

# **Norms on childbearing behaviour in Europe**

**Aart C. Liefbroer**

**Eva-Maria Merz**

# [ Acknowledgement ]

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- This presentation is prepared within the project 'Reproductive Decision-Making in a Macro-Micro Perspective (REPRO)' funded by the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Union.

# [ Central questions ]

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- How do the opinions of Europeans on the timing of childbearing and on combining children with other roles look like?
- How large are the differences across Europe in this respect?
- Can we explain these differences?

# [ What are norms? ]

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- Norms are statements:
  - Related to the necessity (*prescription*), possibility (*permission*), or impossibility (*proscription*) of undertaking certain behaviours
  - Sustained by sanctions
  - Shared by a certain group of actors (*reference group*)

# **Why pay attention to norms?**

- **Individual and couple decisions on childbearing can theoretically be influenced by societal norms on childbearing behaviour.**
- **Several mechanisms link societal norms and childbearing within the TPB framework**
  - **Societal norms influence the opinions of significant others, and thus the social norm of the individual or couple**
  - **Societal norms influence the perceived behavioural control**
  - **Societal norms can influence beliefs about the consequences of childbearing**

# Examples of childbearing norms

## ■ Timing norms

- Lower age deadline for childbearing (can someone be too young to have a child yet, and if so, before what age is someone considered to be too young?)
- Upper age deadline for childbearing (can someone be too old to have a(nother) child, and if so, after what age is someone considered to be too young?)

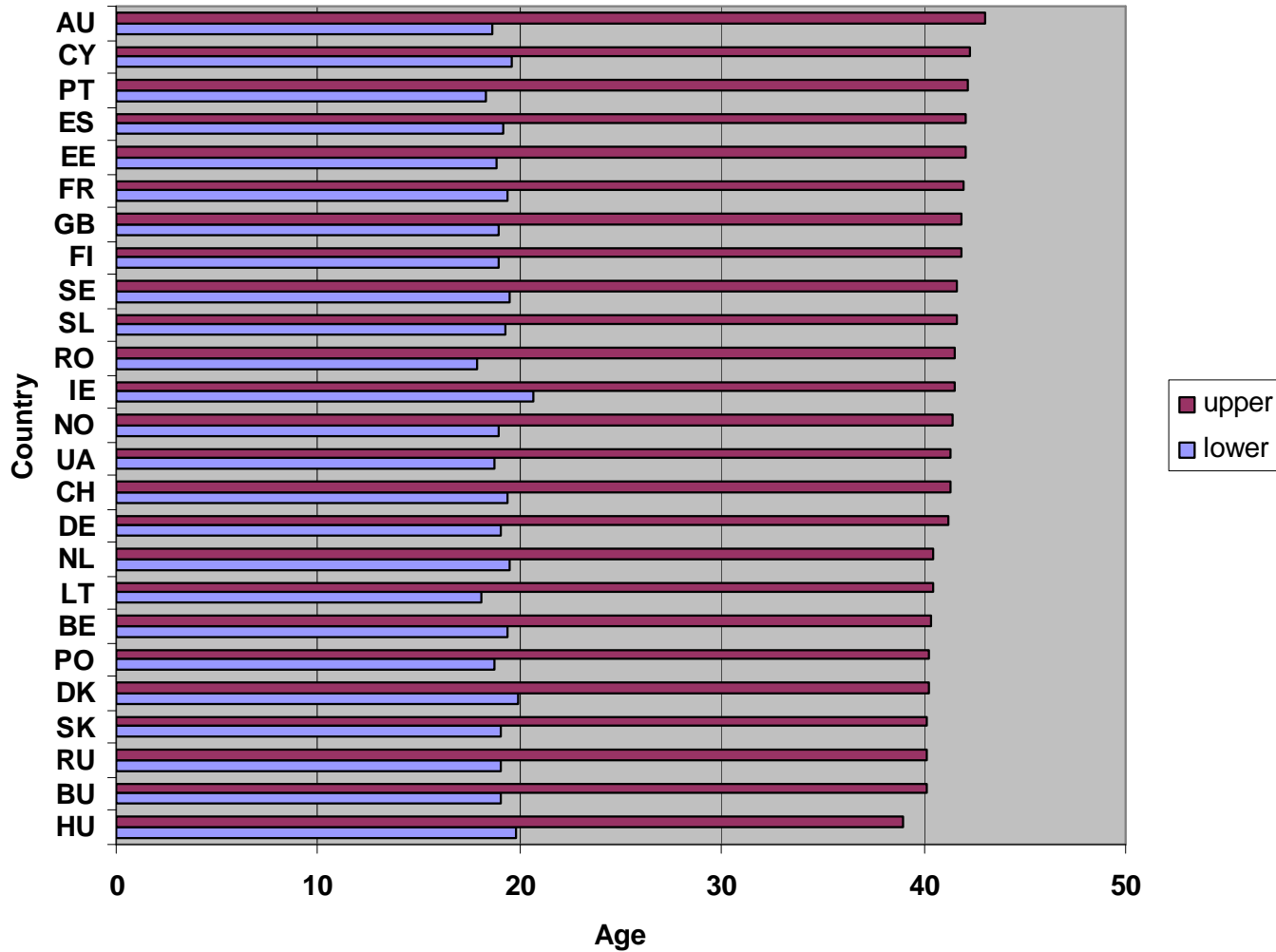
## ■ Quantum norms

- Norm on permissibility of childlessness (does one disapproval of someone deciding not to have children?)

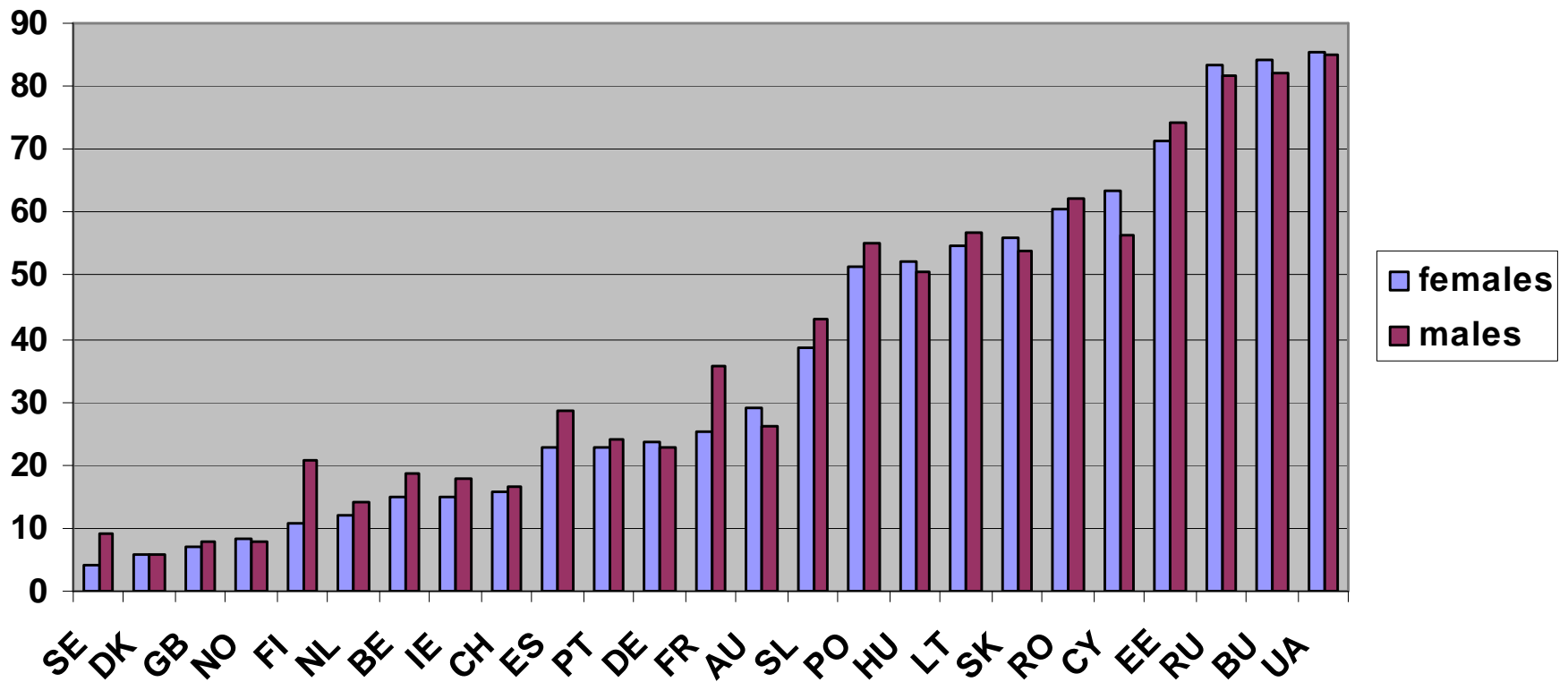
## ■ Sequencing or combination norms

- Norm on permissibility of having a child with a partner one is not married to
- Norm on permissibility of combining having young children and full-time employment

# Lower and upper age limit for childbearing for females

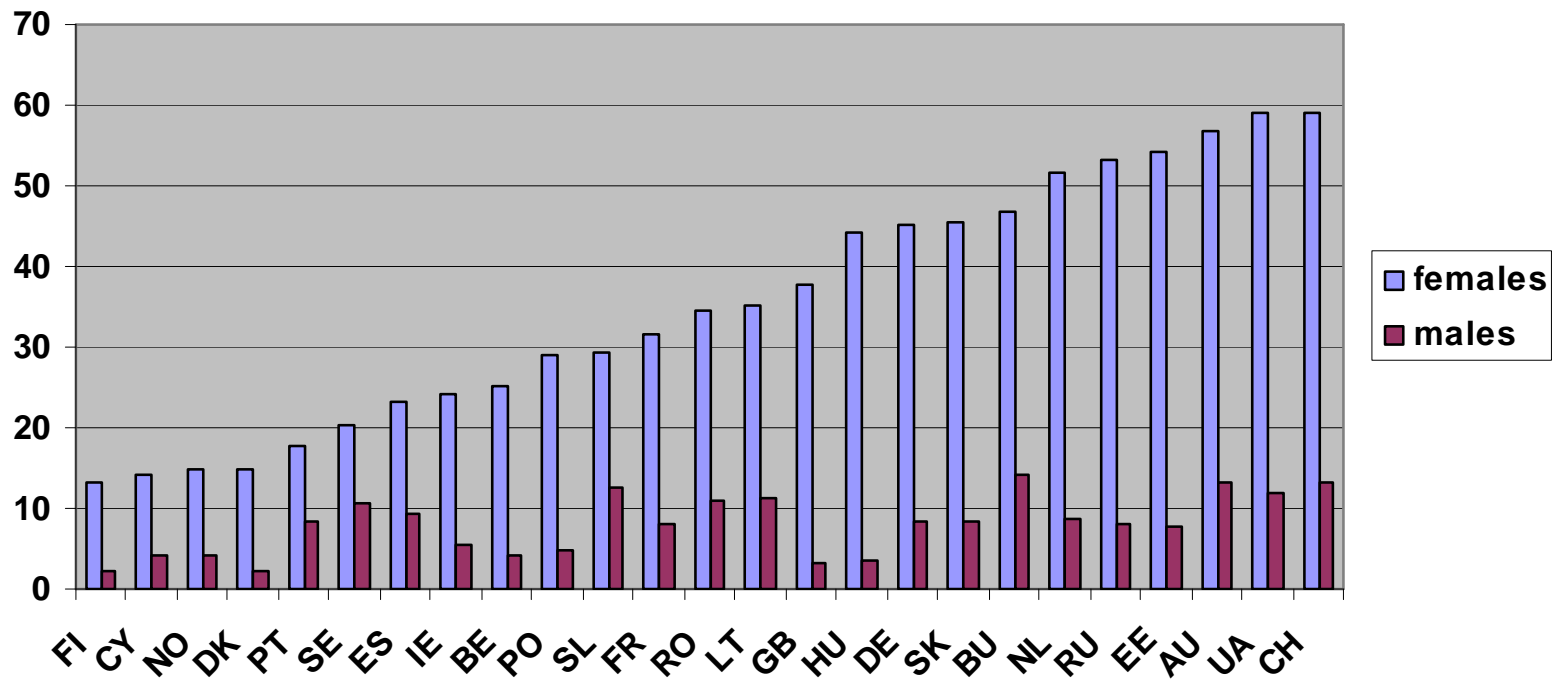


# Percentage disapproving of voluntary childlessness





# Percentage disapproving of full-time employment and caring for young children



# [ Looking for an explanation ]

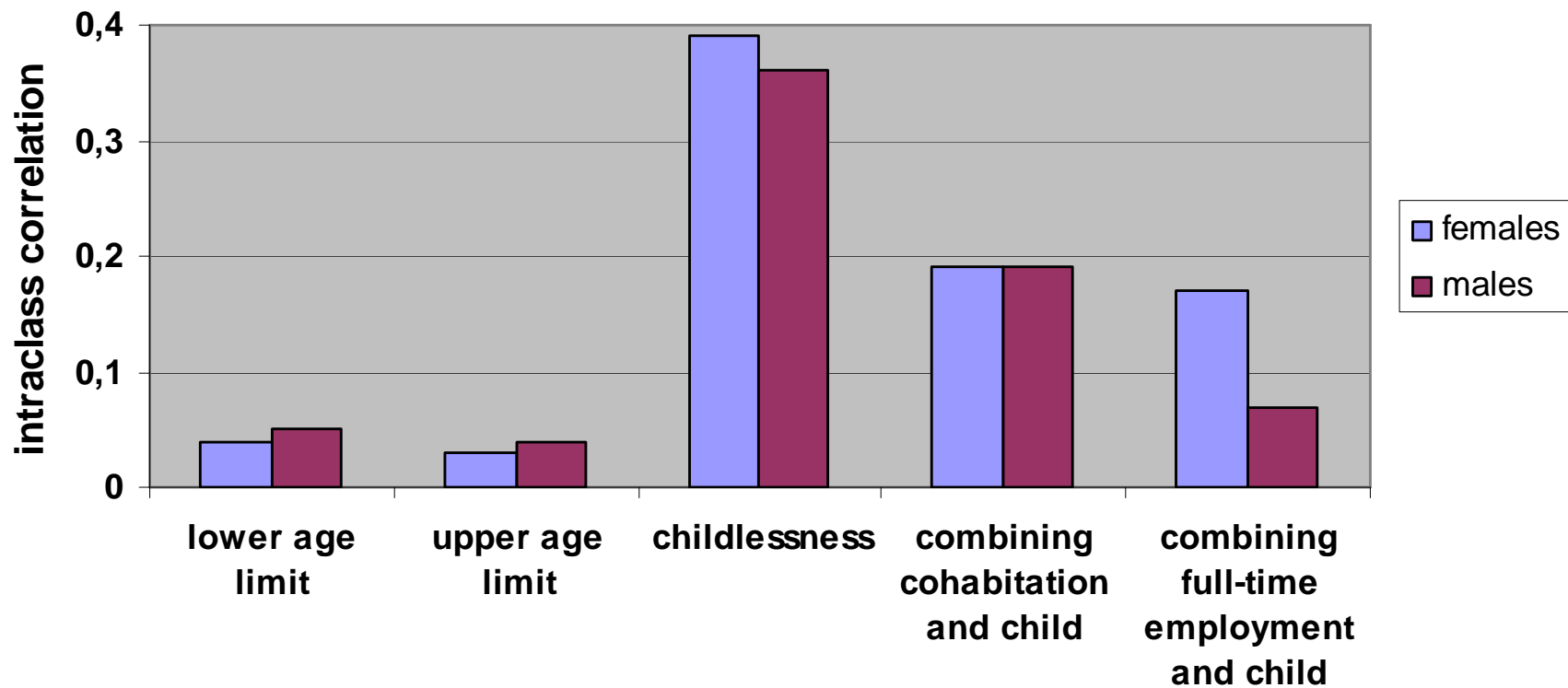
- A key concept used by European demographers to describe changes in demographic behaviour within society and differences across societies is 'The Second Demographic Transition' (SDT).
- The SDT implies a weakening of norms: individual demographic behaviour is no longer influenced by proscriptions made by others (family, Church, society at large), but based on individual (and maybe rational) considerations. Autonomy and self-reliance are key words.
- If so, norms related to childbearing should be weaker, the further advanced a country is in the SDT.

# [ Multi-level analysis ]

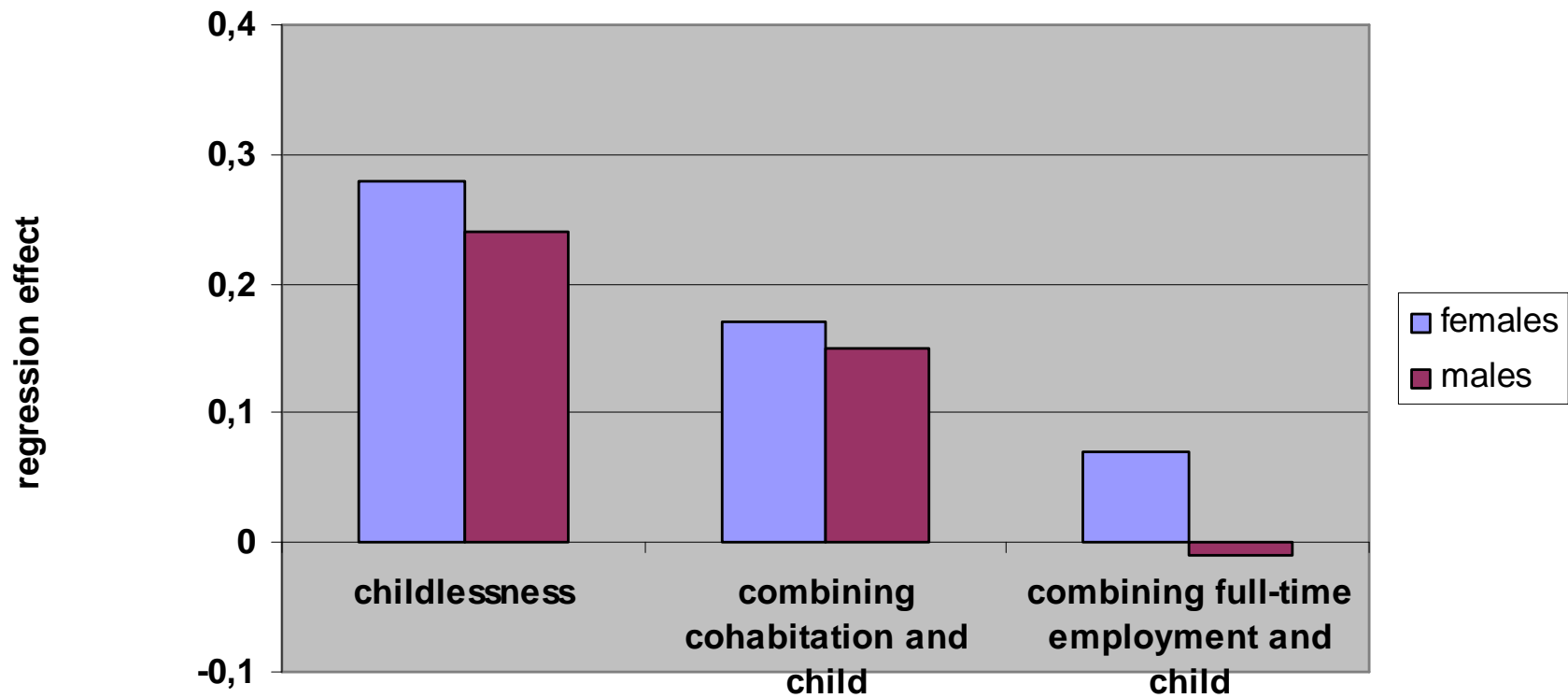
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- Trying to relate country-level variation in norms to the progression a country made in the SDT
- For this, the behaviour-SDT measure suggested by Tomas Sobotka is used
- Based on demographic indicators, each country gets a score between 0 and 10. The higher the score, the more advanced a country is in the SDT

# Country-level variation in childbearing norms



# Effect of macro-level SDT score on childbearing norms



# [ Conclusions ]

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- Relatively little variation in timing norms across Europe
- Relatively large variation in sequencing and combination norms
- Cross-national variation in norms on childlessness and on having kids while cohabiting strongly linked to the SDT, other norms not
- SDT does not 'automatically' weaken all normative constraints related to childbearing
- It is important to look for other macro-forces driving these norms as well (gender equality, family systems) as well