

Two children – still an ideal in the Czech Republic? Social acceptability vs. measurement artefact

Beatrice Chromková Manea, Ladislav Rabušic
manea@fss.muni.cz
rabu@fss.muni.cz

In light of the ongoing very low levels of fertility and population ageing in the developed countries, many studies focus on measuring fertility preferences, ideals, desires and final outcomes. Skirbekk and Testa (2006) reflect on the differences between realized and ideal fertility levels and called this phenomenon the *Low-Fertility Trap Hypothesis*. Although the Czech Republic is among the countries with the lowest level of fertility, the ideal family size continues to be two children (e.g. Rabušic and Chromková, 2013). Previous studies suggest that the low fertility trap hypothesis could be justified even in the Czech environment (Rabušic and Chromková Manea, 2013). If the ideal family size is correlated with the actual number of children, then given the long term low fertility level (it has been less than 1.5 since 1994 with slightly increase in 2018 to 1.6), the new generations of Czechs grow in an environment, where the norm (standard) is a family with a small number of children. This phenomenon, which Goldstein et al. (2003) name the "downward spiral of desired fertility", may affect, as Lutz and his colleagues (Lutz et al. 2006) foresaw, their future fertility intentions and subsequent reproduction behaviour.

However, the mismatch between the desired fertility ideal and realized one could be also caused by the way how we measure ideals and preferences. Hin and colleagues (Hin et al. 2011) argue that the '**two children**' might be an expression of indecision or '*I don't know*' answer. In their opinion, social undesirability that deviates from the social norm of two, put pressure on people to declare that they would like to have two children. We argue that people should be asked about their alternative fertility preferences in order to determine their real ideals.

The goal of this contribution is to explore ideal family size of the Czech population by use of an adapted measurement. We assume that by using subsequence options for the ideal number of children, we can bring new evidence in understanding fertility levels.

We work with the following research questions: 1) How do Czech respondents state their (subsequent) fertility ideals? 2) What are the main socio-demographic determinants of the ideal family sizes? 3) Is two

children a result of social acceptability or a measurement artefact? The analyses are based on data from two surveys: Czech Household Panel Survey (4 waves since 2015) and an ad-hoc survey run in 2015.

Methodology - variables

Our measurement for the ideal number of children is derived for the Coombs' scale. The Coombs' measures of family size preferences predict subsequent fertility behaviour more accurately than simple single-question preference measures (e.g. Coombs 1974, 1978, 1979). Coombs' scale is coded as an ordinal measure that varies from 1 to 16: 1 reflects preferences for small families and 16 reflects preferences for large families. Using the Coombs scale, for example, one can distinguish between a person who answers at the first question "one child" but for whom 1 is the maximum desired number of children, and a person who answers the first question "one child" but for whom 1 is the minimum desired number of children.

The scale provides latent desires about having a smaller or larger number of children, and upper and lower limits of desirable family size. Moreover, the good predictive ability has been shown in the studies.

We used the following sequence of questions to be tested:

Q1. What is the ideal number of children for you personally to have?

- 1) 3 children ▶ Go to question **Q2.1**
- 2) 2 children ▶ Go to question **Q2.2**
- 3) 1 child ▶ Go to question **Q2.3**
- 4) I would like to have more children
- please provide the number ▶ Go to question **Q2.4 and answer**
- 5) I do not want to have any children ▶ Go to question **Q2.5**

Q2.1. If you could not have three children because of various reasons, but you can choose between 2 and 4 children to have, how many would you like to have: 2 or 4?

Q2.2. If you could not have two children because of various reasons, but you can choose between 1 and 3 children to have, how many would you like to have: 1 or 3?

Q2.3. If you could not have one child because of various reasons, but you can choose between 0 and 1 child to have, how many would you like to have: 0 or 1?

Q2.4. If you could not have the number of children you mentioned previously in the question Q1 because of various reasons, but you can choose between having one child less or one child more than the one you mentioned, how many would you like to have?

Q2.5. Even though it is your ideal not to have any children and if this ideal cannot be fulfilled, how many children at maximum would you accept to have?

Data

The paper makes use of two datasets. First data was collected within the Czech Household Panel Study that has been running since 2015 (4 waves – one-year interval). We will mostly work with data from the third wave (2017). The second dataset comes from an ad-hoc survey conducted at the end of 2015 on Czech adult population (approximately 1 100 respondents) where we tested the ideal family size measurements based on an adapted Coombs' scale. The questions on fertility ideals were part of larger questionnaires, which focused on various issues. Data from the Czech Household Panel Study allows us to study fertility ideals in a more detailed perspective as the questionnaire included questions on both family, partnership or employment history, and attitudes and norms. It also gives us the chance to look at the possible differences in preferences between partners.

Analytical framework

The first part of the analysis is concerned with the extent to which the new measurement is appropriate. Further on, we will look at whether there are differences in fertility ideals by various socio-demographic variables. This analysis is addressed by descriptive statistics and it has an exploratory character.

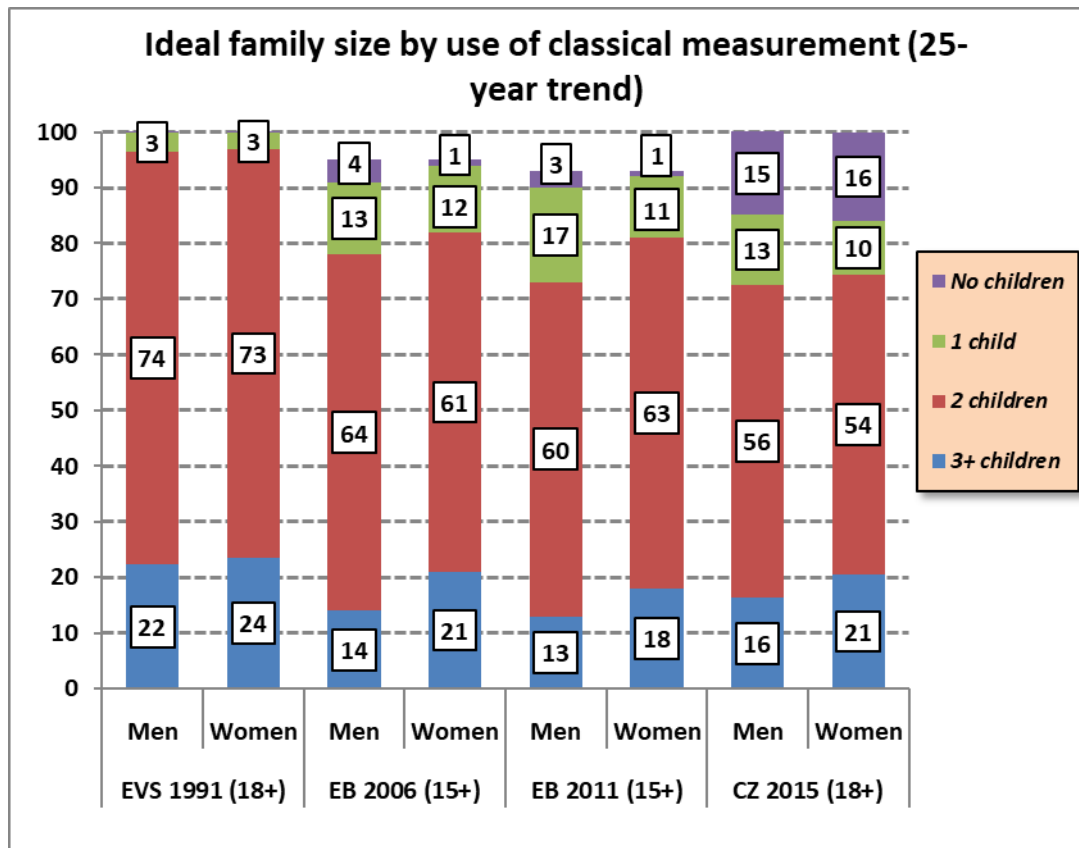
Findings

Due to the fact that data collection for the Czech Household Panel Study (last wave) is still to be completed (data cleaning and harmonization still in progress) and the questions we work with are thematically grouped and were asked in various waves, we are not able to include and discuss all results in the present extended abstract. However, we will be able to present final result during the EPC session next year.

Bellow can be found some of the results based on the ad-hoc survey (the second data source) run at the end of 2015.

The first graph illustrates the ideal family size by use of classical questionnaire measurement. We can observe that the “two-children” ideal is still chosen by more than half of the adult population in 2015. A decrease by 25% can be observed between 1991 and 2015. An important change in the preference for no children model took place in the studied period – whereas childlessness was not preferred at all in 1991, 15% of all adult respondents prefer this “no children” model in 2015.

Figure 1. Ideal family size by use of classical measurement



It is necessary to mention that there are small differences in the way how questions on ideal family size were phrased in these surveys. In the EVS 1991 questionnaire the question was asked in a general way: *In your opinion, what is the ideal family size?* The Eurobarometer 2006 and 2011 operates with two different questions on ideal family size: at a general level (the same as in EVS 1991) and at personal level - *for you personally, what would be the ideal number of children you would like to have or would have liked to have had?* The 2015 question was phrased to express the ideal family size at the personal level - *for you personally, what would be the ideal number of children you would like to have?*

The next figure illustrates the ideal family size measured by an adapted Coombs' scale. The results are based on data from the ad-hoc survey that will be amended by new data from the Czech Household Panel Survey (still incomplete by the time of submission). Results are presented only for respondents in the reproductive age separately for men and women. The figure also presents the ideal family size by use of classical question (at personal level) and real number of children.

Figure 2. Ideal family size by Coombs' and classical measurements, and real number of children (2015)

