Fertility Expectation and Employment Across Three Female Cohorts

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of the study reported here is to assess the relationship between fertility expectation (total number of children expected to have or have had), childrearing career (ratio of actual or intended total time per child taken out of the labour force to rear children), and the following variables across female age cohorts: (a) age, (b) education, (c) personal income, (d) religious strength, (e) marital status, and (f) employment status. The random sample consists of 323 women. Results of simultaneous equation modelling indicates that fertility expectation and childrearing career are influenced by different factors in the age cohorts. Results are discussed in terms of role compatibility and new home economics theories.

KEY WORDS: baby boomer, employment, female, fertility, rearing children.

Introduction

Concomitant with declining fertility rates in North America over the past 25 years has been a steady increase in female employment. Researchers have consistently reported a negative relationship between labour force participation and fertility for married women in North America (Cramer, 1980; Waite & Stolzenberg, 1976). Although these issues have been broadly explored, no consensus has been reached about the causal direction of the relationship between them.

Data were part of the Winnipeg Area Study, managed by Raymond Curry in the Department of Sociology, University of Manitoba.

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Simultaneous equation models have been used to investigate causal direction of the employment/fertility dilemma (Cramer, 1980a; Smith-Lovin & Tickamyer, 1978; Stolzenberg & Waite, 1977; Waite & Stolzenberg, 1976). Results have indicated that causation was in both directions. Waite and Stolzenberg (1976) found that the impact of labour force participation on fertility expectation was four times greater than the reverse relationship. Smith-Lovin and Tickamyer (1978) found that "work behaviour was influenced by the number of children they [women] had during their twenties; childbearing was not influenced by their work" (p. 555). Cramer (1980a) challenged these previous findings and concluded that in the short run, the primary effect was from fertility to employment and in the long run, the opposite effect occurred.

Researchers have measured fertility and employment in diverse ways. Fertility expectation has usually been defined as the total fertility intention (children already had plus those expected to have in one's lifetime). Employment has been more difficult to assess than fertility because of the many aspects to be considered—number of hours worked, number of months worked per year, and number of years worked during eligible work years. According to Ermisch (1990), "Until recently, most economic models of fertility and women's employment have been static in nature . . . . they deal with behaviour in a single, timeless period . . . . a day, a week, a year, or many years" (p. 3). For example, family size and months of employment were studied during a portion of the life cycle, "such as the first 10 years of marriage or up to age 40" (p. 3).

Although the trend has been toward complete employment, women's work patterns have often been inconsistent and in order to be measured accurately, have required tracing patterns in and out of the work force. These tracings are possible, but they are impractical as a research variable. Other methods, such as asking if respondent worked or planned to work at a certain age (e.g., Stolzenberg & Waite, 1977; Waite & Stolzenberg, 1976), are limited in focus.

No reported study has focused on a women's ratio of employment interruption time (in years) for childrearing (per child) as an influencing factor in fertility expectation. Studies have tested for respondent's attitudes toward ideal employment/childrearing patterns for mothers (Booth & Duvall, 1981; Gerson, 1986; Scanzoni, 1975). The purpose of the study reported here was to assess the relationship between women's fertility expectation and the actual or intended ratio of time taken out of the labour force per number of children. Instead