

Ambivalence and Uncertainty in Reproductive Decision-Making

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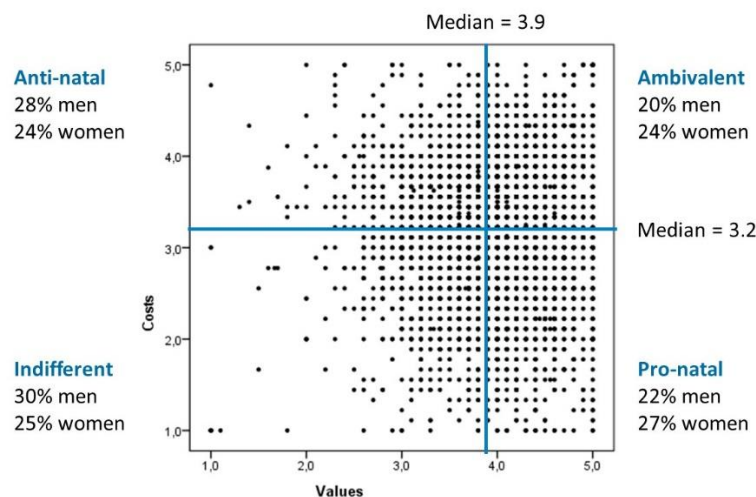
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Childbearing decisions are loaded with uncertainty. Polish Generations and Gender Survey (GGS-PL) data show that almost 40% of respondents answer “probably yes” or “probably no” when asked about their intention to have a child in the next three years. It remains unclear, however, whether their doubts are related to the given time perspective or whether the respondents are unsure about the idea of having a (another) child at all. Also the long term intentions are often stated as uncertain. To shed light onto this issue, I will investigate how positive, negative and ambivalent attitudes towards childbearing relate to fertility intentions and whether they can explain uncertainty in reproductive decision-making.

The analyses will be performed using the Polish GGS. In the second wave of the survey, scales on perceived costs and benefits of parenthood were introduced in Poland to measure the strength of positive and negative feelings about childbearing. The scales allow us to identify four categories of respondents:

- Pro-natal, who clearly favour parenthood – perceive high benefits and low costs related to having children;
- Anti-natal, who perceive low benefits and high costs of childbearing;
- Indifferent, who perceive low costs and low benefits of parenthood;
- Ambivalent, who express strong conflicting feelings about having children – perceive both high costs and high benefits of having children.

First attempt to categorize the respondents used the approach inspired by Miller’s motivational quadrants (Miller, Jones, & Pasta, 2016; Miller, Trent, & Chung, 2014). The results for the GGS-PL wave 2 sample of 4147 men and women, aged 18-39, are presented below.



In the paper, the characteristics of the four categories of the respondents will be explored and their fertility intentions will be examined. Particular attention will be paid to how different attitudes towards childbearing are linked to uncertainty in short-term and long-term childbearing intentions.

In the next step, I will attempt to perform similar analyses, based on the first wave of the Polish GGS, which contains only a few, standard questions on attitudes towards children. While it will be more challenging to perform a parallel categorization using the standard GGS questions, it may open new important opportunities for cross-national comparisons and more insightful research on sources and consequences of ambivalence in reproductive decision-making.

References:

- Miller, W. B., Jones, J., & Pasta, D. (2016). An implicit ambivalence-indifference dimension of childbearing desires in the National Survey of Family Growth. *Demographic Research*, 34(7), 203-242. Retrieved from <http://www.demographic-research.org/volumes/vol34/7/>
- Miller, W. B., Trent, M., & Chung, S. E. (2014). Ambivalent Childbearing Motivations: Predicting Condom Use by Urban, African-American, Female Youth. *J Pediatr Adolesc Gynecol*, 27(3), 151-160. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpag.2013.09.009>