The Usefulness of Describing Childbirths from Different Perspectives – Some Example from a Hungarian Birth Cohort Study

Author: Balázs Kapitány

Contact: kapitany@demografia.hu

Abstract (250 words max)

Demographers mostly use the perspective of women when they analyse research questions related to fertility, parity or life-course events.

The aim of this paper is very simple: to illustrate the usefulness of parallel perspectives of different 'stakeholders', when we describe demographic events related to childbearing. We can look at a demographic phenomenon as childbearing not only from the perspective of woman, but from the perspective of the child or from the father; grandparent, usw. A child cohort study with strong demographic roots – especially when it starts before the birth, as the Cohort '18 – Growing Up In Hungary Study - gives an excellent opportunity for applying and demonstrating these 'different but parallel' perspectives.

Sometimes the results are similar regardless of the point of view. However, we can find remarkable differences too. For example in the cases of 'third children' the chance that a 'third child' (using the term from mothers perspective) have more than two siblings is 18%. (Only the full and half-siblings, without step-siblings!). In this situation the chance to have 'only' two classical siblings is only 64%. The picture is different again, when we use the point of view of the biological father: 10% of 'third child' is a first child of his/her father and 11% is a second one. Finally, the data are different again from the perspective of the 'family': 16% of each 'third child' is the first common child of her/his parents.

The use of parallel perspectives can give new impetus to demographic research.

Extended Abstract (2-4 pages)

Demographers mostly use the perspective of women when they analyse research questions related to fertility, parity or life-course events.

Using the term of 'Family size' in demography is an exaggerated example of this. When demographers or even the BBC speak about family size, it is not rare, that they speak about the number of children of mothers. (Blake 1989; Livingston 2017; Brée 2017; BBC 2018)

The aim of this paper is very simple: to illustrate the usefulness of parallel perspectives of different 'stakeholders', when we describe demographic events related to childbearing. We can look at a demographic phenomenon as childbearing not only from the perspective of woman, but from the perspective of the child or from the father; grandparent, usw.

Of course, using the male's (Dudel-Klüsener 2016; Nordfalk et al 2015; Petren 2017) or the child's perspective (Bernstein 1997; Cancian et al 2011) in the demography is not a novelty. However, when these analyses change the perspective, they replace the mother's perspective with the father's or child's one, but don't use parallelly them.

A child cohort study with strong demographic roots – especially when it starts before the birth, as the Cohort '18 – Growing Up In Hungary Study (about the study: Veroszta 2019) - gives an excellent

opportunity for applying and demonstrating these 'different but parallel' perspectives. With this dataset we can describe demographic events around the childbirth not only from the perspective of mothers but from the perspective of the new-born babies or from the perspective of the biological fathers.

Sometimes the results are similar regardless of the point of view. (Example 1) However, we can find remarkable differences too. (Example 2. 3.)

Some examples:

1. Partnership status at childbirth (from the perspective of the biological mother vs biological father)

The partnership status of the mother (in cohabiting partnership or not or without any partner) strongly correlates with the presence of the baby's biological father – at least in Hungary. The 7th months pregnant women live together with a person who is not the biological father of the new-born baby only in a very few cases. (In the Cohort '18 – Growing Up In Hungary Study the mothers were interviewed firstly at the 7th months of their pregnancy. In this text we describe this moment in a simplistic way, as 'the time of birth'.) That is, if a mother has a cohabiting partner at the time of birth, it is very likely that the new-born baby has co-resident father as well.

2. Number of children / siblings (from the perspective of the mother vs. child vs. father vs. 'family')

The decreasing fertility, the decreasing family size among mothers in Hungary increases the chance that someone will be born as his/her mother's first child, without any sibling (1990: 44%; 2019: 47%). But from the child's perspective, the increasing complexity of families improves their chance of being a half-sibling. Today, 11% of the first-born children in Hungary have already at least one sibling at the time of birth: a paternal half-sibling. (see Tab 1)

Table 1. *Family size among mothers and number of (full- or half-)siblings of the new born baby*

from the perspective of mother: number of children (alive)	from the baby's perspective: number of siblings (full or half)						Total
	0	1	2	3	4	5+	
1	89%	6%	3%	1%	0%	0%	100% n:3193
2	-	88%	8%	3%	1%	1%	100% n:2768
3	-	-	82%	8%	6%	4%	100% n:1161
4+	-	-	-	45%	19%	36%	100% n: 567
Total	42%	32%	15%	5%	3%	2%	100% n:8409

Source: Cohort '18 – Growing Up In Hungary, 1st wave: period of pregnancy, child sample N=8,409

The chance to have more than two siblings is 18% when it comes to the perspective of a third baby. (Only the full and half-siblings, without step-siblings!). In this situation the chance to have 'only' two classical siblings is only 64% (see Tab 2).

Table 2. *Family size among mothers and type of siblings of the new-born baby*

|	from the baby's perspective: type of siblings	Total

from the perspective of mother: number of children (alive)	no sibling	only uterine-sibling(s)	only half-sibling(s) - the father is common	half-sibling (both type) but no full-sibling(s)	only full-sibling(s)	full and half-siblings too	
1	89%	-	11%	-	-	-	100% n:3193
2	-	12%	-	4%	76%	8%	100% n:2768
3	-	10%	-	6%	64%	20%	100% n:1161
4+	-	11%	-	7%	45%	37%	100% n: 567
Total	42%	6%	5%	3%	37%	8%	100%

Source: Cohort '18 – Growing Up In Hungary, 1st wave: period of pregnancy, child sample N=8,409

The picture is different again, when we use the point of view of the biological father: 10% of 'third child' is a first child of his/her father and 11% is a second one. Finally, the data are different again from the perspective of the 'family': 16% of each 'third child' is the first common child of her/his parents.

Figure 1.a ***"Third children" – from the perspective of biological father***
Figure 1.b ***"Third children' – from the perspective of the 'family' (Number of common children)***
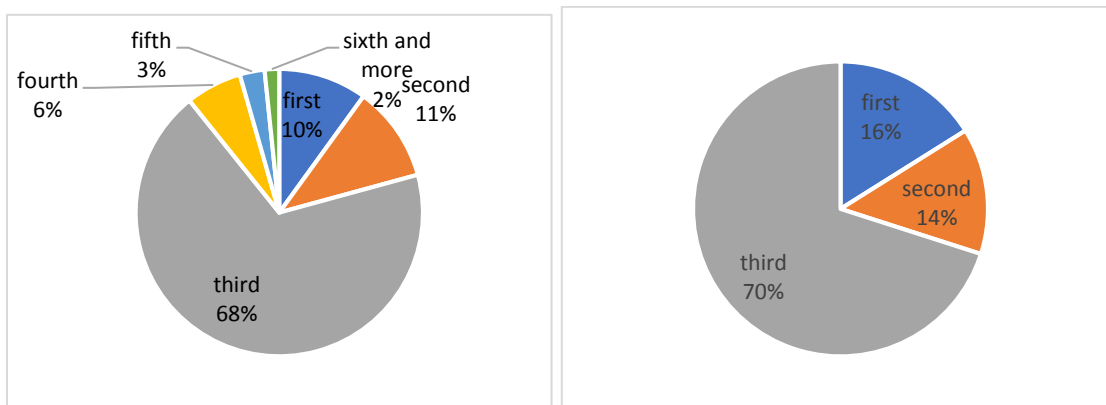
Source: Cohort '18 – Growing Up In Hungary, 1st wave: period of pregnancy, child sample N=1,161

3. Partnership pathways to the first child (from the perspective of the 'would be' biological mother vs biological father)

The database also provides an opportunity to illustrate that men and women in which partnership of their lives, after how long time (spent together or independently) have their first child.The results show that motherhood typically occurs at a younger age than fatherhood. (It is not a novelty.) However, becoming a mother typically occurs after a longer and more complex partnership history than becoming a father.

Some lessons:

In the last years life-course researches and especially the multiprocess analysis is more and more popular in interpreting demographic processes. (pl. Kulu – Steele 2013; Guzzo 2017; Mikolai - Kulu 2018; Rutigliano - Esping-Andersen 2018) In these analysis researchers investigate the relationships

and interactions of more then one demographic event (eg. childbearing, housing changes) in a person's life.

The use of parallel perspectives can give new impetus to demographic research in other ways. In these cases, we hope to gain a better understanding of a demographic event by examining and interpreting it from the perspective of more than one person. When using parallel perspectives, the linked lives approach (Settersten 2015) could be useful as a theoretical framework.

References

BBC (2018): Family size shrinks to record low of 1.89 children source: https://www.bbc.com/news/health-46303120

Bernstein, A. C. (1997). Stepfamilies from siblings' perspectives. Marriage and Family Review, 26, 153–175.

Brée, Sandra (2017): Changes in Family Size over the Generations in France (1850-1966) in.: Population 2017/2 (Vol. 72) 297 - 332

Blake, Judith (1989) Family Size and Achievement. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Cancian, M. - Meyer, D.R; - Cook, S. T. (2011) "The Evolution of Family Complexity from the Perspective of Nonmarital Children," Demography 48 (2011): 957–982.

Dudel, C., Klüsener, S.,(2016): Estimating male fertility in eastern and western Germany since 1991: a new lowest low? Demographic Research, 35:53, 1549-1560

Guzzo, K. B. (2017). Is Stepfamily Status Associated With Cohabiting and Married Women's Fertility Behaviors? Demography, 54, 45–70.

Kulu, H., & Steele, F. (2013). Interrelationships between childbearing and housing transitions in the family life course. Demography, 50, 1687–1714.

Mikolai, Júlia - Kulu, Hill. (2018) Divorce, Separation, and Housing Changes: A Multiprocess Analysis of Longitudinal Data from England and Wales in: Demography (2018) ebruary Volume 55, Issue 1, pp 83–106 https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-017-0640-9

Livingston, Gretchen (2015) Childlessness Falls, Family Size Grows Among Highly Educated Women in: Pew Research Center Social & Demographic Trends 2015, Washington DC https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2015/05/2015-05-07_children-ever-born_FINAL.pdf

Nordfalk, F. - Hvidtfeldt, U. A. - Keiding N (2015): TFR for males in Denmark: Calculation and tempo-correction Demographic Research, 32:52, 1421–1434

Petren R. E. (2017). Paternal Multiple Partner Fertility and Environmental Chaos Among Unmarried Nonresident Fathers. Journal of social service research, 43(1), 100–114.

Rutigliano, R., & Esping-Andersen, G. (2018). Partnership Choice and Childbearing in Norway and Spain. European journal of population = Revue europeenne de demographie, 34(3), 367–386. doi:10.1007/s10680-017-9432-6

Settersten, Richard. (2015). Relationships in Time and the Life Course: The Significance of Linked Lives. Research in Human Development. 12. 217-223. 10.1080/15427609.2015.1071944.

Veroszta, Zsuzsanna (ed.) (2019): Conceptual framework. Growing Up in Hungary – Cohort '18. Hungarian birth cohort study. Working Papers on Population, Family and Welfare, No. 32, Hungarian Demographic Research Institute, Budapest