several European societies. This research shows that in most West-European countries women with different socio-economic backgrounds are equally likely to have a birth in marriage, while in North-American and most East-European countries women with a higher socio-economic background have a higher risk of having a birth in marriage (compared to a birth in cohabitation).

Most studies have so far focused on one single point in time, such as the moment of birth. The current study will contribute to the literature by examining differences in the partnership status that occur at the moment of birth, are already apparent at the moment of conception and if differences intensify in the period between conception and birth. We expect that this can nuance or highlight certain (country) differences.

Data of 15 Western and Eastern European countries of the Generations and Gender Programme is used, in combination with information of the United States and the United Kingdom by using the datasets of the National Survey of Family Growth and the British Household Panel Survey. In the first step of the analysis we examined if parental educational attainment influences the likelihood to be married at the moment of conception and birth using logistic regression models. In the second step we examined if parental educational attainment influences the transition rate from not being married with the partner at the moment of conception to being married with the partner at the moment of. We used a Cox model for this analysis where duration was measured in months since conception.