

# Population Change and Public Policy

***Low fertility in the context of changing  
family and work obligations***

*A few disorganized comments*

Céline Le Bourdais

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## **Avoid the opposition between “determinants” and “consequences”**

- Both are necessary
- We cannot apprehend consequences without understanding determinants, and thus
- We cannot properly model change and its implications through simulation if we cannot identify which scenarios are most likely to occur

# Avoid the opposition between “macro-” and “micro-level” analyses

- Until recently, demographers focused mostly on macro-level analysis (only data available?)
- Recent emphasis on individual-level analysis is perhaps due to the richness of the new individual longitudinal surveys
- A very difficult challenge : how to connect both levels
  - 1) how does the macro and meso environment influence the life course of individuals
  - 2) how do individual experiences affect population change and composition

## A variety of factors and policy relevant issues need to be taken into consideration

- Not so much *Is low fertility inevitable?* but rather, *Why is fertility lower (or higher) in given societies or settings?*
- *Why are men and women unable to achieve the number of children they desire?*
- *Why is a rising proportion of men and women remaining childless?*

## **A variety of factors and policy relevant issues need to be taken into consideration**

- Is postponement of fertility due to difficulty to find a decent job ?
- To what extent are difficulties in balancing work and family linked to low fertility?
- Do traditional family systems based on role specialization lead to lower fertility?
- Is greater equality between men and women leading to higher level of fertility?

## **A variety of factors and policy relevant issues need to be taken into consideration**

- What is the impact of new conjugal and family forms and dynamics on individual and society levels of fertility?
- How do families function, make decisions and achieve economic well-being?
- Fertility cannot be analyzed solely at a macro level, as a component of population growth; it is the sum of a series of individuals' family decisions

# Issues of interest to our cluster?

- Use and misuse of contraception, abortion and fertility
- New technologies of reproduction and their impact on fertility and on defining parent / child relationships

# Importance of comparative work

- across cohorts
- by region (quasi-experimental setting)
- across countries
- over historical periods
- among various socio-economic groups
- When comparing fertility levels across groups, need to focus on parity order and on timing (% of childless women; importance of adolescent fertility)

# **Need to study changing family structure and dynamics per se, not only as a mediating context in which reproduction occurs**

- family composition and family histories have important repercussions on the organization of day-to-day life and well-being of individuals (transfers and exchanges within and across households)
- the de-institutionalization of conjugal and family life raises important legal and social issues in terms of the rights and responsibilities of partners at separation and of parents towards children

# **Need to study changing family structure and dynamics per se**

- changing family dynamics are posing a challenge for welfare state economies and policies
- family dynamics have long-term implications regarding support and exchanges across generations

## **Importance of taking a *life-course perspective***

- life-course approach, disentangling the age, cohort and period effects, is at the heart and one of the strengths of the demographic approach
- it is necessary if we are to understand the determinants of demographic changes and to grasp the consequences of these changes, both at the individual and societal levels

## **Less work on “policies that seek to influence the course of demographic events”**

- Perhaps because research has shown that policies often result from demographic changes but that their capacity to influence these changes is doubtful (Gauthier)
- Example: birth allowances (“bébé-bonus”) in Québec have influenced the timing of fertility (changes in the total fertility rate) but not the completed fertility rate