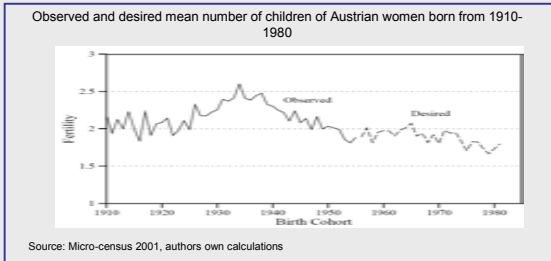


Introduction

Nowadays it is generally a deliberate decision **if, how many** and **when** to have children. However the **opportunity set** under which these decisions are made became more diverse and the complexity of the **decision rules** increased. Of great concern is the fall in ideal family size below the replacement level.



Fertility rates in Europe have continuously dropped in the past decades. This figure shows that already the ideal family size declined below 2,0 children.

Qualitative research

Qualitative interviews with childless people who are living in a partnership indicate that **intentions for a child** are commonly expressed with emotional arguments.



"...well I think . children are . super and if there are (...) personal private developments than form being single to get in a working relationship and the only possible next development are children." (Male 13)

Rather unexpectedly our interviews also indicate that people who **do not want to get a child**, expressed themselves in an emotional way.



"I do not feel a need (to have a child). And if I should feel there is such a need, it is imposed on me from outside. (...) but when I sit down and listen to myself ... there is nothing." (Female 7)

On the other hand arguments about the **timing** are to a larger extend rational.



"...I should be settled in my job to some extent, so that I know when I come back I will still have all the possibilities. And yes, so, financially, because for our apartment, we have a mortgage, and that should be paid off first." (Female 4)

The decision on the timing of getting a child turned out to constitute a major uncertainty in the fertility decision.

How the tradeoff between rational and emotional arguments work in detail and how people in the end come to a **decision** is not possible to answer with this data. However as our qualitative interviews indicate, emotional arguments play a key role in fertility desires and decisions – in addition to rational arguments commonly included in fertility theories.

Theoretical considerations

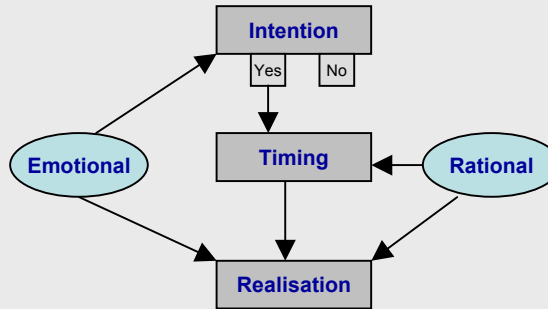
In this paper we stress that fertility behavior is a multistage process with various determinants influencing different stages. A special focus will be in the question how the **rational** and the **emotional arguments come into play** in these processes.

Our theoretical assumptions

In a **first step** we consider the **intention to have a child**. The findings suggest that the intention to get a child is stimulated by emotions. Desires and values seem to shape the intention for a child. The general intention for and also against a child was always argued with emotional satisfaction.

In a **second step** we shall investigate the **timing** of a child. As our qualitative survey indicated, mainly rational arguments are at play in this stage of the fertility decision process. Men as well as women have a wide range of opportunities, these must be discussed and evaluated to make a good decision.

In the **final step** we investigate the **birth outcome**. We assume that emotional and rational reasoning guides this final step in the fertility process.



Based on the results **our hypothesis** is:

Arguments for getting a child are mainly motivated emotionally and arguments against getting a child in the near future are rather based on rational arguments.

We further assume that intentions for a child are low cost but the realization of a child is an irreversible behavior, and this is desired as a high cost decision and therefore not so easy to make. (compare low cost hypothesis in environmental studies - Diekmann and P. Preisendörfer. 2003)

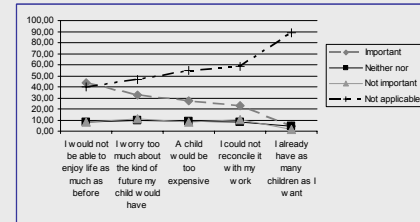
We also assume that people consider the costs and benefits of such a decision. Our theoretical considerations are in line with the concept of Family Economics which assumes that people consider the costs and benefits of such a multistage decision.

Data and method

A triangulation of qualitative and quantitative methods will be used of in this work. For the **qualitative part** 22 problem-centered interviews have been made. Thirteen with woman and nine with men. They were analysed by combining grounded theory and objective hermeneutic sequence analysis (Flick 2006). Considering the **quantitative data** we are facing problems with finding adequate surveys to test hypotheses. In a first attempt we opted to use the Austrian Population Policy Acceptance Survey 2001 (PPA2) and investigate reasons against having a (or alternatively another) child.

Results

Childless people and the reasons why they do not have any children

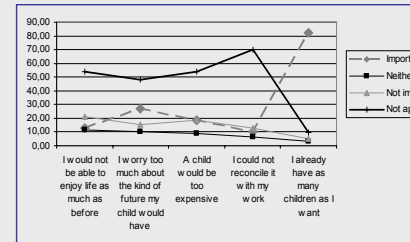


Source: PPA 2 Data of Austria

The figure shows that the reasons like monetary costs that work would limit the wish to have a child are rather low compared to more emotional arguments. Childless people do not want to change their lives or that they worry much about the future of the children.

People with children and the reasons why they do not want another children

The most important argument here is that people have already as many children as they want. Again rational arguments like work or monetary costs seem again not that important for the fertility intention.



Source: PPA 2 Data of Austria

Discussion

These empirical results are well in line with our theoretical considerations. The aim of the paper is to investigate the **role of emotional versus rational arguments** at different stages of the fertility process. So far, **only qualitative data** allow such an analysis. Quantitative data that capture interviews that ask not only for reasons against but also for reasons in favour of children are urgently needed.

References

Flick, U. 2006. "An introduction to qualitative research." Third edition, London: Sage Publications.
 Diekmann, A. and P. Preisendörfer. 2003. "Green and greenback; the behavioral effects of environmental attitudes in low-cost and high-cost situations." *Rationality Society* . 4 (15): 441-472.
 Hanika, A., 2003. *Volkszählung 2001: Paritäts-Fertilitätstafeln*. Statistische Nachrichten 2/2003, S.90-96.