

Report on analysis of ESS data on cross-national differences in perceived norms concerning fertility-related behaviour¹²

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1 Introduction

During the last decades, large changes in childbearing behaviour have occurred across Europe. The number of children born to women has decreased, the entry into parenthood has been postponed, an increasing proportion of children are born outside marriage – and sometimes outside a steady partner relationship as well – and an increasing proportion of women combine motherhood and a full-time or part-time attachment to the labour market (Sobotka, 2004; Liefbroer & Goldscheider, 2007). At the same time, large differences in childbearing behaviour have persisted, both within countries and across countries within Europe.

A host of potential explanations for existing differences in childbearing behaviour across and within countries can be given. One of the explanations that have been suggested is that norms on childbearing behaviour may influence the actual behaviours of individuals. Differences within countries could result from differences in norms that are dominant in different subgroups within a society and differences across countries could result from different norms being dominant in different countries (Liefbroer & Billari, 2009). The potential importance of norms in guiding behaviour is also underscored in the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Recent research on the process of leaving home has shown that perceived expectations of important people like parents and friends can indeed influence subsequent behaviour (Billari & Liefbroer, 2007). Other explanations, though, suggest that the importance of norms has waned during the last decades (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). As a result, no strong norms on childbearing behaviour are expected to exist, or – if norms do still exist – their influence on guiding behaviour is thought to be limited at best.

Given these opposing views on the existence and importance of norms, our aim in this report is to examine the existence, content and potential cross-national variation in norms in more detail. Specifically, this report aims at answering the following research questions:

1. What kinds of norms exist in Europe with regard to childbearing issues?
2. How large is the variation in childbearing norms across Europe?
3. How can cross-national variation in childbearing norms be explained?

To answer these research questions, data will be used that have been collected in the 2006 wave of the European Social Survey (ESS 2006). The ESS 2006 includes a module on ‘The Timing of Life’ in which a number of questions on norms related to childbearing are

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incorporated. For example, there are questions on the ages before and after which people are considered to be too young or too old to have children, on approval of voluntary childlessness, and on the combination of full-time employment and caring for young children. The ESS 2006 has been conducted in 25 European countries. In each country a representative sample of approximately 1,500 respondents has been interviewed.

The structure of this report is as follows. In Section 2, we will discuss the concept of norms, and what we mean by childbearing norms. We will pay attention to the types of norms that can be distinguished and to the ways in which they might influence the fertility decision-making process. We will also briefly discuss available explanations for cross-national differences in childbearing norms. Finally, we will discuss how norms can be measured. In Section 3, the data used in this study and the methods applied to analyze these data will be introduced. Descriptive findings on variation in childbearing norms will be presented in Section 4, and a more thorough multivariate and multilevel analysis of that variation is presented in Section 5. Section 6 will focus more in depth on one of the most interesting childbearing-related norms – that on voluntary childlessness. In that section, multiple hypotheses about the macro-sociological factors that may create cross-national variation in the norm on voluntary childlessness will be tested, using the ESS data. Finally, in Section 7 we will draw conclusions and discuss potential policy-related implications of our findings.

2 Childbearing norms: theoretical and methodological issues

2.1 Theoretical background and definitions

Within sociology, *norms* are generally defined as statements about whether certain behaviours are necessary (prescription), allowed (permission), or not allowed (proscription) (Liefbroer & Billari, 2009). Such norms can either be general, or they can be situation-specific (Finch & Mason, 1991; Lesthaeghe & Moors, 2002). Norms are often thought to be shared within a society as a whole. However, this does not necessarily have to be so. At the least, they are usually shared by a certain group of actors, the so-called reference group (Micheli, 2004). Another aspect that is often thought to be necessary in order to define an expectation as being a norm is that they are backed up by sanctions (Durkheim, 1965). In other words, the transgression of norms leads to some form of sanction, ranging from punishment to stigmatization and social exclusion. An example of this view on norms is provided in the work of Settersten and Mayer (1997). They view norms as prescriptions or proscriptions in the sense of ‘should’ and ‘should not’, being supported by consensus. Norms are enforced by various mechanisms of social control, particularly sanctions; either positive ones to keep people on the ‘right’ track or negative ones to bring individuals ‘back in line’. Finally, they suggest that norms have an either prescriptive or proscriptive essence; they do not refer to ideal behaviour.

Previous work has shown that norms are important for demographic decision making across the life course (Liefbroer & Billari, 2009). Demographers have often underlined the importance of norms and changes in norms for demographic choices, especially fertility-related ones, but also for the transition of leaving the parental home (e.g., Billari & Liefbroer, 2007; Settersten, 2003). In many societies, more or less explicit ideas exist about normative demographic behaviour and about when and in what order events in the life course should occur or not occur and individuals feel guided by these “cultural timetables” (Settersten & Hagestad, 1996, p. 186). Norms thus fulfil an important psychological function in regulating the life course (Heckhausen, 1999) and life course transitions. As a result of the fact that norms fulfil important cultural and psychological functions, it often seems unnecessary to

attach sanctions to them. Even without the existence or application of sanctions, many people will still act in accordance of existing norms.

The concept of norms can be used both at the macro and at the micro level. At the micro or individual level, a norm can be thought to refer to the attitude of an individual about the appropriateness of a specific behaviour. This can be referred to as a 'personal norm'. At the macro or societal level, a norm refers to how society-at-large feels about a specific behaviour. This can be referred to as being a 'societal norm'. However, it is extremely rare that all members of society feel exactly the same about the appropriateness of a specific behaviour. The question, therefore, can be raised what proportion of the population have to agree on the existence of a norm in order for such a norm to exist? One answer to this question could be that a societal norm exists if at least half of the population of a society agrees on the existence of a norm. However, this point of view does not take into account that norms that are shared by a minority may still be important in shaping the behaviour of sizeable portions of the population, and may even influence the behaviour of people who do not share that specific norm.

2.1.1 Types of fertility-related norms

Different types of norms can be distinguished: timing norms, quantum norms, sequencing norms and combination norms. Timing norms are expectations about the appropriate age at or age range within which behaviours should occur. Lower and upper age limits for specific behaviour exist and are defined as cultural timetables (Settersten & Hagestad, 1996a, 1996b). With respect to childbearing behaviour timing norms refer to the age when men and women are considered to be too young to become parents or too old to have (more) children.

Quantum norms refer to the number of times that events should occur or not occur. It is possible to distinguish among an appropriate ideal number of times that an event should occur as well as lower and upper limits. Regarding fertility behaviour, quantum norms refer to the number of children individuals should or should not have. One special type of a quantum norm proscribes the occurrence of specific behaviour, for example voluntary childlessness. This norm refers to the appropriateness of having a 'quantum' of zero children.

Sequencing norms concern the order in which events in the life course, in the same or different life domains, should occur. Within the family domain, examples of sequencing norms are the order of union formation and marriage, or the order of marriage and leaving home. With respect to childbearing behaviour, an example of a sequencing norm is the order of parenthood and marriage. Similarly, combination norms prescribe or proscribe the combination of certain behaviours, for example, the appropriateness of combining parenthood and (full-time) labour.

2.1.2 The role of norms in reproductive decision-making

The theory of planned behaviour (TPB; Ajzen, 1991) is a widely used concept in fertility research, especially on contraceptive behaviour, but has proven to be suitable as well for studying reproductive decision making (Philipov, Thevenon, Klobas, Bernardi, & Liefbroer, 2009). According to the theory of planned behaviour, the intention of a particular act is the immediate determinant and single best predictor of a certain behaviour. Norms and attitudes (or external and internal motivation) influence behavioural intentions. Strong relationships between attitudes and behaviour in a wide variety of demographic transitions have been suggested (Barber, Axinn, & Thornton, 2002) and investigating childbearing behaviour and changing fertility rates across Europe requires a thorough investigation of the shaping of

norms, attitudes and (changes in) intentions. Figure 2.1 provides a schematic representation of the main elements of applying the TPB in the context of reproductive decision-making (based on the REPRO proposal).

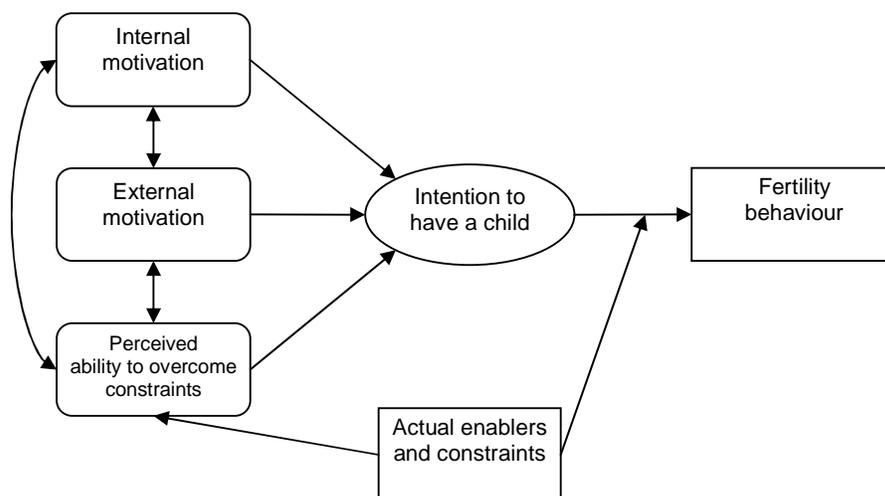


Figure 2.1 A model of fertility decision-making (inspired by Ajzen 1991) (Source: REPRO project proposal)

In Figure 2.1, several mechanisms link societal norms and fertility issues. First, the external motivation component is based on an individual’s perceptions of how important other think about appropriate fertility-related behaviour. Thus, external motivation reflects the opinions of the self and significant others that are dominant within the social networks to which individuals belong. Second, societal norms influences this external motivation, because societal norms will partly determine the norms that are operative within the social networks of individuals. However, societal norms may also influence the perceived behavioural control of individuals which can enhance or obstruct the decision making with respect to childbearing. For instance, if one feels that a certain behaviour – voluntary childlessness, for instance – is met with strong disapproval within society, this may reduce feelings of behavioural control. Finally, societal norms may also influence individual’s internal motivation. If one perceives strong disapproval of a specific behaviour – like having a child after the age of 40 –, this may affect one’s beliefs about the consequences of such specific behaviour, and result in a change in attitudes towards late childbearing.

2.1.3 Explaining cross-national differences in childbearing norms

As mentioned above, in most societies more or less explicit ideas exist about normative demographic behaviour and about when and in what order events in the life course should occur; individuals feel guided by “cultural timetables” (Settersten & Hagestad, 1996a, p. 186). However, processes of individualization, emancipation and secularization in Western Europe are reflected in considerable societal changes in norms, attitudes and demographic behaviour, emphasizing individualism, personal autonomy (Lesthaeghe & Van de Kaa, 1986; Merz, Özeke-Kocabas, Oort, & Schuengel, 2009; Mills, 2007; Van de Kaa, 1987) and promoting higher female labour participation, women’s economic independence and detachment from traditional family roles (Sobotka, 2004). For example, emancipation movements, individualization, and the so-called Second Demographic Transition (SDT) – stressing the

importance of individual autonomy in demographic decision-making – may have led some European societies to become more open and tolerant regarding attitudes towards demographic behaviour, whereas in other countries strong family norms, disapproval of childlessness, high rewards of parenthood and the male breadwinner model might still be dominant.

Studying and explaining childbearing norms across countries requires consideration of individual as well as societal factors, such as women's greater economic and legal independence and growing prosperity to account for differences among countries. It is likely that cultural influences on attitudes and behaviour have diminished in many Western European countries (Liefbroer, 2005; Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001), and the wish for autonomy and free decision making along with increased individualism (Van de Kaa, 1987) has paved the way for acceptance of all different kinds of demographic behaviour and life course transitions. In other countries, however, more traditionalistic views of demographic behaviour, along with strong religious beliefs may still continue to exert an influence on the shaping of norms towards fertility-related behaviours (Jansen & Kalmijn, 2002). Religious institutions often encourage family formation and reproduction and benefit families with children in terms of childcare access, financial support and family counselling (Pearce, 2002). Religion is strongly tied to family values and commitments, no matter how liberal or conservative the religious group is (Myers, 2004).

Until now, norms on fertility behaviour and how they are associated with individual, structural and cultural determinants have received scant theoretical and empirical attention (Koropeckyj-Cox & Pendell, 2007a), especially in a comparative perspective (Liefbroer & Fokkema, 2008). Traditional demographic work, based on various theoretical frameworks, including economic fertility theories (Becker, 1981), the value of children theory (Friedman, Hechter, & Kanazawa, 1994) or the theory of the Second Demographic Transition (SDT; Van de Kaa, 1987) has highlighted different aspects that are important for childbearing behaviour. Drawing from this research it seems useful and promising to examine cross-national differences in norms about childbearing behaviour and to relate these to important macro-level explanations.

2.2 *Methodological considerations*

Measuring norms with respect to childbearing behaviour is possible in various ways. With respect to quantum and sequencing or combination norms, individual norms can be measured by asking how much people approve or disapprove of certain behaviours. With regard to timing norms one could ask if there is a certain age when men and women are too old or too young to perform certain behaviours. Additionally to these individual norms, there is the possibility to measure societal norms by asking individuals how they think the majority of people would react to certain behaviours or if they think that a majority endorses lower and upper ages for demographic transitions.

After having distinguished various types of norms, generally and with respect to childbearing behaviour, the question arises which criteria need to be fulfilled to make a norm a norm. For example, one can speak about lower or higher age deadlines, but can one also speak about the strength of a timing norm? And if so, how can that strength be measured? One possibility would be to consider the variation among the mean of a lower and upper age deadline; the smaller this variation, the stronger the norm. Another possibility is considering the difference between the biological and social age deadline. The higher the lower age deadline and the lower the upper age deadline, the stronger the norm. In Sections 3 and 4, we will return to these issues.

3 Data and method

3.1 *The European Social Survey*

The current report uses data from the European Social Survey (ESS) to shed light on types of norms and variation in norms across Europe. The ESS is an academically-driven social survey designed to chart and explain the interaction between Europe's changing institutions and the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of its diverse populations. Now in its fourth round, the survey covers over 30 nations. It has been funded through the European Commission's Framework Programmes, the European Science Foundation and national funding bodies in each country.

In this report data from the third ESS round (2006) are used. In this round, a special module measuring norms about demographically relevant behaviour, was included. The module aims at furthering our understanding of the views of European citizens on the organisation of the life course and of their strategies to influence and plan their own lives. Three main research topic concerning the organisation of the life course are studied in the set of proposed questions: 1) To what extent do citizens perceive the life course as a structured sequence of life stages, and which events mark the transition from one stage to the other? 2) Do social norms concerning the life course exist, and if so, to what extent are these norms backed by sanctions? 3) What are the expectations and capacities of citizens concerning life course planning? In this report, we will mainly draw on information gathered to answer the second of these three questions.

Data for the third round were collected during 2005 and 2006 in the following countries: Austria (AT), Belgium (BE), Bulgaria (BG), Switzerland (CH), Cyprus (CY), Germany (DE), Denmark (DK), Estonia (EE), Spain (ES), Finland (FI), France (FR), Great Britain (GB), Hungary (HU), Ireland (IE), Latvia (LV), the Netherlands (NL), Norway (NO), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Romania (RO), Russia (RU), Sweden (SE), Slovenia (SI), Slovakia (SK), and Ukraine (UA). The ESS intends to be representative of the residential population of each participating nation aged 15 years and older, regardless of nationality, citizenship or legal status. Anyone who had been living in the country for at least one year and who had no immediate concrete plans to return to country of origin could be selected as respondent. Strict guidelines were used to obtain a dataset of high methodological and theoretical value. An effective sample size of at least 1,500 respondents in each round (800 for countries with less than 2 million inhabitants) was intended. Additionally, the ESS aimed at a minimum response rate of 70 per cent. This was not achieved in all countries and the response rates varied between 46.0 per cent and 73.2 per cent with an average of 63.4 per cent. The sample sizes varied between 995 (Cyprus) and 2,916 (Germany). This procedure resulted in a total of 47,099 respondents from 25 countries. The mean age of the respondents was 46.3 years ($SD = 18.4$) and 53.8 per cent was female.

3.2 *Measuring childbearing norms in the ESS*

With respect to childbearing, a range of questions on norms were posed in ESS2006. First, norms about lower and upper age deadlines have been asked. The specific questions posed were:

- *Before what age would you say a woman/man is generally too young to become a mother/father?*
- *After what age would you say a woman/man is generally too old to consider having any more children?*

People could reply that they thought that people were never too young or too old to have children, or they could provide a specific age. Half of the respondents got the female version of these questions, and the other half had to answer the male version of these questions.

Second, combination and sequencing norms have been measured by asking how much individuals approved or disapproved of two types of behaviour. The specific questions posed were:

- *How much do you approve or disapprove if a woman/man has a child with a partner she/he lives with but is not married to?*
- *How much do you approve or disapprove if a woman/man has a full-time job while she/he has children under 3?*

Respondents could answer these questions on a five-point scale ranging from 'strongly disapprove' to 'strongly approve'. Again, a random half of the respondents were presented with the male version of these questions, whereas the other half had to answer the female version.

Finally, quantum norms were measured by asking if people approved or disapproved of voluntary childlessness. The specific question posed was:

- *How much do you approve or disapprove if a woman/man chooses never to have children?*

Again, respondents had to answer on a five-point scale ranging from 'strongly disapprove' to 'strongly approve', and respondents were randomly assigned to the male or female version of this question.

3.3 Methodological approach

Descriptive analyses of the norms presented in Section 3.2 were performed for the whole sample, broken down by country. The results of these analyses are presented in Section 4.

Next, in Sections 5 and 6, multilevel regression analyses with random intercepts were used to investigate the influence of individual and country characteristics on childbearing related norms. Depending on the type of question posed, interactions between individual and country characteristics (within-level and cross-level interactions) on individual attitudes about childbearing norms were also included in the analysis. By using multilevel modelling with a two-level approach, data were analyzed with regression-like hierarchical models in which units at the first level of analysis (i.e. individual respondents) were treated as nested within units at the next (second) level of analysis (i.e. countries). In other words, the model correctly described that respondents are nested within countries. The aim of multilevel analyses is to estimate variance at the two levels of effects (i.e. individuals and countries). The estimation of variance at level 1 is an indicator of how much individuals differ in their norms on childbearing behaviour. At level 2, variance estimation indicates variation in norms on childbearing behaviour among countries. The ratio of level 2 variance to total variance is called the intra-class correlation, and in the current study represents the extent to which residents from the *same* country are similar in their norms about childlessness (for more details on the multilevel approach see also Section 5.1). Analyses were conducted by using the multi-level regression procedure in Stata 10, with the maximum likelihood method to estimate the variance components.

4 Variation in childbearing norms across Europe: descriptive findings

4.1 Descriptive findings on timing norms

Childbearing timing norms were measured by asking before which age men and women are too young to have children and after which age they are too old to have any more children. First of all, it is interesting to know whether any people did not perceive a lower or upper age deadline for having children. A bare one per cent of all respondents state there is no lower age deadline for childbearing (1.0 per cent do not perceive a lower deadline for women, and 1.5 per cent does not do so for men). In all countries, these percentages are very low. Therefore, it can be concluded that – across Europe – almost everyone feels that people can be too young to have children yet. The proportion of Europeans that feel that there is no upper age deadline for childbearing is higher. Four per cent of respondents feel that there is no upper age deadline for women, and 8.8 per cent feel that there is no such age deadline for men. Latvia was a clear outlier in this respect, with 19.3 per cent stating that there was no upper age deadline for women and 27.5 per cent stating that there was no such deadline for men. In all other countries, the percentages of respondents who did not perceive an upper age deadline were much lower, with Belgium having the smallest percentages (0.8 per cent for women and 2.6 per cent for men).

Table 4.1 Lower and upper age limits for first/last child

Country	Lower age limit		Upper age limit		Social reproductive period	
	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males
HU	19.8	22.0	39.0	43.9	19.2	22.4
DK	19.9	21.1	40.3	44.9	20.4	23.9
IE	20.7	22.0	41.5	44.4	20.9	23.2
BE	19.4	20.6	40.4	44.8	21.0	24.3
BG	19.1	21.2	40.1	42.2	21.0	21.5
NL	19.5	20.8	40.5	44.9	21.0	24.3
RU	19.1	20.8	40.1	44.0	21.0	23.7
SK	19.1	20.6	40.1	44.6	21.1	24.3
PL	18.7	20.2	40.3	44.9	21.6	24.9
CH	19.4	21.1	41.3	46.4	21.8	25.4
DE	19.1	20.7	41.2	46.1	22.1	25.6
SE	19.5	20.9	41.7	46.9	22.3	26.0
SI	19.3	21.2	41.6	45.9	22.3	25.0
FR	19.4	21.1	42.0	47.4	22.5	26.4
NO	18.9	20.0	41.4	46.6	22.5	26.7
CY	19.6	21.1	42.3	46.9	22.6	25.8
UA	18.7	20.6	41.3	44.0	22.7	23.7
ES	19.2	20.0	42.1	44.5	22.9	24.5
FI	19.0	20.3	41.9	48.3	22.9	28.1
GB	19.0	20.2	41.9	46.3	22.9	26.2
LV	18.1	18.7	40.5	42.8	22.9	24.5
EE	18.8	20.4	42.1	47.6	23.4	27.5
RO	17.9	19.6	41.5	44.9	23.6	25.5
PT	18.3	19.6	42.2	45.6	23.8	26.1
AU	18.6	20.0	43.0	48.7	24.4	29.5

The next issue is, what kind of age deadlines respondents across Europe perceive. An overview on the average lower and upper age limits broken down by country can be found in Table 4.1. As we did not want to drop respondents who did not perceive an age deadline from this analysis, we gave them a deadline that more or less coincides with the biological age deadline. The lower age deadline given to these respondents was 15 years for both men and women, the upper age deadline for women was set at 50 years and that for men at 60 years.

The results for the lower age deadline in the first two columns of Table 4.1 show that relatively little variation exists across Europe in the mean lower age deadline. The mean lower age deadline for childbearing is around 19 years of age for women and between 20 and 21 years of age for men. The lowest mean age deadlines are found in Latvia (18.1 years for women and 18.7 years for men), whereas the highest age deadlines are found in Ireland (20.7 years for women and 22.0 years for men). Given that the biological age deadline is about 15 years of age, these findings imply that people feel that young people are socially ready for parenthood only four or five years after they have become biologically ready for it.

The third and fourth column of Table 4.1 show the mean upper age deadline for having children in different European countries. In most countries, the mean age after which women are considered to be too old to have additional children is between 40 and 42. Austria and Hungary – two neighbouring countries – have the most extreme mean values. In Austria, the mean age after which a woman is considered to be too old to have any children is 39, whereas it is 43 in Hungary. Not surprisingly, the upper age deadline for men to have children is substantially higher, varying from a low of 43.9 in Austria to 48.7 in Hungary. Just as in the case of the lower age deadline, we see a quite large difference between the social age deadline and the biological age deadline. Quite long before it becomes biological impossible to become a parent, men and women are already socially expected to defer from parenthood.

Roughly estimated, a woman's biological reproductive life span cover a period of about 35 years, from age 15 until age 50. Men's biological reproductive life span is less easy to determine, but if we would fix their upper age limit at age 60, it would span a period of even 45 years. By calculating the difference between the mean lower and upper age limit of childbearing in the respective countries, one could calculate what we would like to term the 'social reproductive life span', that is the period within which it is socially deemed acceptable to have children. The length of this social reproductive life span is presented in the last two columns of Table 4.1³. The mean length of the social reproductive life span for women is around 22 years, with a low of 19.2 years for Hungary and a high of 24.4 years for Austria. For men, the mean length of their social reproductive period is around 26 years, with a low of 22.4 in Hungary and a high of 29.5 in Austria. Overall, these results show that the social reproductive life span is much shorter than the biological reproductive life span. Thus social norms strongly restrict the life span within which men and women are expected to have children. With a few exceptions – like Austria and Hungary – variation in the ideas about the length of this social reproductive life span seems to be limited across Europe.

³ The mean length of the social reproductive life span in Table 4.1 does not always exactly match the difference between the mean lower and upper age limit, because the number of respondents on which the calculation of the lower and upper age limit is based differs somewhat within a country.

4.2 Descriptive findings on norms towards voluntary childlessness

Norms about childlessness were measured with the following question. *How much do you approve or disapprove if a woman/man chooses never to have children?* As the reference to the ‘choice’ of being childless makes clear, this norm is not about childlessness in general, but about the voluntary choice to remain childless. As mentioned in Section 3, respondents could answer this question on a five-point scale. To estimate the norm towards voluntary childlessness, we calculated the mean level of disapproval – respondents answering either ‘disapprove’ or ‘strongly disapprove’ – of choosing to remain childless. An overview of disapproval rates for the ESS countries is given in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Disapproval rates of voluntary childlessness

Country	% disapproval of voluntary childlessness	
	Female	Male
UA	85.6	85.2
BG	84.4	82.0
RU	83.3	81.9
EE	71.2	74.4
CY	63.3	56.2
RO	60.7	62.2
SK	55.9	54.1
LV	54.7	56.9
HU	52.1	50.6
PL	51.3	55.0
SI	38.4	43.2
AU	29.1	26.3
FR	25.1	35.8
DE	23.7	22.9
PT	23.0	24.2
ES	22.7	28.6
CH	15.6	16.6
IE	15.1	18.0
BE	14.9	18.8
NL	11.9	14.2
FI	10.9	20.7
NO	8.4	7.7
GB	7.0	7.9
DK	6.0	6.0
SE	4.0	9.2

This table shows that large variation exists between countries in disapproval rates with respect to voluntary childlessness. Disapproval rates of female voluntary childlessness vary from 86 per cent in Ukraine to 4 per cent in Sweden. Disapproval rates for voluntary childlessness for men vary between 6 per cent in Denmark to 85 per cent in the Ukraine. In ten European countries, a majority of the population disapproves of voluntary childlessness. Almost all these countries are located in the Eastern part of the continent. At the same time, another nine countries – mostly Western European ones – have less than 20 per cent of the population disapproving of voluntary childlessness of either men or women. A final interesting observation can be made with regard to a gender bias in childlessness norms. In many

countries, among which Estonia, Romania, Latvia, France, Portugal, Spain, Netherlands, Finland and Sweden, the disapproval of voluntary childless men was stronger than the disapproval of female voluntary childlessness.

4.3 Descriptive findings on sequencing/combination norms

Various sequencing norms can exist with respect to childbearing behaviour. Within the ESS norms are measured with regard to having children while one is cohabiting unmarried and with regard to combining full-time employment and caring for young children. Disapproval rates of these norms for the different countries can be found in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Disapproval rates of combination/sequencing norms

	% disapproval of having children while cohabiting unmarried		% disapproval of working full-time while having children under 3	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
UA	53.5	56.0	58.9	11.9
RO	48.1	45.3	34.5	11.1
CY	46.5	41.7	14.3	4.3
SK	41.2	40.4	45.5	8.3
RU	37.0	42.9	53.3	8.1
BG	34.9	37.7	46.9	14.1
PL	31.8	29.8	28.9	4.9
IE	26.4	23.1	24.3	5.4
EE	24.6	32.3	54.1	7.8
LV	21.2	29.4	35.1	11.2
GB	20.7	20.1	37.8	3.2
ES	18.6	17.9	23.1	9.2
CH	18.4	21.3	59.0	13.1
DE	15.9	16.4	45.2	8.5
AU	15.7	16.5	56.7	13.3
SI	15.1	18.5	29.5	12.7
NL	15.0	13.8	51.5	8.8
PT	13.4	11.4	17.7	8.4
BE	13.2	13.3	25.3	4.3
HU	12.4	16.1	44.3	3.5
FI	11.2	13.2	13.2	2.3
FR	10.9	15.9	31.5	8.0
DK	8.9	8.5	15.0	2.1
NO	6.8	13.8	14.9	4.3
SE	5.7	6.3	20.4	10.7

In the left-hand side of Table 4.3, information on the percentage of respondents that disapproves of having children while cohabiting unmarried is presented. Only in the Ukraine more than 50 per cent of respondents disapprove of this behaviour. In Scandinavian countries, only a small minority disapprove of having children while living in a consensual union. Overall, quite some variation in this norm exists.

In the right hand side of Table 4.3, the percentage of respondents who disapprove of a mother or a father combining a full-time job and having a child under the age of 3 are presented. Again, considerable variation exists among countries with regard to combining

motherhood and full-time employment. But, the pattern of disapproval is quite different than that for other norms. A majority of respondents in Ukraine, Estonia and Bulgaria disapprove of being full-time employed and having a child below the age of 3, but the same is also true in Switzerland, Austria and the Netherlands, countries that have much less strict norms with regard to other aspects of childbearing behaviour. In addition, disapproval of combining motherhood and a full-time job is even surprisingly high in Scandinavian countries, with between 13 and 21 per cent of respondent disapproving of this combination. Another striking observation that can be made on the basis of Table 4.3 is that norms for men and women differ very strongly. This is illustrated in Figure 4.2. female behaviour within countries. For example, in The Netherlands more than half of the respondents disapproves of full-time female labour force participation while having little children whereas only nine per cent disapproves of males combining these two roles. In many other countries, such as Austria, Ukraine, Switzerland, Hungary, and others, comparable double standards exist with respect to male and female behaviour.

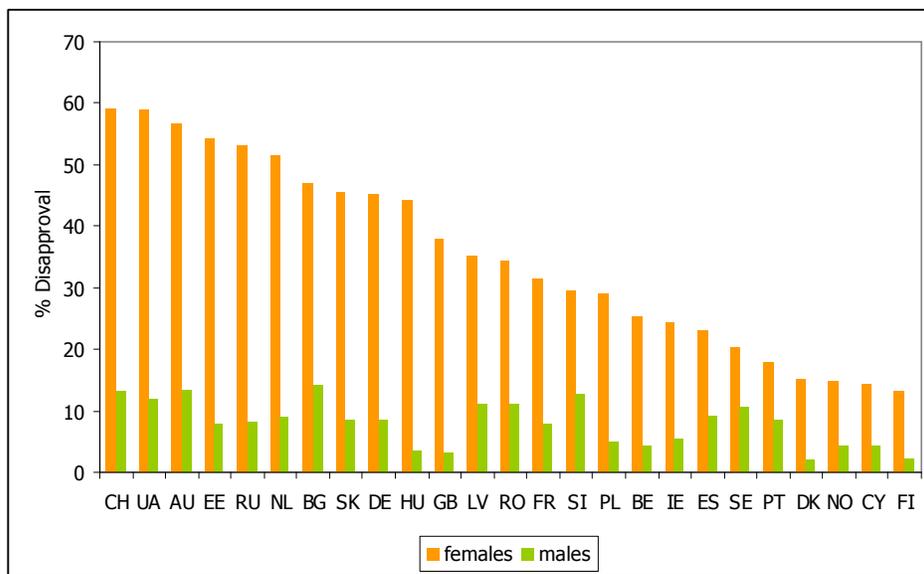


Figure 4.2 Disapproval of male and female childlessness across countries

5 Variation in childbearing norms across Europe: A case of the SDT?

5.1 Introduction

The descriptive findings presented in the previous section show that substantive variation in childbearing norms exists across Europe. What these descriptive findings do not reveal though, is how large the variation in these norms between countries is, compared to the variation in these norms within countries. If relatively little variation exists between countries, a focus on country differences in norms does not make much sense, as there is little variation to be explained in the first place. If, on the other hand, relatively much country-level variation in norms exists, explaining this variation becomes an important task. Therefore, a first question that will be answered in this Section of the report is: *How much of the variation in childbearing norms that exists in Europe is explained at the national level?*

Multilevel modelling offers a useful tool to answer this research question. In what can be considered one of its most basic applications – the so-called variance partitioning model (Goldstein, Browne, & Rasbach, 2002) – the total variance that exists with a multi-country dataset like the ESS is split into a part of the variation that exists within each of the countries and a part of the variation that exists between countries. The intra-class correlation – ρ – gives the proportion of the total variation in each norm that can be accounted for by the national-level. If this proportion is low, relatively little cross-national differences in norms exist; if it is high, relatively much cross-national differences in norms exist.

If substantial variation in norms between countries is observed, the next question is how this variation can be explained. As briefly discussed in Section 2, a large variety of explanations for such variation have been suggested. These explanations include cultural, economic, and institutional factors, or a mix of these types. In this Section, we will explore the relationship between childbearing norms and one crucial dimension of temporal and spatial demographic differences – the extent to which demographic behaviour in a country resembles what can be considered as the advanced stages of the Second Demographic Transition. So, the second research question to be answered in this Section is: *To what extent is cross-national variation in childbearing norms related to differential advancement of countries in terms of the Second Demographic Transition?*

To answer this second research question, we will take advantage of a recent SDT-index developed by Sobotka (2008). This index uses basic demographic indices – like the mean age of mother at first birth (MAFB) and the total divorce rate (TDR) – to examine to what extent the demographic behaviour within a country resembles what Lesthaeghe and Van de Kaa (e.g., Van de Kaa, 2001) considered to be the advanced stages of the SDT process. Based on the performance of each country on the respective indices, for each country a SDT-score that can run from 1 to 10 is calculated. The higher the score, the further advanced a country is in the SDT process – see Section 5.2 for further details. This variable is available for 23 of the 25 countries in the ESS 2006 dataset. We will include this SDT-score as a country-level variable in our multilevel models of childbearing norms.

Two multilevel models are estimated to examine the relationship between childbearing norms and the Second Demographic Transition. In a first model, the country-level SDT-index only is included. This model provides an estimate of the extent to which cross-national differences in norms are related to the differential advancement of the SDT across Europe. In a second model, a number of individual-level variables are added to the model. These variables are supposed to tap individual-level openness to the SDT. To be more specific, on the basis of previous theorizing and research, we expect that people living in urban areas, who are not strongly religiously committed, who are highly educated, and who value autonomy are more open to SDT-like attitudes and behaviour than people with the opposite set of characteristics. Thus, one explanation for the country-level SDT-effect could be that in

countries that 'lead' in the SDT-process there are more persons with individual characteristics that favour SDT-like attitudes and behaviour than in countries that 'lag' behind in the SDT-process. If such a 'composition effect' would be present, one would expect that the effect of the country-level SDT-index would become much smaller – or even statistically insignificant – after controlling for these individual characteristics. If – on the other hand – the effect of the SDT-index would remain important, this would suggest that people with the same kind of individual characteristics hold different norms depending on the kind of country they live in, and one would need to look for a genuinely country-level explanation for the observed differences. Before presenting the results of the estimated multilevel models, the variables used in these models will be briefly introduced.

5.2 *Definition of variables*

SDT-index. The country-level index for a country's advancement in the Second Demographic Transition has been developed by Sobotka (2008, pp. 85-88). He distinguishes a demographic and an attitudinal and value dimension of the SDT. Here we use the demographic index, as it is available for more countries than the attitudinal and value index. In addition, the latter index is too closely related to the norms that are studied here. The demographic SDT-index is constructed by combining a country's performance on seven different indices, viz. (1) mean age of mother at birth of first child, (2) the sum of age-specific fertility rates below age 20, (3) the percentage of non-marital births, (4) the total first marriage rate, (5) the mean age at first marriage, (6) the total divorce rate, and (7) the prevalence of cohabitation. Each country's SDT score could vary between 0 – indicating hardly any advancement in the SDT-process – and 10 – indicating maximum advancement in the SDT-process. Of the 23 countries for which this index is available, Sweden has the highest score (8.8) and Romania has the lowest score (1.7). No information is available for Belgium and Cyprus.

Level of urbanisation. People who live in urban areas often hold more liberal attitudes towards a range of issues than people who live in rural areas. This difference is often linked to the fact that a cosmopolitan culture is dominant in large cities, either as a result of selection – people who hold liberal values move to urban areas – or of exposure to other types of cultures that are more likely in urban settings (Fischer, 1995). In the ESS 2006, respondents were asked in what type of locality they were living. Answer categories included: farm or home in the country side (1), country village (2), town or small city (3), suburbs or outskirts of small city (4), and big city (5). This variable was treated as an interval-level variable with scores ranging from 1 to 5.

Level of religiosity. Secularization is often viewed as one of the determining processes of the SDT (Lesthaeghe & Surkyn, 1988). Thus, people who feel a strong religious commitment are expected to hold less liberal views and to be less approving of innovative demographic behaviour than people who are not religiously involved. In the ESS, three items tap religious involvement: a self-evaluation of level of religiousness (measured with the question "How religious are you?"), frequency of church attendance and frequency of prayer. A factor analysis showed that these three items clearly loaded on one strong underlying factor. Therefore, a factor score was constructed. The higher the factor score, the more religiously involved respondents were.

Educational attainment. Usually a strong positive correlation is observed between level of educational attainment and approval of liberal family attitudes and behaviours (Thornton, Alwin, & Camburn, 1983). The higher educated are expected to be more exposed to ideas and behaviours that differ from the mainstream, and to be better able to assess the advantages and disadvantages of these different types of behaviour, leading to a less strong adherence to traditional views on family life. In the ESS, the ISCED classification of

educations was used to scale respondents on a scale running from less than primary education (1) to the second stage of tertiary education (7).

Importance of autonomy. One of the most important ingredients of the SDT is the risen importance people attach to being autonomous (Lesthaeghe & Surkyn, 2008). In the ESS, Schwartz' Human Values Scale (2007) includes an item that directly taps the importance people attach to autonomy. Respondents have to evaluate to what extent the statement "it is important to make my own decisions and be free" pertains to themselves. Answer categories range from "not like me at all" (1) to "very much like me" (6).

Additional control variables. In addition to the substantive individual-level variables discussed above, age and gender are included in the multilevel analyses. Age in years is included, centred around the mean, as well as age squared divided by 100. The latter variable is included to test whether age effects are linear or curvilinear. Finally, a dummy variable 'male' is included in the analysis to examine whether men and women differ in their approval of different aspects of childbearing behaviour.

5.3 Results

In what follows we present several multi-level models regressing the various childbearing norms on individual and country variables. Per dependent variable two models were calculated; one for the norms concerning this certain behaviour performed by women, the other for the norms about this behaviour when performed by men.

Lower age deadline for childbearing. The first childbearing norm to be discussed is the age before which one feels that one should not have children. In Table 5.1 we show the estimation results of our multi-level models. The left-hand side of the Table presents results for the lower age deadline for women, and the right-hand side of the Table presents results for the lower age deadline for men.

Model A presents the results of a variance-partitioning model. It shows that both for women ($\rho = 0.04$) and for men ($\rho = 0.05$) only a very small proportion of the variance is explained at the national-level. This implies that individual-level differences are much more important than country-level differences. Model B shows that the limited country-level differences in lower age deadlines are unrelated to the advancement of countries in the SDT-process, although the estimate for the lower age deadline for women almost reaches statistical significance ($p = .051$). It suggests that the lower age deadline for childbearing for women is higher in countries that are far advanced in the SDT than in countries that lag behind in that regard. Model C includes a number of potentially important individual-level variables. The higher educated and those living in urban areas perceive higher lower age deadlines for childbearing for both men and women than people with a low level of education or living in rural areas. In addition, people who strongly value autonomy perceive a higher lower age deadline for men than do people who do not value autonomy very strongly.

Model C also reveals gender differences in that men perceive a later lower age deadline for childbearing for women than women themselves do, whereas exactly the opposite is true for the lower age deadline of childbearing for men; in that case, women perceive a later deadline than men do. Finally, the age pattern of these lower age deadline depends on which gender one considers. The age deadline for women does not differ very much between age 20 and 65, but is clearly lower for people above the age of 65 (results not shown), whereas the age deadline for men increases with age, and thus is higher among older adults than among young adults. This is remarkable given that the actual childbearing age is much higher among younger than among older cohorts.

Table 5.1 Multilevel regression model predicting lower age deadlines for childbearing for women and men

	Women						Men					
	Model A		Model B		Model C		Model A		Model B		Model C	
	Estimate	SE										
<i>Fixed parameters</i>												
Constant	19.10***	0.12	18.41***	0.37	17.78***	0.39	20.57***	0.16	20.18***	0.51	19.04***	0.52
SDT			0.12	0.06	0.12	0.06			0.07	0.09	0.06	0.08
Urbanisation					0.04*	0.02					0.06*	0.02
Religiosity					0.04	0.02					0.01	0.03
Education					0.13***	0.02					0.20***	0.02
Autonomy					0.02	0.02					0.11***	0.02
Age					-0.00	0.00					0.01	0.00
Age squared					-0.01*	0.01					-0.01	0.01
Male					0.14***	0.04					-0.27***	0.05
<i>Random part</i>												
$\sigma(u)$	0.57***	0.09	0.53***	0.08	0.52***	0.08	0.74***	0.11	0.73***	0.11	0.71***	0.11
$\sigma(e)$	2.84***	0.01	2.84***	0.01	2.83***	0.01	3.38***	0.02	3.38***	0.02	3.36***	0.02
<i>Derived part</i>												
ρ	0.04		0.03		0.03		0.05		0.04		0.04	
<i>N</i>	19,751		19,751		19,751		19,201		19,201		19,201	

Note. Gender is dummy coded such that 1 = male. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Upper age deadline for childbearing. In Table 5.2, the estimation results of multi-level models of the upper age deadline for childbearing are presented. Again, the left-hand side of the Table presents results for women, and the right-hand side presents results for men.

From Models A in Table 5.2 it becomes clear that there is little cross-national variation in the age after which women and men should not have any children anymore. Just 3 per cent of the variation in the upper age deadline for women and 4 per cent of the variation of the upper age deadline for men occurs at the national level. Thus, variation in this norm within countries is much more important than variation within countries.

The upper age deadline for childbearing among women does not vary by the SDT-score of a country – see Model B for women. For men, though, the SDT-score of a country does make a difference – see Model B for men. The further advanced a country is in the SDT process, the higher the upper age deadline for childbearing among men becomes. The drop in the intra-class coefficient from 0.04 to 0.02 suggests that about half of the – limited – between-country variation in this norm can be attributed to a country’s progression in the SDT process.

In Model C, important individual-level correlates of the SDT are included in the model. No effects of level of urbanisation and level of religiosity are observed. However, the other two indicators – educational attainment and autonomy – do show significant effects. The upper age deadline is higher with increased educational attainment, implying that the higher educated are more lenient towards late childbearing than people with a low level of education. The effect of autonomy runs in the opposite direction. The more people value autonomy, the more they are opposed to late childbearing.

The age patterns for the upper age deadline for childbearing varies for men and women. Older adults object more to late childbearing among women than younger adults, whereas the former object less to late childbearing among men than the latter. Given that the mean upper age deadline for childbearing for men is a few years higher than that for women – see Section 4 – this implies that younger adults a smaller difference in the upper age deadlines for men and women than older adults do. Finally, men mention a lower upper age deadline for childbearing among men than women do. The difference is almost a year (0.88).

Voluntary childlessness. People may not only have norms on the timing of childbearing, but also about whether to have children, and if so, how many. Unfortunately, we do not have information on the minimum and maximum number of children that people should have. But information is available about whether people approve or disapprove of voluntary childlessness. In Table 5.3, results of our multi-level analysis of the level of approval of voluntary childlessness are presented. Results about approval of childlessness among women are presented in the left-hand side of the Table, whereas results about approval of childlessness among men are shown in the right-hand side of Table 5.3.

Models A in Table 5.3 show the results of the variance-partitioning models. Substantial proportions of the variance in the norm on voluntary childlessness among women and men are situated at the country level – 39 per cent of the variance in the norm on voluntary childlessness among women and 36 per cent of the variance in the norm on voluntary childlessness among men. These percentages are much higher than those observed for the timing norms, implying that there is much more variation in childlessness norms than in timing norms across Europe.

Table 5.2 Multilevel regression model predicting upper age deadlines for childbearing for women and men

	Women						Men					
	Model A		Model B		Model C		Model A		Model B		Model C	
	Estimate	SE										
<i>Fixed parameters</i>												
Constant	41.20***	0.19	40.23***	0.58	40.43***	0.63	45.52***	0.34	42.12***	0.86	41.42***	0.95
SDT			0.17	0.10	0.17	0.10			0.59***	0.14	0.61***	0.15
Urbanisation					-0.02	0.03					0.06	0.05
Religiosity					0.00	0.04					0.17*	0.07
Education					0.18***	0.03					0.44***	0.05
Autonomy					-0.13***	0.03					-0.12*	0.06
Age					-0.01***	0.00					0.02***	0.00
Age squared					-0.01	0.01					0.02	0.02
Male					-0.03	0.08					-0.88***	0.12
<i>Random part</i>												
$\sigma(u)$	0.88***	0.13	0.82***	0.13	0.84***	0.13	1.60***	0.25	1.20***	0.19	1.23***	0.19
$\sigma(e)$	5.13***	0.03	5.13***	0.03	5.11***	0.03	8.30***	0.04	8.30***	0.04	8.26***	0.04
<i>Derived part</i>												
ρ	0.03		0.03		0.03		0.04		0.02		0.02	
<i>N</i>	19,355		19,355		19,355		18,752		18,752		18,752	

Note. Gender is dummy coded such that 1 = male. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 5.3 Multilevel regression model predicting approval of voluntary childlessness of women and men

	Women						Men					
	Model A		Model B		Model C		Model A		Model B		Model C	
	Estimate	SE										
<i>Fixed parameters</i>												
Constant	2.88***	0.15	1.19***	0.36	1.11***	0.38	2.79***	0.14	1.34***	0.34	1.23***	0.36
SDT			0.30***	0.06	0.28***	0.06			0.25***	0.06	0.24***	0.06
Urbanisation					0.01*	0.01					0.02**	0.01
Religiosity					-0.14***	0.01					-0.12***	0.01
Education					0.05***	0.00					0.04***	0.00
Autonomy					0.02**	0.01					0.02**	0.01
Age					-0.00***	0.00					-0.01***	0.00
Age squared					-0.01***	0.00					-0.01***	0.00
Male					-0.11***	0.01					0.01	0.01
<i>Random part</i>												
$\sigma(u)$	0.74***	0.11	0.52***	0.08	0.54***	0.08	0.67***	0.10	0.49***	0.07	0.51***	0.08
$\sigma(e)$	0.92***	0.00	0.92***	0.00	0.89***	0.00	0.90***	0.00	0.90***	0.00	0.88***	0.00
<i>Derived part</i>												
ρ	0.39		0.24		0.27		0.36		0.23		0.25	
<i>N</i>	20,399		20,399		20,399		20,020		20,020		20,020	

Note. Gender is dummy coded such that 1 = male. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Models B in Table 5.3 show that the effects of the SDT-score are positive and highly statistically significant for both norms. In countries that are far advanced in the SDT process, voluntary childlessness of both men and women, is met with much more approval than in countries where the SDT has not had much of an impact yet. The mean differences between countries that are one standard deviation below the mean on the SDT-index and countries that are one standard deviation above the mean on that index is about 0.6 on a five-point scale for approval of female's voluntary childlessness, and 0.5 for approval of voluntary childlessness among men.

In Models C, important individual-level covariates are added to the model. For SDT-related variables, the results are in line with expectations. Approval of voluntary childlessness is higher (a) among people living in urban areas than among people living in rural areas, (b) among people who are not religiously involved than among the religiously committed, (c) among the higher educated than among those with lower levels of completed education, and (d) among those who strongly value autonomy than among those who do not put much value on autonomy. At the same time, there is little evidence that composition effects are responsible for country-level differences in norms on voluntary childlessness. First, the direct effect of the SDT-score on these norms remains almost the same after including individual-level covariates. Second, the relative variation at the country level even increases – from 0.24 to 0.27 for the norm on women's childlessness and from 0.23 to 0.35 for that of men – after the inclusion of individual-level covariates. Composition effect thus seem to partially mask existing country-level differences in these norms.

Finally, some comments on the gender and age differences in approval of childlessness are in order. Men and women do not differ in their approval of childlessness among men, but men approval somewhat less of female voluntary childlessness than women do. Approval of voluntary childlessness is highest among people below age 35, and clearly decreases with increasing age, after age 35.

Having children while cohabiting unmarried. Another norm that may influence childbearing behaviour is whether people approve of having children outside marriage. In many European countries, having children outside marriage does not mean that they are having their child outside a partner relationship. Rather, they will have children while cohabiting unmarried with a partner (Liefbroer & Goldscheider, 2007; Sobotka & Toulemon, 2008). Results of a multi-level analysis of how much people approve of having children within an unmarried cohabitation are presented in Table 5.4. As usual, information on how much people approve of this type of behaviour from women are presented in the left-hand side, and results on approval of that behaviour by men are shown in the right-hand side of Table 5.4.

The intra-class coefficient of Model A shows that about one-fifth of the overall variance in approval of having children within a consensual union occurs at the national level ($\rho = 0.19$ for approval of this behaviour of women and men). Although this proportion is lower than that for approval of childlessness, it is still considerable. This underscores the observation made in Section 4 that the norms on having a child while cohabiting unmarried vary rather strongly across Europe.

The results for Model B in Table 5.4 show that approval of having a child within a non-married partnership is higher in countries that are far advanced in the SDT process than in countries where the SDT has not caught on. The mean differences between countries that are one standard deviation below the mean on the SDT-index and countries that are one standard deviation above the mean on that index is about 0.4 on a five-point scale of approval. This difference is somewhat smaller than the difference observed for the childlessness norm, but it is still quite substantial.

Table 5.4 Multilevel regression model predicting approval of having a child while cohabiting unmarried of women and men

	Women						Men					
	Model A		Model B		Model C		Model A		Model B		Model C	
	Estimate	SE										
<i>Fixed parameters</i>												
Constant	3.30***	0.10	2.12***	0.22	2.15***	0.24	3.25***	0.10	2.17***	0.23	2.15***	0.25
SDT			0.21***	0.04	0.17***	0.04			0.19***	0.04	0.15***	0.04
Urbanisation					0.01*	0.01					-0.01	0.01
Religiosity					-0.26***	0.01					-0.25***	0.01
Education					0.04***	0.01					0.03***	0.01
Autonomy					0.04***	0.01					0.05***	0.01
Age					-0.01***	0.00					-0.01***	0.00
Age squared					-0.02***	0.00					-0.02***	0.00
Male					-0.11***	0.01					-0.05***	0.01
<i>Random part</i>												
$\sigma(u)$	0.48***	0.07	0.31***	0.05	0.33***	0.05	0.47***	0.07	0.32***	0.05	0.35***	0.05
$\sigma(e)$	0.98***	0.00	0.98***	0.09	0.91***	0.12	0.97***	0.00	0.97***	0.00	0.91***	0.00
<i>Derived part</i>												
ρ	.019		0.09		0.12		0.19		0.10		0.13	
N	20,641		20,641		20,641		20,249		20,249		20,249	

Note. Gender is dummy coded such that 1 = male. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .00

In Model C, individual-level covariates are included in the multi-level models. Almost all effects of SDT-related indicators are all in the expected direction. Approval of having a child while cohabiting unmarried with a partner is higher among people living in urban areas – but for approval of females’ behaviour only –, higher among the non-religiously committed, higher among the highly educated, and higher among those who value autonomy, than among people with the opposite set of characteristics. Furthermore, the direct effect of the SDT-index in about 20 per cent smaller in Model C than in Model B, suggesting that some of the SDT-effect can be attributed to differences in the composition of countries with respect to the proportion of the population that is inclined towards SDT-like behaviour. At the same time, the intra-class coefficient of Model C is somewhat larger than that of Model B, suggesting that – overall – not controlling for individual-level compositional differences underestimates the importance of country-level differences.

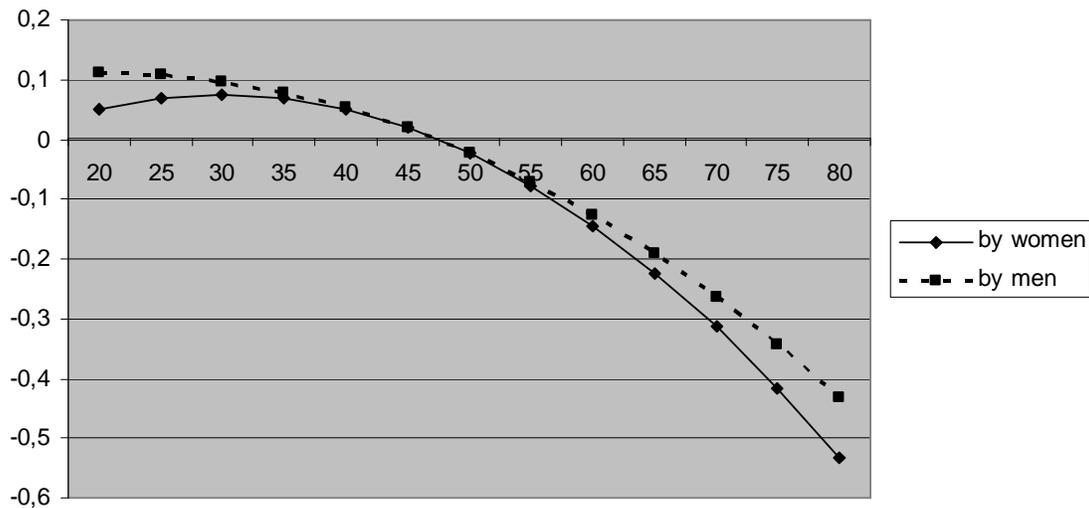


Figure 5.1 Age pattern of approval for women and men having a child while cohabiting unmarried

The gender effects in Models C suggest that men approve slightly less of having a child within a consensual union than women do. The age effects for approval of having children within a cohabitational union are presented in Figure 5.1. Approval of this behaviour does not differ much for respondents below the age of 45. Above that age, though, approval for having a child while cohabiting with a partner decreases quite rapidly, both for men and for women displaying this kind of behaviour.

Combining a full-time job and small children. A final norm we will discuss is how much people approve of combining a full-time job and caring for children under the age of 3. In Section 4, it was observed that a truly ‘double standard’ still exists in most countries with respect to this norm. Approval of men combining a full-time job and small children is high, but approval of women doing so is much lower. The estimates of our multi-level models of approval of combining these two roles are presented in Table 5.5, with information on approval of women doing so in the left-hand panel and information on men doing so in the right-hand panel.

Table 5.5 Multilevel regression model predicting approval of combining full-time work and caring for children under age 3 of women and men

	Women						Men					
	Model A		Model B		Model C		Model A		Model B		Model C	
	Estimate	SE										
<i>Fixed parameters</i>												
Constant	2.96***	0.09	2.44***	0.29	2.48	0.31	3.86***	0.05	3.87***	0.17	3.75***	0.17
SDT			0.09	0.05	0.07	0.05			-0.00	0.03	-0.01	0.03
Urbanisation					0.01	0.01					-0.01	0.01
Religiosity					-0.14***	0.01					-0.04***	0.01
Education					0.06***	0.01					0.02**	0.01
Autonomy					-0.01	0.01					0.04***	0.01
Age					-0.00***	0.00					0.00***	0.00
Age squared					-0.02***	0.00					-0.01***	0.00
Male					-0.10***	0.01					-0.02	0.01
<i>Random part</i>												
$\sigma(u)$	0.45***	0.07	0.42***	0.06	0.43***	0.06	0.24***	0.04	0.24***	0.04	0.24***	0.04
$\sigma(e)$	1.00***	0.00	1.00***	0.00	0.97***	0.00	0.92***	0.00	0.92***	0.00	0.92***	0.00
<i>Derived part</i>												
ρ	0.17		0.15		0.17		0.07		0.07		0.06	
N	20,467		20,467		20,467		20,064		20,064		20,064	

Note. Gender is dummy coded such that 1 = male. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .00

The results presented in Models A underscore the importance of gender differences in this norm. The constant term for approval of men combining a full-time job and young children is much higher than that for approving the same combination behaviour of women. In other words, across Europe people are much more approving of men combining a full-time job and small children than they are of women combining these two roles. The low intra-class coefficient (0.07) for men suggests that there is little cross-national variation in how people view the men's behaviour in this respect. The intra-class coefficient for women's behaviour (0.17) is much higher though. This implies that the approval of women who combine a full-time job and raising small children varies considerably across Europe.

In Model B, it is examined whether country-differences in this combination norm are related to the advancement of a country in the SDT. The results do not confirm this idea. There is no relationship whatsoever for the approval of men's combination behaviour, and the effect for women fails to reach statistical significance ($p = .062$). This latter finding suggests that there is a tendency that people in countries with a high score on the SDT-index are somewhat more likely to approve of women combining care for a small child and a full-time job than people in countries with a low score on the SDT-index.

Results on relevant micro-level covariates are presented in Model C. The more religious people are, and the lower their level of education is, the less approving they will be about women combining a full-time job and caring for small children. Level of urbanisation and importance of autonomy do not exert a statistically significant effect on this norm. The effects of religiousness and educational attainment on approval of men combining these two roles run in the same direction. However, though statistically significant, the effects are much weaker. Finally, people who value autonomy approve more of men combining a full-time job and small children than people who put little value in autonomy.

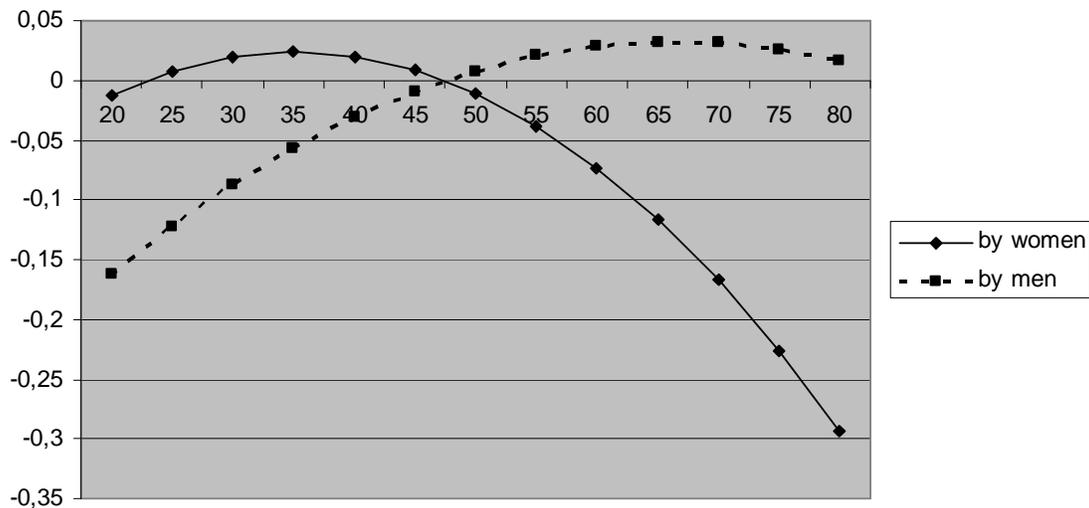


Figure 5.2 Age pattern of approval for women and men combining a full-time job and a child below age 3

Men and women do not differ in their approval of men combining parenthood and full-time employment. They do differ in their approval of women doing so: men disapprove more of such behaviour than women do. Finally, the age patterns are presented in Figure 5.2. Approval of women combining a full-time job and a small child are quite similar for respondents between the ages of 25 and 55. After age 55, disapproval of this combination rapidly increases. The age pattern is opposite for approval of men combining these two roles.

Approval of this combination is lowest among young respondents, and much higher among those aged 50 and over.

5.4 *Summary*

Based upon the results presented in this Section, at least three important conclusions can be drawn about country differences in norms related to childbearing. First, country differences in the lower and upper age deadline for childbearing of both men and women are small. The same is true for country differences in approval of men combining a full-time job and having small children. Roughly, a bare 5 per cent of the variation in answers among Europeans can be accounted for by the country-level. The remaining variation is situated between individuals rather than between countries. At the same time, there is substantial cross-national variation in approval for voluntary childlessness, having a child while one is cohabiting unmarried, and women combining a full-time job and small children. Between 15 and 30 per cent of the variation in approval levels is located at the country level.

Secondly, cross-national variation in approval of voluntary childlessness and in approval of having children in a consensual union are strongly related to how far a country is 'advanced' in the SDT process. Approval levels of these behaviours are much higher in countries that are far advanced in this process, than in countries that are only in the early stages of the SDT. The link between the SDT index and the lower and upper age deadlines for childbearing and approval of combining a full-time job and having small children is much weaker or even completely non-existing. These results suggest that some childbearing norms may be changing as countries advance in the SDT process, but that other norms remain more or less unaffected by a country's advancement in the SDT.

Thirdly, across Europe, the highly educated, the religiously uncommitted, and those who value autonomy are much more likely to approve behaviours that are in line with the SDT than people with the opposite set of characteristics. At the same time, country-level differences in norms related to voluntary childlessness and to having a child outside marriage remain prominent, even if compositional differences in these individual-level characteristics are taken into account. This suggests that people in countries that are far advanced in the SDT-process hold different norms about these behaviours even if their individual characteristics are similar. This begs the question whether it is possible to isolate more specific country-level characteristics that can account for these country differences. In the next Section, this issue will be examined for the norm about voluntary childlessness.

6 Norms in focus: explaining cross-national variation in childlessness norms

6.1 Introduction

Having children or not remains an important decision in women's and men's life course and depends on multiple determinants, such as individual and cultural factors – like societal norms. However, little theoretical and empirical attention has been paid as yet to norms on voluntary childlessness, and how such norms are associated with individual, structural and cultural determinants (Koropecj-Cox & Pendell, 2007a), especially from a comparative perspective (Liefbroer & Fokkema, 2008).

As stated above, the prevalence of childlessness has increased enormously as has the societal acceptance of childlessness (Koropecj-Cox & Pendell, 2007a; Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). This shift in attitudes and values is observed mainly in Western countries (Liefbroer & Fokkema, 2008), but is likely to vary among countries with diverging historical, cultural and structural contexts. For example, in the post-communist countries of Eastern Europe societal acceptance of childlessness as a clear choice has only very recently been spreading (Sobotka, 2004), but still little is known about reproductive decision making in these countries (Philipov, Spéder, & Billari, 2006). As can be seen from Section 4.2 substantive variation in norms about voluntary childlessness has been found among the ESS countries, with large majorities disapproving of voluntary childlessness in former communist Eastern European countries. Some of this variation might be explained by individual factors, and country factors may be responsible for another part. Individual characteristics, such as age, gender, educational and occupational background may play a role in the shaping of norms on childlessness as well as structural circumstances, such as the availability of childcare facilities and cultural factors, for example religiousness and gender equality (cf. Koropecj-Cox & Pendell, 2007a, 2007b). Hence, the aim of the present section is to increase our knowledge about the shaping of norms on voluntary childlessness in different cultural contexts. First, we briefly discuss the role of individual determinants, such as age, gender and education. Next, we discuss the role of structural and cultural determinants. Particularly, we consider the availability of childcare facilities, the role of religion and gender quality in countries as determinants of norms about childlessness. In an empirical endeavour to shed light on differences in the shaping of norms on childlessness we use two-level models to analyze data from the European Social Survey to investigate variation in the association between individual and cultural factors with norms on voluntary childlessness in 25 European countries.

6.2 Correlates of norms about voluntary childlessness

Usually, young adults expect to have children later in life, but the general pressure to become a parent has decreased and the societal acceptance of voluntary remaining childless has increased (Koropecj-Cox & Pendell, 2007b). Nowadays, it is not unusual to acknowledge the negative sides of parenthood, such as strains and sacrifices in personal and professional life (Dykstra, 2009; Sobotka, 2004). Women in particular are more likely to admit that lives without children do not necessarily have to be empty and that parenthood produces restrictions on female life courses (Koropecj-Cox & Pendell, 2007b). Societal changes, structural and cultural ones, during the last decades are associated with higher economic and personal costs of childbearing mirrored by higher education, higher labour market participation and higher childlessness rates of women.

A large body of literature has found that younger generations often hold less traditionalist and conservative attitudes about various life course transitions and living arrangements than the older generations (e.g., Hynie, Lalonde, & Lee, 2006; Lalonde & Cameron, 1993; Merz, Özeke-Kocabas, Oort, & Schuengel, 2009). Koropeckyj-Cox and Pendell have shown, in their two U.S. based studies on attitudes about parenthood and childlessness (2007a, 2007b), that younger adults held more positive attitudes compared to older adults. Other factors have also been shown to be associated with norms and attitudes about childlessness; for example educational and occupational status. It has been found that the lower educated and the non-employed endorsed more negative attitudes on childlessness compared to higher educated and employed individuals (Koropeckyj-Cox & Pendell, 2007a). Educational ambitions and career aspirations increase the opportunity costs to become a parent, especially for women, and have been shown to influence fertility behaviour (Becker, 1981; Liefbroer, 2005). As a result, higher educated women with good career opportunities may be more reluctant to opt for children and may hold more favourable norms towards childless life courses.

Studying childlessness requires consideration of individual as well as cultural and structural factors such as women's greater economic and legal independence and growing prosperity to account for differences among countries (Dykstra, 2009; Sobotka, 2004). It is likely that certain cultural influences on attitudes and behaviour have diminished in many Western European countries (Liefbroer, 2005; Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001) and the wish for autonomy, emancipation and free decision making along with increased individualism (Van de Kaa, 1987) has paved the way for acceptance of all different kinds of demographic behaviour and life course transitions. In other countries, however, more traditionalistic views of demographic behaviour, along with stronger religious beliefs may still continue to exert an influence on the shaping of norms towards childlessness (Jansen & Kalmijn, 2002). Religious institutions often encourage family formation and reproduction and benefit families with children in terms of childcare access, financial support and family counselling (Pearce, 2002). Religion is strongly tied to family values and commitments, no matter how liberal or conservative the religious group is (Myers, 2004). Structural factors, such as childcare availability and opportunities to combine labour force participation and parenthood may also be important in shaping norms and intentions about childlessness across countries (Sobotka, 2004). Combining labour force participation and motherhood remains to be difficult in certain countries and societies (e.g., Liefbroer, 2005), reflected by shortages in child care facilities, especially for preschool children. These difficulties with flexibly combining work and parenthood in several European countries may have driven women into childlessness and at the same time shaped more positive norms about childlessness.

6.3 The present study and hypotheses

Until now, most studies that examined norms about childlessness have been based on college student convenience samples (e.g., Koropeckyj-Cox, Romano, & Moras, 2007; Mueller & Yoder, 1997; Polit, 1978), representing a restricted group, consisting of young and highly educated adults in quite stable economic circumstances. Other studies investigated attitudes in more representative samples, such as the American National Survey of Families and Households and the American General Social Survey, but only in the U.S. (e.g., Koropeckyj-Cox & Pendell, 2007a, 2007b). Extending this previous work, the present section examines norms about voluntary childlessness in a large scale representative sample from the European Social Survey (a more detailed description is given in Section 3), including data on individuals from 25 European countries. The design and structure of the data offer the

possibility to examine how childlessness norms are shaped by individual factors, cultural factors and by their interplay.

We hypothesized similar norms among men and women with women having slightly higher levels on approval of voluntary childlessness compared to men due to growing endorsement of gender equality (Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). With respect to age, we generally expected more positive norms about childlessness in younger compared to older respondents. Moreover, we hypothesized an interaction effect between age and parent status. Because of the widespread postponement of parenthood and the increased likelihood of childless and childfree life courses, we expected older adults without children to hold more positive norms about childlessness than younger adults without children, who may expect to become parents later in life.

Despite the ongoing trends of secularization in European countries scientific work clearly indicates that religion remains to be a salient factor associated with family life, values and demographic behaviour (Mahoney, 2005). Religious people were expected to endorse favourable norms towards parenthood and more strongly disapprove of voluntary childlessness compared to non-believers.

It has long been recognized that female labour force participation and fertility are reversely associated (Rindfuss, Guilkey, Morgan, Kravdal, & Benjamin Guzzo, 2007). Based on this result, one could argue that countries with better public childcare provision allow for both higher labour participation and parenthood and therefore encourage childbearing, leading to more negative norms towards childlessness. At the same time, it has been found that countries with higher childcare provision and higher female labour force participation have higher fertility rates. These countries often are liberal and tolerant and may encourage open-minded and positive norms towards childlessness. Similarly, it has been suggested that a country's level of gender equality is associated with either high or low fertility (McDonald, 2000). The question how childcare provision associates with norms on childlessness across countries therefore is explorative, but we expect the effect to operate differently for parents and childless individuals.

Moreover, we hypothesized that norms about childlessness are more positive in richer countries with a better welfare system than in poorer countries. Children in these countries do not need to function as structural capital and future caregivers to their parents (Liefbroer, 2005). As an indicator of the wealth and level of welfare of a country we used the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita. Countries with a higher GDP are expected to have a better welfare system and care facilities.

6.4 Variables

The variable *individual norm about voluntary childlessness* is measured with the question "How much do you approve or disapprove if a woman/man chooses never to have children?" Item response options ranged from 1 = strongly disapprove, 2 = disapprove, 3 = neither approve nor disapprove, 4 = approve, 5 = strongly approve.

Independent variables at the individual level. Variables at the individual level included demographic information about age, gender, educational attainment (completed years of education), current employment situation, parent status, and partner status. Individual religiosity was measured as a scale including three items about the subjective self-evaluation of own religiosity (ranging from 0 = "not at all religious" to 10 = "very religious"), praying behaviour and religious service attendance (answer categories to the two latter questions ranged from 1 = "every day" to 7 = "never"). All three items were coded in a similar direction and standardized. An exploratory factor analysis on these three single items pointed to one

underlying factor which was labelled religiousness. Cronbach's alpha for this three items scale was .81. Furthermore, feelings about household income was included as independent variable, ranging from 1 = very difficult on present income to 4 = living comfortably on present income.

Independent variables at the country level. Variables at the country level included information about childcare facilities, gender empowerment index, and GDP. Countries' childcare facilities were expressed as "childcare gap" in weeks. Considering parental leave and state supported childcare facilities for children from 0 to 6 years in each country, the total number of weeks during these six years for which neither parental leave nor state supported childcare is available has been calculated. This measure has been termed the total childcare gap (TCG; cf. Saraceno & Keck, 2008). The higher this gap, the more time parents themselves have to invest in either caring for the child themselves or making their own childcare arrangements. The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) is a measure of inequalities between men's and women's opportunities in a country. It combines inequalities in three areas: political participation and decision making, economic participation and decision making, and power over economic resources. The country scores were retrieved from the United Nations Development Programme. GDP per capita in Purchasing Power Standards in the year of data collection was retrieved from the International Monetary Fund (2008) and used as an indicator of welfare and economic prosperity in a country.

Control variables. Because there was not enough space to ask all participants questions about norms with respect to male and female behaviour, a split ballot design has been used in the ESS. About half of the respondents were asked norm questions about male behaviour, the other half about female behaviour. Whether the answer on the dependent variable was about norms on men's or women's voluntary childlessness was included as a control variable in our multilevel models.

6.5 Results

6.5.1 Descriptive information

Descriptive results on the disapproval rates of voluntary childlessness can be found in Section 4.2. Descriptive results of independent variables on individual and country level used in the following multilevel models can be found Tables 6.1 and 6.2. Table 6.1 presents the means and standard deviations of the core variables broken down by country. As can be seen from Table 6.1, considerable variation existed among countries with respect to demographic and substantive variables. For example, employment rates ranged from 38 per cent in Romania to almost 70 per cent in Norway. With respect to norms on childlessness we also found considerable variation across countries and across individuals.

Table 6.2 displays an overview of macro predictors on the country level. Substantial variation among countries with regard to the three macro factors, child care gap, gender equality and GDP can be seen from this table. With respect to gender equality and GDP some pattern across countries can be detected, in the sense that in countries with an earlier onset of the SDT scores on these measures were generally higher than in countries with a later onset of the SDT. Regarding the childcare gap this picture was less clear and did not show a clear relation to the SDT status of the country.

Table 6.1 Individual study characteristics broken down by country

	Age, <i>M (SD)</i>	Gender, % female	Partner, % yes	Education, <i>M (SD)</i>	Currently employed, % yes	Childless, % yes	Religiosity, <i>M (SD)</i>	Income satisfaction, <i>M (SD)</i>
AT (<i>n</i> = 2,405)	41.94 (17.34)	53.75	60.64	12.53 (3.06)	62.65	39.07	.09 (.96)	3.21 (.75)
BE (<i>n</i> = 1,798)	46.19 (18.64)	53.28	63.90	12.10 (3.68)	50.83	32.48	-.22 (.93)	3.13 (.84)
BG (<i>n</i> = 1,400)	47.94 (17.29)	60.04	69.47	11.18 (3.46)	45.47	18.62	-.20 (.80)	1.86 (.80)
CH (<i>n</i> = 1,804)	47.61 (18.06)	53.37	67.29	13.36 (3.74)	62.29	33.26	.18 (.93)	3.35 (.76)
CY (<i>n</i> = 995)	44.60 (16.92)	52.63	68.75	11.29 (4.01)	53.45	29.35	.84 (.71)	2.94 (.75)
DE (<i>n</i> = 2,916)	48.15 (17.92)	50.62	60.01	13.19 (3.42)	53.18	34.33	-.32 (.96)	3.00 (.75)
DK (<i>n</i> = 1,505)	49.78 (17.51)	50.96	68.17	13.17 (5.13)	63.19	25.85	-.35 (.78)	3.60 (.64)
EE (<i>n</i> = 1,517)	47.41 (19.30)	56.49	56.10	12.25 (3.16)	57.81	29.14	-.49 (.78)	2.71 (.74)
ES (<i>n</i> = 1,875)	46.20 (18.96)	51.66	61.26	11.68 (5.36)	54.86	37.08	-.06 (1.04)	3.13 (.75)
FI (<i>n</i> = 1,896)	48.74 (19.02)	51.53	64.56	12.41 (4.25)	52.74	31.80	-.05 (.84)	3.08 (.64)
FR (<i>n</i> = 1,986)	45.84 (17.47)	51.26	70.09	12.47 (4.09)	56.99	27.90	-.44 (.91)	3.11 (.71)
GB (<i>n</i> = 2,394)	47.30 (18.78)	52.50	62.85	13.43 (4.01)	58.51	31.27	-.27 (.99)	3.22 (.78)
HU (<i>n</i> = 1,518)	48.25 (18.02)	57.72	61.06	11.74 (3.83)	47.17	24.68	-.14 (1.00)	2.47 (.80)
IE (<i>n</i> = 1,800)	44.15 (17.56)	51.72	61.16	12.72 (3.54)	56.02	35.82	.61 (.95)	3.32 (.73)
LV (<i>n</i> = 1,960)	42.44 (19.27)	60.00	44.95	11.68 (3.60)	51.79	39.59	-.25 (.89)	2.41 (.84)
NL (<i>n</i> = 1,889)	47.17 (17.24)	52.47	69.08	13.16 (4.57)	62.60	32.63	-.16 (1.02)	3.29 (.78)
NO (<i>n</i> = 1,750)	45.89 (18.12)	49.09	64.69	13.36 (3.80)	69.43	30.74	-.39 (.86)	3.44 (.70)
PL (<i>n</i> = 1,721)	44.14 (18.59)	52.46	58.00	11.51 (3.29)	47.49	31.82	.94 (.79)	2.68 (.64)
PT (<i>n</i> = 2,222)	48.50 (18.88)	58.99	65.37	7.71 (4.95)	49.37	27.17	.46 (.95)	2.50 (.84)
RO (<i>n</i> = 2,139)	46.11 (18.49)	52.31	57.22	10.68 (3.99)	37.91	31.00	.82 (.73)	2.22 (.90)
RU (<i>n</i> = 2,437)	43.86 (18.39)	58.39	55.67	12.03 (3.32)	54.27	27.65	-.32 (.87)	2.15 (.84)
SE (<i>n</i> = 1,927)	47.21 (18.70)	50.60	63.78	12.58 (3.64)	64.50	31.29	-.51 (.80)	3.48 (.70)
SI (<i>n</i> = 1,476)	46.76 (18.88)	54.81	59.96	11.62 (3.65)	47.56	30.15	-.04 (.97)	3.30 (.75)
SK (<i>n</i> = 1,766)	43.43 (17.89)	50.74	56.57	12.45 (3.27)	54.53	31.94	.38 (1.08)	2.57 (.84)
UA (<i>n</i> = 2,002)	48.72 (18.37)	57.26	63.43	11.50 (3.67)	41.65	20.47	.25 (.94)	1.95 (.77)
Total (<i>N</i> = 47,098)	46.31 (18.39)	53.75	61.86	12.07 (4.11)	54.31	30.93	-.01 (1.00)	2.88 (.91)

Table 6.2 Overview country level characteristics

	TCG	GEM	GDP
AT ($n = 2,405$)	131.08	.79	36.22
BE ($n = 1,798$)	39.38	.85	33.69
BG ($n = 1,400$)	140.1	.61	10.29
CH ($n = 1,804$)	-	.66	38.92
CY ($n = 995$)	133.37	.58	25.82
DE ($n = 2,916$)	107.82	.83	32.43
DK ($n = 1,505$)	29.85	.88	35.90
EE ($n = 1,517$)	78.39	.64	19.14
ES ($n = 1,875$)	120.34	.79	28.77
FI ($n = 1,896$)	137.03	.89	32.86
FR ($n = 1,986$)	34.82	.72	31.89
GB ($n = 2,394$)	112.32	.78	33.35
HU ($n = 1,518$)	78.63	.57	18.25
IE ($n = 1,800$)	150.12	.70	40.67
LV ($n = 1,960$)	97.57	.62	15.30
NL ($n = 1,889$)	102.56	.86	36.83
NO ($n = 1,750$)	51.92	.91	50.20
PL ($n = 1,721$)	203.52	.61	14.88
PT ($n = 2,222$)	148.36	.69	20.82
RO ($n = 2,139$)	-	.50	10.43
RU ($n = 2,437$)	-	.49	13.17
SE ($n = 1,927$)	33.79	.91	34.87
SI ($n = 1,476$)	96.07	.61	24.97
SK ($n = 1,766$)	104.46	.63	17.87
UA ($n = 2,002$)	-	.46	6.25

6.5.2 Multilevel modelling

In our multilevel analyses several models, as described in the paragraphs below, were estimated. The first model is what is called an *intercept only* model (cf. Model A in Table 6.3) to determine the effect of being residents of the same country on approval of childlessness. The intraclass correlation was .37, indicating substantial within country similarity (cf. Snijders & Bosker, 1999) with respect to approval of childlessness. In a next step (cf. Model B in Table 6.3), control variables at the individual level (Level 1 predictors) were added to Model A. These effects demonstrate the association between the predictors and the dependent variable and can be interpreted as regression coefficients (Jenkins, Rasbash, & O'Connor, 2003). Model B shows which individual characteristics (i.e. age, age squared, gender, parent status, partner status, employment status, and income satisfaction) significantly predicted approval of voluntary childlessness. Age was positively, age squared negatively associated with approval of childlessness. Women approved more of childlessness compared to men whereas parents showed lower values on approval of childlessness. Respondents who were currently employed and single showed more approval of childlessness compared to their non-working, partnered counterparts. More positive feelings about income were related to higher approval of childlessness. Additionally, this model showed that adding individual factors explained 5 per cent of the variance. In a next step (Model C in Table 6.3), education and individual religiousness were added to the model. Higher educated respondents approved more of childlessness than the lower

educated. More religious individuals approved less of childlessness compared to non-believers. Adding these predictors explained an additional 1 per cent of the variance. Model D included two interaction terms between variables on the individual level, i.e. the interaction between age and parent status and between gender and education. The interaction between age and parent status displayed a non-linear association with approval of childlessness which is presented in Figure 6.1. As can be seen from this figure, parents generally showed lower approval of childlessness compared to childless persons. With respect to age a turning point around age 45 can be observed. Parents and childless individuals younger and older than 45 years approve less of childlessness than the middle aged.

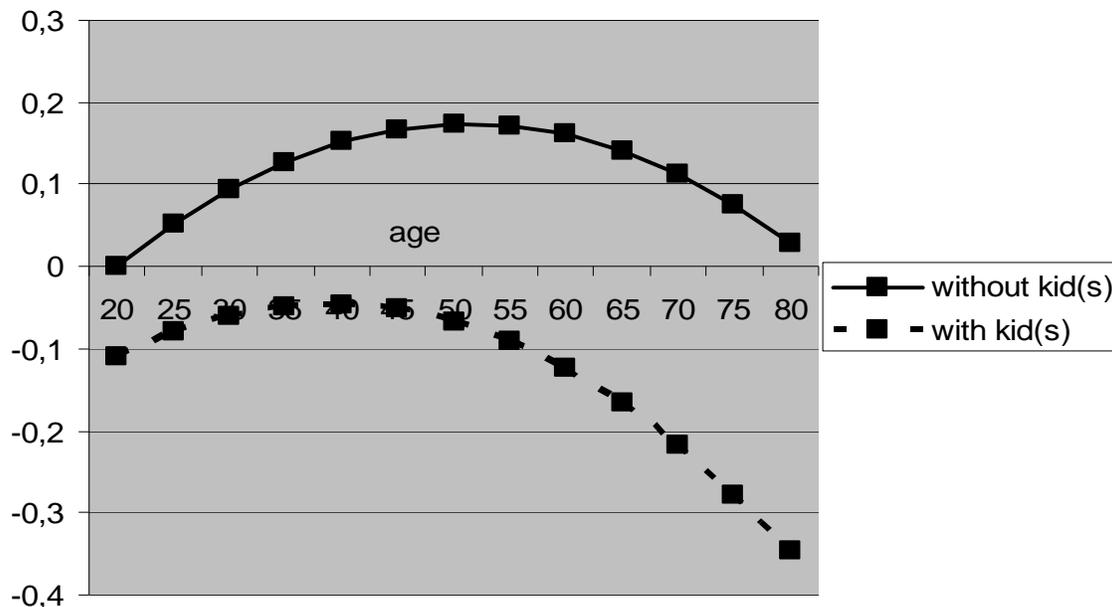


Figure 6.1 The relation between age, parental status and approval of childlessness

The other interaction effect showed that higher education increased the approval of childlessness for women. Adding these two interactions to the model explained another additional 1 per cent of the variance (cf. Model D in Table 6.3).

Results of adding country level factors to the model are presented in Model E in Table 6.3. In countries with higher gender equality more approval of childlessness was found than in countries with less gender equality. No associations between childcare gap and GDP with norms on childlessness were found. Adding country predictors to the model increased the explained variance by 24 per cent compared to Model D. In a last step, one cross-level interaction, between parent status and childcare gap, was added to the model (cf. Model F in Table 6.3) and was found to be associated with approval of childlessness. Parents in countries with the largest childcare gaps showed higher levels of disapproval of childlessness. Adding this interaction effect did not result in an increase in explained variance, but did significantly improve the model fit.

Table 6.3 Multilevel regression model with individual and country variables predicting approval of childlessness

	Model A		Model B		Model C		Model D		Model E		Model F	
	Estimate	SE										
<i>Fixed parameters level 1</i>												
Constant	2.84***	0.14	2.70***	0.09	2.44***	0.08	2.48***	0.08	-0.29	0.65	-0.34	0.69
Split ballot			0.10***	0.01	0.10***	0.01	0.10***	0.01	0.12***	0.01	0.12***	0.01
Age			0.02***	0.00	0.02***	0.00	0.02***	0.00	0.02***	0.00	0.02***	0.00
Age squared			-0.00***	0.00	-0.00***	0.00	-0.00***	0.00	-0.00***	0.00	-0.00***	0.00
Gender			0.02**	0.01	0.07***	0.01	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02
Partner status			-0.07***	0.01	-0.06***	0.01	-0.07***	0.01	-0.07***	0.01	-0.07***	0.01
Parent status			-0.24***	0.01	-0.22***	0.01	-0.02	0.03	-0.02	0.04	0.05	0.04
Employment status			0.06***	0.01	0.03*	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01
Income satisfaction			0.06***	0.01	0.04***	0.01	0.04***	0.01	0.04***	0.01	0.04***	0.01
Education					0.02***	0.00	0.01***	0.00	0.02***	0.00	0.02***	0.00
Religiousness					-0.13***	0.01	-0.13***	0.01	-0.13***	0.01	-0.13***	0.01
<i>Interaction terms</i>												
Age*parent status							-0.00***	0.00	-0.00***	0.00	-0.00***	0.00
Gender*education							0.01*	0.01	0.02**	0.01	0.02**	0.01
<i>Fixed parameters level 2</i>												
GEM									3.01**	1.06	3.01**	1.11
GDP									0.02	0.01	0.02	0.01
TCG									0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<i>Interaction term</i>												
Parent status*TCG											-0.00**	0.00
<i>Random part</i>												
$\sigma(u)$	0.693		0.665		0.660		0.660		0.339		0.339	
$\sigma(e)$	0.922		0.903		0.895		0.893		0.906		0.906	
<i>Derived part</i>												
Rho	0.36		0.35		0.35		0.35		0.12		0.12	
ΔR^2			0.05		0.01		0.01		0.24		0.00	
Log likelihood	-61509.71		-58420.10		-55633.89		-54916.33		-45984.23		-45979.59	

Note. Gender, partner status, parent status and employment status are dummy-coded such that 1 = female, having a partner, being a parent, being currently employed. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.

6.6 Summary

In this Section, special attention was given to the norm about voluntary childlessness, as this norm was found to vary significantly between countries. In particular, we focused on the role played by macro-level economic, structural and cultural factors. The results presented in this Section indicated that especially cultural factors, such as individual religiousness, education and gender equality in a country were important factors associated with approval of childlessness. Interestingly, most variation in norms on childlessness was explained by macro-level factors, especially gender equality.

More tolerant views with respect to voluntary childlessness were found among women, singles, respondents without children, the currently employed and those satisfied with their income level compared to their counterparts; partnered, fathers, currently not employed and less satisfied with income. The gender difference seems not surprising considering the persistence of higher opportunity costs for women of becoming a parent (cf. Liefbroer, 2005). The gender main effect disappeared when adding the interaction with education, pointing even stronger to structural constraints for women to enter parenthood, especially those who have invested in higher education and better career opportunities.

Contrary to earlier research we found that older respondents showed stronger approval of voluntary childlessness compared to younger ones and additionally, we found a non-linear age effect on norms about childlessness. Although it has generally been suggested that younger individuals endorse more modern and tolerant views with respect to various life domains and demographic behaviour, it seems also possible that older respondents tend to become milder and more tolerant with respect to fertility norms compared to younger ones.

Maybe even more important than mere demographic factors, cultural aspects such as education and religiosity have been found important in shaping norms on childlessness. In line with previous work higher education was related to a higher approval of childlessness, especially for women (cf. Koropecj-Cox & Pendell, 2007b). The effect of education is likely to operate both directly and indirectly. Initially, higher education carries a generally broader, more distinguished and nuanced view on various aspects of human living – including demographic behaviour – leading to tolerance with respect to individual and personal decisions.

In accordance with expectations and consistent with earlier work, religious people were found to endorse more negative norms with respect to childlessness compared to non-believers. Additional analyses (not shown here) revealed that religious denomination did not matter additional to the general religiosity effect. By and large, churches strongly and often explicitly value marriage, childbearing and family norms which apply to all monotheistic denominations. Although in most Western countries the influence of religion is diminishing in times of secularization, *individual* religiousness seems to continue its influence on family formation and normative behaviour.

Most important to the present study was the explaining power of country level predictors. Adding these macro factors, i.e. GDP, gender equality and childcare availability, increased the explained variance of the model by 24 per cent even though two of the factors (GDP, childcare), did not provide significant effects on norms about childlessness. Gender equality, however, was strongly associated with norms about voluntary childlessness. Countries with high gender equality, such as Scandinavia, have had an earlier onset of the SDT (Oláh & Bernhardt, 2008) implying strong individualisation, and more emphasis on individual autonomy and decision making, emancipation and modernisation compared to Southern and Eastern European countries. Due to these timely different onsets of the SDT a

different development and advancement of changing individual norms, values and social norms has taken place in different countries across Europe.

The availability of childcare facilities did not associate significantly with norms about childlessness in the first place. However, less structural childcare facilities as one consequence of the dominating market economy now prevailing in the former communist and socialist countries did operate differently for individuals who are parents and those who are not.

7 Summary and conclusions

7.1 Summary

Due to large changes in childbearing behaviour across Europe – for example decreasing numbers of children, late entry into parenthood, and higher female labour participation – fertility norms might have changed too, within and across European countries. The aim of the present report was to give an overview of existing norms about fertility behaviour in present Europe. In this endeavour we tried to shed light on different types of fertility norms, differences in these norms across countries and to explain cross-national differences.

Clear norms regarding the timing, quantum and sequencing of fertility have been found. More or less strong lower and upper age deadlines existed in all countries. In other words, the life span within which reproduction is felt to be appropriate – what we term ‘social reproductive period’ – is much shorter than what is biologically feasible. Thus, across all countries, strong normative restrictions exist on the length of the reproductive period. With respect to quantum and sequencing norms clear differences were found among European countries. Childlessness is strongly disapproved of in many Eastern European countries as is having children while one cohabits unmarried. Nordic and Western European countries however showed less disapproval of those kinds of fertility behaviour.

Most strikingly, double standards with respect to female and male fertility behaviour persisted in all countries. Combining labour force participation and motherhood was far more disapproved of than labour force participation in combination with fatherhood. This double standard occurred in all countries. However, the absolute disapproval rates were highest in Eastern European and lowest in Scandinavian countries. Norms about parenting children while living in a consensual union differed across Europe as well, with higher disapproval rates in Eastern and Southern European countries compared to Northern and Western Europe. The largest differences among countries, however, were found with respect to norms about voluntary childlessness.

Interestingly, norms with respect to all types of fertility behaviours were often quite negative and disapproving, whereas the actual behaviours – such as combining work and motherhood, staying childless and having children while cohabiting – have become much more popular across Europe during the last decades. Especially the former socialist countries, such as the Ukraine, Bulgaria and Romania, highly disapproved of voluntary childlessness and unmarried parenthood. With respect to the combination of motherhood and full-time employment, a majority disapproved of that behaviour in many European countries, including Switzerland, The Netherlands and Austria.

Although a full examination of all factors that may shape these different norms was beyond the scope of the current report, some interesting findings have been presented. The more countries have advanced in the SDT process, the weaker the endorsement of certain norms was in these countries. For example, the disapproval of voluntary childlessness and the

disapproval of parenthood within a consensual union was stronger the less advanced countries were in the SDT process.

In Section 6 we further investigated the cross-national differences in norms about voluntary childlessness because most variation among countries was found with respect to this norm. Acceptance of voluntary childlessness was found to be determined by both cultural and institutional aspects. The higher the level of gender equality in a country, the lower the level of disapproval of voluntary childlessness is. In addition, the provision of state-regulated childcare turned out to be important. The length of the period during which state-provided childcare is available does not influence the opinions of childless people. Among people with children, though, parents in countries where a large childcare gap existed were more disapproving of voluntary childlessness than parents in countries where good parental leave and childcare arrangements existed.

7.2 *Conclusions*

Based on the results presented in this report, a number of conclusions on norms related to childbearing in Europe can be drawn. First, quite strong opinions on the appropriateness of specific aspects of childbearing behaviour ‘still’ exist in many European societies. This widespread existence of childbearing norms is remarkable, given that theories of modernisation - such as the SDT – expect an increase in the importance attached to individual autonomy and thus a weakening of normative constraints on demographic behaviour. The fact that norms are still important could imply a number of different things. It could be that the process of the SDT simply has not reached its final stages yet in some parts of Europe. Our finding that norms are weaker in Scandinavian countries – who are known to be frontrunners in the SDT process – and stronger in Eastern Europe – where the SDT has just recently gained some momentum – seems to underscore this view. At the same time, some other findings suggest that trends might be less linear than modernization theories lead us to expect. For instance, norms on the combination of motherhood and full-time employment are still quite strong in countries like The Netherlands, Austria and Switzerland, that are often thought to be quite far advanced in the SDT. In addition, the fact that minorities of people oppose to fathers combining a full-time job and having young children suggest that ‘new’ norms are being formed. In the past, no one would have objected to this combination, but nowadays in seven European countries more than ten per cent of respondents disapproves of men combining full-time employment and having children under the age of 3. This is even true for Sweden, that can be considered the ‘SDT-champion of the world’. Therefore, we might need to reconsider the role of norms even in countries that are well-advanced in the SDT process. It could be that people – even in this type of countries – are in need of scripts that offer guidelines for structuring their lives. These norms may be less binding than in the past, but may still have an important orienting function. If so, this could even imply that new norms are emerging. The norm that men should not want to combine parenthood with full-time employment – but rather opt for reduced working hours – could be one of these emerging norms.

Second, the results clearly show that norms on certain aspects of childbearing – in particular with regard to the lower and upper age deadline for having children and with regard to the appropriateness of combining fatherhood and full-time employment are highly similar across Europe. At the same time, large-scale cross-national variation is visible with regard to other norms. What our results also suggest, is that the variation within countries with regard to appropriate childbearing behaviour is much larger than the variation between countries. This attests to the need to increase our understanding of the factors that influence differences of opinion within specific countries.

Third, the results of our case study of childlessness norms suggest that the level of gender equality that has been established in a country is strongly linked to the strength of norms on childlessness. In countries where the level of gender equality is high, it might be commonplace to accept that both men and women make autonomous decisions about how to structure their lives. As a result, the decision not to have children is not met with much disapproval. Another important finding of this case study is that disapproval of voluntary childlessness is particularly widespread among parents in countries where a large ‘childcare gap’ exists. The childcare gap measures how much institutional support for caring for young children is provided for in a country. If this gap is small, childcare provision is large, whereas the latter is small in countries with a large childcare gap. It seems that parents who live in countries where they had to make relatively large sacrifices to have children are much more disapproving towards people who make the choice not to have children – and thus not to make these sacrifices themselves – than parents in countries where the costs of parenthood are smaller.

Fourth, we find clear evidence that a double standard continues to exist with regard to the combination of parenting young children and full-time employment. For men, this combination is widely accepted, presumably because they are not expected to spend much time on parenting activities anyway. For women, strong resistance to this combination is still pervasive in many European countries. A likely reason is that parenting is still considered mainly to be the task of the mother and that the parenting role may be thought to come under pressure if much time of the mother is consumed by work-related activities.

Fifth, the fact that we were only able to explain part of the variation between countries in childbearing norms underscores the need to pay attention to the specific cultural and historical context in which norms evolve and develop.

What policy implications can be drawn from these findings? If one accepts the assumption that the norms on childbearing-related behaviour that exist within a country have an impact on actual childbearing among the population, the most general implication is that policy makers should be aware of the strength of these norms. For instance, in countries where combining motherhood and full-time employment is strongly disapproved, policies that try to increase female labour force participation may not be as effective as in countries where combining motherhood and full-time employment is approved of.

Another policy implication is that – if norms influence actual behaviour – it might be useful to try to change norms that conflict with existing policy aims. Again, combining motherhood and full-time employment provides a compelling example. This double standard with regard to combining parenthood and labour force participation strongly discourages female labour force participation, motherhood and/or the combination of both in many countries. Such a prospect is particularly alarming to many European governments who try to increase either female labour force participation, or fertility, or both. How to overcome it? Given the high level of disapproval of this behaviour, policies that allow this disapproval to diminish may be highly effective in changing behaviour. Ways of doing so could be to show that it is actually quite feasible to combine both roles, or to show that the quality of existing childcare is high and that children are not in any way harmed if they spend a considerable amount of time in such childcare. Another potential avenue is to take the opposite road. Rather than trying to loosen norms on motherhood and full-time employment, one could try to strengthen norms on fatherhood and full-time employment. If successful, this could lead to fathers taking more responsibility for the actual parenting of their children, and this – in its turn – could allow mothers to increase their labour force participation.

Finally, the finding that disapproval of voluntary childlessness is weaker in countries where gender equality is high than in countries where gender equality is low, may have important implications. If the same relationship between gender equality and norms might

also hold for other norms, this could imply that a general policy to increase the position of females in society might indirectly translate into increased autonomy for women to make their own decisions. This increased autonomy could make it easier for women to ignore norms that conflict with their own interests, and it might – in the long run – even lead to a weakening of norms that restrict women’s decision-making autonomy in fertility-related issues.

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