Gender dynamics in couples' labour market preconditions to parenthood in Belgium and France

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Introduction

From the second half of the twentieth century onwards, Western countries have witnessed an unprecedented rise in female educational and labour force participation (England, 2010), and an according rise in dual earner households. The so-called gender revolution is, however, incomplete. The rise in gender equality in the public domain of the labour market is (yet) not mirrored by an equivalent shift towards higher gender equality in the private sphere of the household, i.e. higher involvement of men in household and childcare tasks (Goldscheider, Bernhardt, & Lappegård, 2015; McDonald, 2000). So, whereas men's stable employment has consistently been positively related to childbearing, the increase in female employment was initially perceived to have a negative effect on fertility (Goldscheider et al., 2015). In recent decades, however, female employment is increasingly becoming a prerequisite to family formation (Goldscheider et al., 2015), especially in contexts with high availability of work-family policies and supportive norms toward the work-family combination. This raises the question whether both partners' employment characteristics have become equally relevant with regard to the transition to parenthood.

Research has widely corroborated the importance of financial resources, job stability and time availability in fertility decisions and indicates that failure to meet these criteria typically entails postponement of parenthood (Jalovaara & Miettinen, 2013; Kreyenfeld, 2015; Vignoli, Drefahl, & De Santis, 2012; Wood, Vergauwen, & Neels, 2015). However, most research considers women and research exploring gender differentials in the link between employment (characteristics) and parenthood mostly examines men and women separately (Dribe & Stanfors, 2008; Hart, 2015; Liefbroer & Corijn, 1999; Pailhé & Solaz, 2012; Winkler-Dworak & Toulemon, 2007). Although these studies inform on different mechanisms in men and women, they fail to consider couple-level gender dynamics in childbearing decisions, i.e. whether different fertility decisions are made depending on the relative distribution of labour market resources between partners. To date, only a handful of studies have taken on a couple perspective (Begall, 2013; Inanc, 2015; Jalovaara & Miettinen, 2013; Kaufman & Bernhardt, 2012; Schmitt, 2012; Vignoli et al., 2012; Zhou & Kan, 2019): In the Netherlands, the female partner's education and earning potential most strongly predict childbearing (Begall, 2013), whereas in Italy, the male partner's employment and earnings are decisive in making the transition to parenthood (Jalovaara & Miettinen, 2013). Positive and gender neutral effects of employment and a higher income on the transition to parenthood were found in Finland (Jalovaara & Miettinen, 2013) and in Great Britain, the positive association between the traditional division of labour and fertility has been weakening over time (Zhou & Kan, 2019). Available research thus shows clear variation in couples' gendered labour market preconditions to parenthood between countries with different institutional and normative contexts. However, this research predominantly consists of single-country studies and thus fails to examine potential explanations for this cross-country variation.

Using detailed longitudinal microdata from the Belgian Administrative Socio-Demographic Panel (BASD) and the French Echantillon Démographique Permanent (EDP), we examine the potentially gendered link between partners' relative employment characteristics and the transition to parenthood in Belgium and France. Both countries exhibit similar employment rates – although those of France are slightly higher for both men and women compared to Belgium. However, the gender gap in both employment overall and part-time employment is somewhat higher in Belgium than in France. Furthermore, these two countries are similar with respect to their work-family reconciliation policies

as both countries are characterised as having explicitly genderizing[1] parental leave schemes on the one hand but degenderizing childcare policies on the other (Saxonberg, 2013). However, according to Ciccia and Verloo's (2012) fuzzy-set ideal type analysis, French family policies are still predominantly based on a traditional division of gender roles (the male breadwinner model), whereas Belgian family policies are based on contrasting aims of promoting maternal employment and securing familial care (the dual breadwinner model). Hence, the comparison of countries that are similar in some respects but different in others, may inform on the role of normative and institutional contexts in couples' gendered labour market preconditions to parenthood.

Data and methods

For Belgium, we use data from the Belgian Administrative Socio-Demographic Panel (ASD-Panel) that was constructed using microdata from the National Register and the Crossroads Bank for Social Security. The panel provides detailed longitudinal information on a representative sample of 108,511 women aged 15-50 years, legally residing in Belgium in the period from January 1st 1999 to December 31st 2010. To preserve the cross-sectional representativeness of the panel throughout the observation period, annual top-up samples of 15-year olds were drawn, as well as annual samples of women aged 16-50 years who settled in Belgium in the preceding year. In addition to the sampled women, the panel includes all household members residing in these women's households on the first of January of each observation year. As a result, the panel provides a representative sample of heterosexual co-resident couples. The ASD Panel provides detailed quarterly information on labour market positions and income of all household members, as well as annual information on household composition.

For France, we use data from the Echantillon Démographique Permanent (EDP) that is constructed by the Insee (Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques) using microdata from five different sources: i) Vital Statistics, ii) population censuses, iii) the General Register of voters, iv) a panel of employed persons, and v) social and tax data. From 1968 onwards, the panel provides information on individuals born on certain days of the year (between the 2nd and 5th of January, the 1st and 4th of April, July or Octobre) and allows to study demographic events, socio-economic trajectories and geographical, residential, professional and social mobility.

We observe nulliparous women who are aged 18 and older, no longer enrolled in education and have a co-resident partner. The sample is further restricted to couples where both partners are employed. Couples are followed until i) their first child is born, ii) until the female partner reaches the age of 45 (the presumed end of women's reproductive life span) iii) until the couple separates, or iv) until censoring occurs as a result of mortality, emigration or reaching the end of the observation period on December 31st 2010. For Belgium, the analytic sample provides 133,130 couple-quarters for 13,822 couples of which 5,632 had their first child between the third quarter of 2000 and the fourth quarter of 2010.

We estimate discrete-time hazard models of conception leading to a first birth using a logit link function. The dependent variable takes on a value of 1 at the moment of conception and a value of 0 at all other time points. We analyse conception leading to a first birth, being the event lagged with 4 quarters, rather than the actual birth to avoid reverse causation in the parameter estimates.

The baseline hazard function models the conception risk as a quadratic function of the number of quarters elapsed since the quarter in which women had their 18th birthday. As timing of the first birth is closely associated with women's level of education, we also include the interaction s between level

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[1] Genderizing policies are policies that promote different gender roles for men and women (Saxonberg, 2013). Degenderizing policies are policies that promote the elimination of gender roles (Saxonberg, 2013).

of education of the female partner and the baseline hazard function. Furthermore, we include the household income and the relative distribution of this household income between partners, the household working percentage and the relative distribution of this working percentage between partners and the household past employment intensity and partners' share of this household past employment intensity. Also time-varying gender-specific indicators of flexibility in partners' employment sectors are constructed and added to the model. Finally, we control for a number of socio-demographic characteristics that have been shown to affect the probability of having a first child: civil status, migration background of the couple, region and time-varying age- and gender-specific unemployment rates.

Preliminary results

Table 1 shows the results of the logit models of conceptions leading to a first birth for Belgium. The relative distribution of income between partners is not related to the transition to parenthood, suggesting that the responsibility to provide sufficient financial resources is no longer gendered along the traditional lines in dual earner couples in Belgium. Furthermore, the female partner having a low(er) past employment intensity than her partner – meaning that she spent less time in employment in the preceding year than her male partner, indicating lower job stability - is negatively associated with couples' first birth hazards. As women have lower job stability, future access to flexible work arrangements (e.g. parental leave) may be uncertain, hence negatively affecting the decision to have a first child. Controlling for the relative distribution of income between partners, women's higher working percentage is negatively associated with the transition to parenthood. This gendered effect suggests that time availability of the female partner is still of primary importance in view of the transition to parenthood. Finally, flexibility in both partners' employment sectors is positively associated with the transition to parenthood. This positive link is more articulated, however, in couples where the female partner has high and the male partner has low flexibility than in couples where the female partner has low and the male partner high flexibility. As a result, particularly high flexibility in the female partner's employment sector – and thus her possibility to have or make time to care for a child – is positively associated with the transition to parenthood. Overall, our results suggest that there is a shift away from a traditionally gendered fulfilment of labour market preconditions to parenthood in dual earner couples in Belgium, certainly with regard to income, but not unambiguously towards gender neutral patterns. Particularly time availability and access to flexible work regimes of the female partner rather than the male partner strongly affect couples' transition to parenthood, which may be related to gender role expectations with respect to care provision. In contrast, the effect of income seems to have become gender neutral.

Future work

The presented results are preliminary results for Belgium. In the course of the following months, these analyses will be re-worked and similar analyses will be done for France as we have the EDP-data already at our disposal. Analysing the link between partners' employment characteristics and the transition to parenthood in a similar way in both Belgium and France may inform on the role of normative and institutional contexts in the employment-fertility link.

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Table 2. Logit models of conceptions leading to a first birth, BELGIUM

| | Conception leading to a first birth (1) versus no conception (0) | | | | | |
| | Model I | | Model II | | Model III | |
	OR	sig.	OR	sig.	OR	sig.
Constant	0.003	***	0.005	***	0.004	***
Time						
Linear	1.102	***	1.099	***	1.099	***
Quadratic	0.999	***	0.999	***	0.999	***
Level of education (ref. High)						
Low	9.237	***	8.974	***	8.943	***
Middle	5.686	***	5.607	***	5.624	***
Unknown	1.113		1.063		1.062	
Education*Quarters since 18 (linear)						
Low	0.911	***	0.913	***	0.913	***
Middle	0.932	***	0.933	***	0.933	***
Unknown	0.986		0.987		0.987	
Education*Quarters since 18 (quadratic)						
Low	1.001	***	1.001	***	1.001	***
Middle	1.001	***	1.001	***	1.001	***
Unknown	1.000		1.000		1.000	
Household income	1.001	***	1.001	***	1.001	***
Relative income (ref. equal)						
Man higher			0.919		0.921	
Woman higher			1.006		1.008	
Household past employment intensity	1.003	***	1.003	**	1.003	**
Relative past employment intensity (ref. equal)						
Man higher			0.893	*	0.895	*
Woman higher			1.090		1.089	
Household work percentage	1.003		1.001		1.002	
Relative work percentage (ref. equal)						
Man higher			0.985		0.983	
Woman higher			0.778	**	0.750	***
Relative sector-specific flexibility (ref. both low)						
Woman low, man high flexibility					1.087	
Woman high, man low flexibility					1.068	*
Both high flexibility					1.168	**
Married (ref. cohabiting)	2.096	***	2.096	***	2.096	***
Migration background couple (ref. Belgian-Belgian)						
Woman 1st generation - Man 1st generation	1.215	*	1.224	*	1.214	*
Man 2nd generation	1.054		1.070		1.068	
Man Belgian	0.805	**	0.833	*	0.828	**
Woman 2nd generation - Man 1st generation	1.462	***	1.432	***	1.440	***
Man 2nd generation	1.156		1.157		1.159	
Man Belgian	0.991		0.993		0.991	
Woman Belgian - Man 1st generation	1.067		1.046		1.052	
Man 2nd generation	0.944		0.941		0.944	
Unknown	0.698	**	0.696	**	0.692	**
Unemployment rate						
Female	0.997		0.997		0.976	
Male	0.985	**	0.984	***	0.984	***
Region (ref. Flanders)						
Wallonia	1.227	***	1.228	***	1.220	***
Brussels	0.976		0.979		0.969	
N couple quarters	133,130		133,130		133,130	
N couples	13,822		13,822		13,822	

*Significance levels: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001*
Source: BASD Panel 1999-2010, calculations by authors