

Spanish Fertility: How Low Can It Go?

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Short abstract

In 1991, Spain was the first country (together with Italy) in the world to cross the ‘lowest-low fertility’ threshold of 1,3 children per woman. Since then, Spain has been increasingly alluded to in the demographic literature. Despite such allusions, existing research lacks in-depth analysis about why Spanish fertility has remained so low for such a long period of time. To fill this gap, this study presents an overview of recent fertility patterns in Spain using data from “long awaited” and Spanish Fertility Survey, held in 2018. First, we examine the reproductive trajectories of men and women born between 1965 and 1989 over the life-course and by educational attainment. Second, we investigate the short-term reproductive intentions and the reasons for not having (more) children among women and men at the time of the survey by parity-specific fertility. Third, we examine the implications of emancipation, union formation, and work for transition probabilities to first-child based on the experiences of women and men born in Spain between 1965 and 1989.

Introduction

After twenty years without a fertility survey in Spain, the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística* (INE; Spanish Statistics Institute) has recently released a new fertility survey conducted in 2018 among 14,556 women and 2,619 men born between 1962 and 2000. This survey allows for a more detailed understanding of women’s and men’s reproductive trajectories and intentions in Spain, a country with a fertility rate below 1,5 children per women since the mid 1980s and that was the first in the world (together with Italy) to cross, back in 1991, the ‘lowest-low fertility’ threshold of 1,3 children per women (Kohler et al. 2002). Since then, Spain has been increasingly alluded to in the demographic literature, both directly and as a reference to Southern European countries. Low fertility in this region has been associated with a late emancipation, and a precarious employment situation among young adults, as well as with traditional gender values and systems (e.g. Billari & Kohler 2004; Sobotka 2004). Despite such allusions to Spanish fertility, existing research lacks in-depth analysis about why Spanish fertility has remained so low for such a long period of time (Bernardi & Requena 2003; Castro-Martín & Martín-García 2016; Esteve et al. 2016).

To fill this gap, this study presents an overview of recent fertility patterns in Spain based on the newly released data of the 2018 survey. The structure of the analysis is divided into three main blocks. First, we examine the reproductive trajectories of men and women born between 1965 and 1989 over the life-course and by educational attainment. Second, we investigate the short-term reproductive intentions and the reasons for not having a

(another) child among women and men at the time of the survey by parity-specific fertility. Third, we examine the implications of emancipation, union formation, and work for transition probabilities to first-child based on the experiences of women and men born in Spain between 1965 and 1989.

Data and Method

We use data from the *Encuesta de Fecundidad* (Spanish National Fertility Survey) conducted by the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística* (INE; Spanish Statistics Institute) in 2018 among 14,556 women and 2,619 men born between 1962 and 2000. Our analysis is restricted to men and women born in Spain between 1965 and 1989. Thus, we excluded migrant women and men. The final sample consists of 15,130 individuals (12,808 female and 2,322 male) aged 18-50. Women and men are sampled independently. This allows us to compare men and women across multiple dimensions, which is rarely possible in fertility surveys. The survey contains retrospective information about fertility, residential, union and work trajectories. It also provides information about reproductive desires, intentions and reasons for (not) having children, plus other variables such as partner characteristics, values, attitudes, amongst other. In this paper, we mainly focus on reproductive trajectories and intentions. Depending on the topic, we alternated between cohort and cross-sectional perspectives.

Preliminary results

1. The survey data reaffirmed that fertility rates of cohorts born in Spain since 1962 were low and never exceeded 1.5 children per woman (1.45 children per man), and that infertility levels were high and close to 20 % (25 % for men). No trends of recovery were observed among the youngest generations (see Figure 1).
2. Fertility differences by educational level reproduce the traditional educational gradient (higher education, lower fertility for women and higher fertility for men) without clear evidence of a possible gradient inversion among female younger generations, as it did, for instance, in the Nordic countries or the United States (see Figure 2).
3. The observed fertility is at least 0.5 children below the desired fertility, set at 2 children per woman, and almost one child below what would be observed if the intentions of men and women to have a child were to be materialized within the next three years (see Figure 3).
4. Main reasons for not having children reported by men and women at different age and parity generally refer to their lack of desire for having children, being too young, not having a partner, difficulties to balance work and family, and reproductive health problems. The weight of these reasons varies according to age and parity (see Figure 4).
5. The in-depth analysis of life course trajectories (i.e: emancipation, partnering, work and fertility trajectories) shows the importance of being emancipated and, especially, having a stable partner between the ages of 25 and 35 for fertility. Interestingly, female employment stability has little predictive ability on its own (see Figures 5 and 6).

Discussion

The relevance of our results goes beyond the Spanish context, as they are also useful at the theoretical level, especially to understand and conceptualize low fertility in

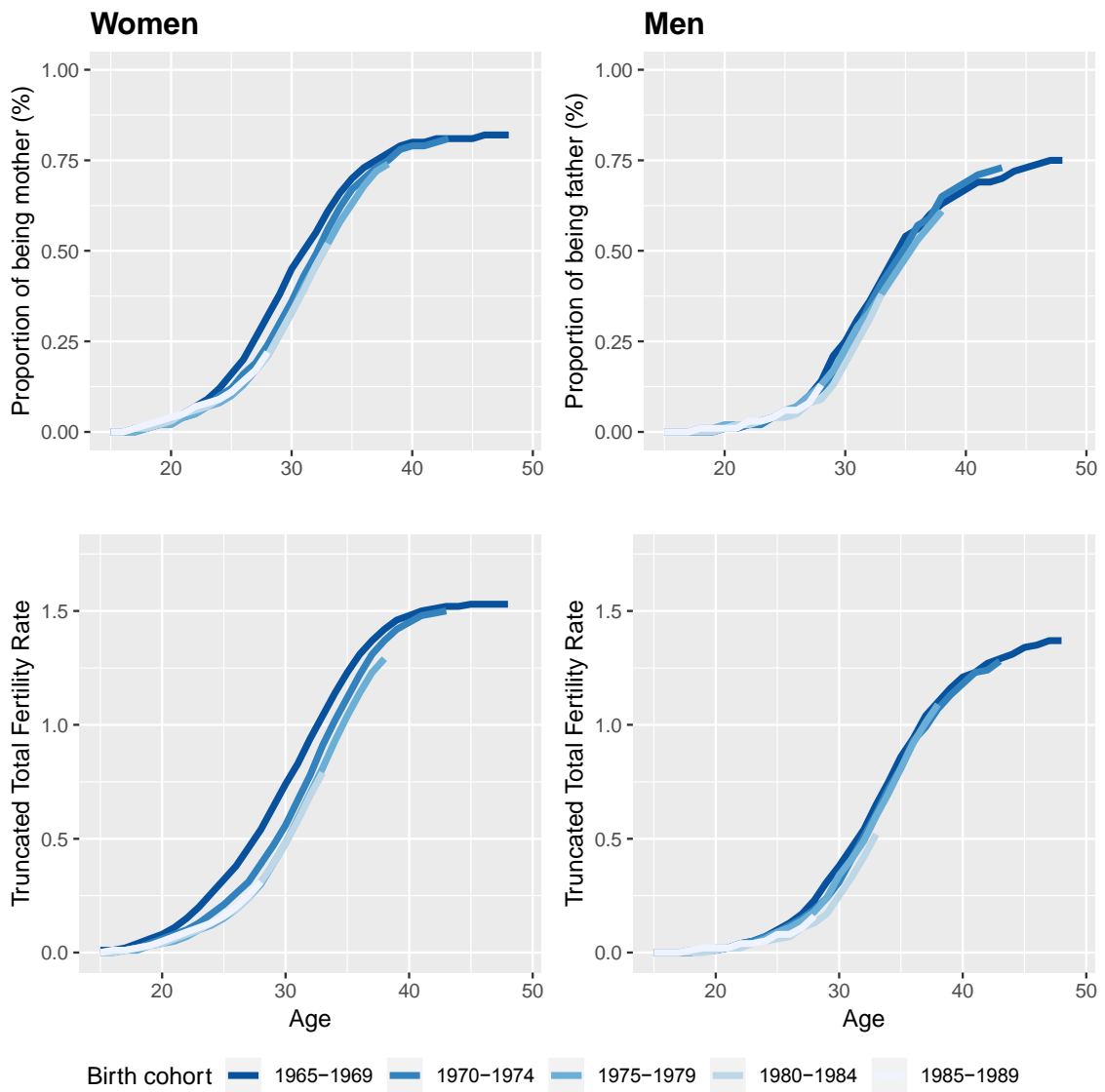
developed countries that do not reach the desired fertility of two children per woman. Our results brings a wide perspective to examine fertility in a dynamic way. Reasons for not having children vary according to age and parity and are strongly influenced by other life course events such as emancipation from the parental home and peoples' partnering trajectories. As life course theories already claimed, events in one life domain will impact events in other life domains, called "parallel careers" (Elder 1985).

Although the cross-sectional nature of our database does not allow us to examine reasons for not having children throughout the life cycle, the distribution by sex, age and parity of these reasons suggests that the reasons do not accumulate, but rather succeed over time. At early ages, before 25 years old, people tend to report being too young to be a parent, later structural and couple availability reasons appear, and finally infertility issues emerge. The desired infertility is relatively low and barely represents 10 % of both women and men. Our results emphasize that having a partner and being economically independent between the ages of 25 and 35 years are the main factors associated with the probability of having a first child. These results call for examining the relationship between emancipation, stable couple and fertility in an international context. What would be the difference in fertility between Spain and Sweden if they had similar levels of emancipation and partnership formation? Recent trends in Spain regarding these aspects do not predict a promising future for fertility.

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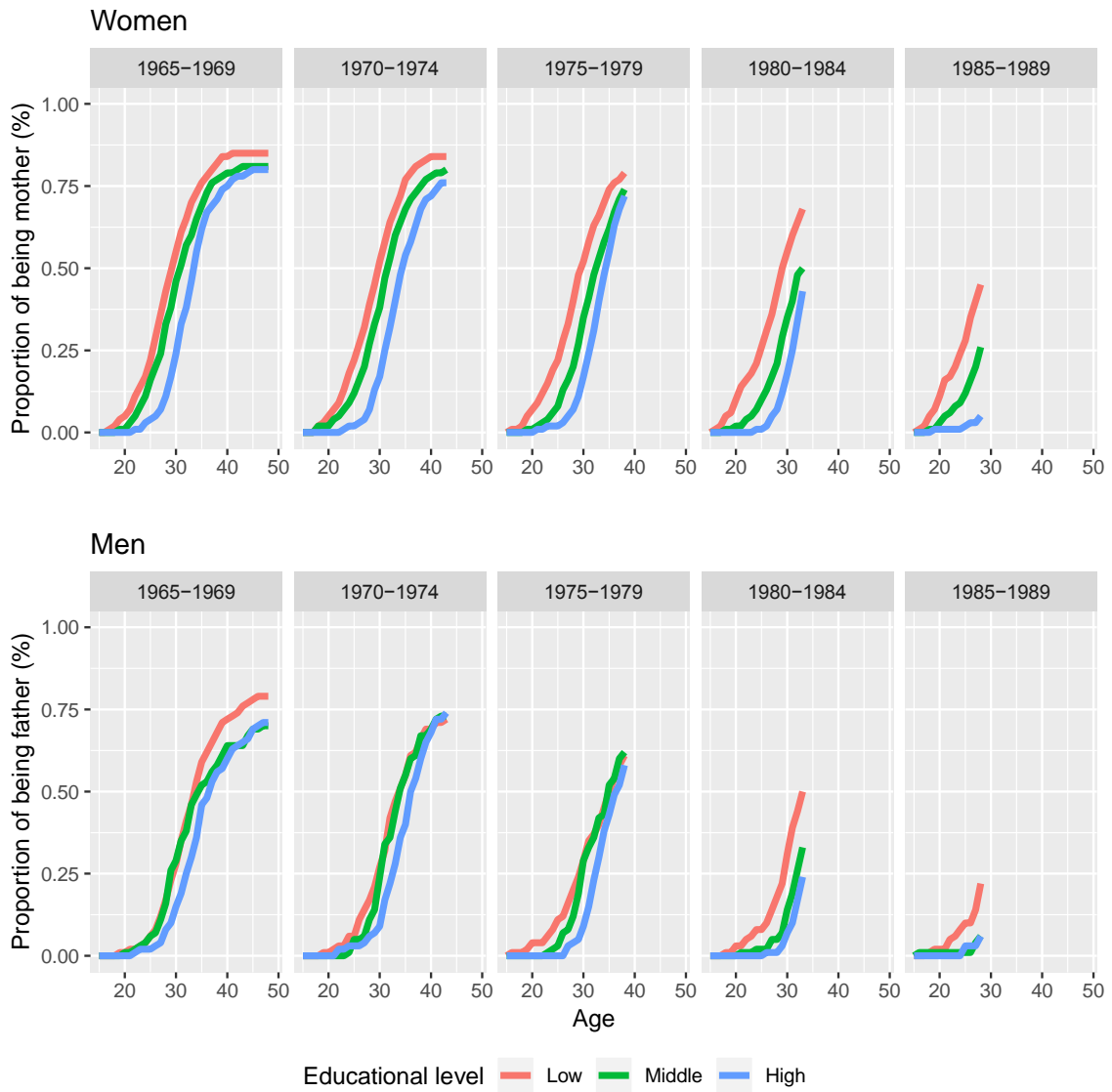
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Figure 1. Fertility patterns by age, sex, and birth cohort. Men and women born in Spain between 1965 and 1989.



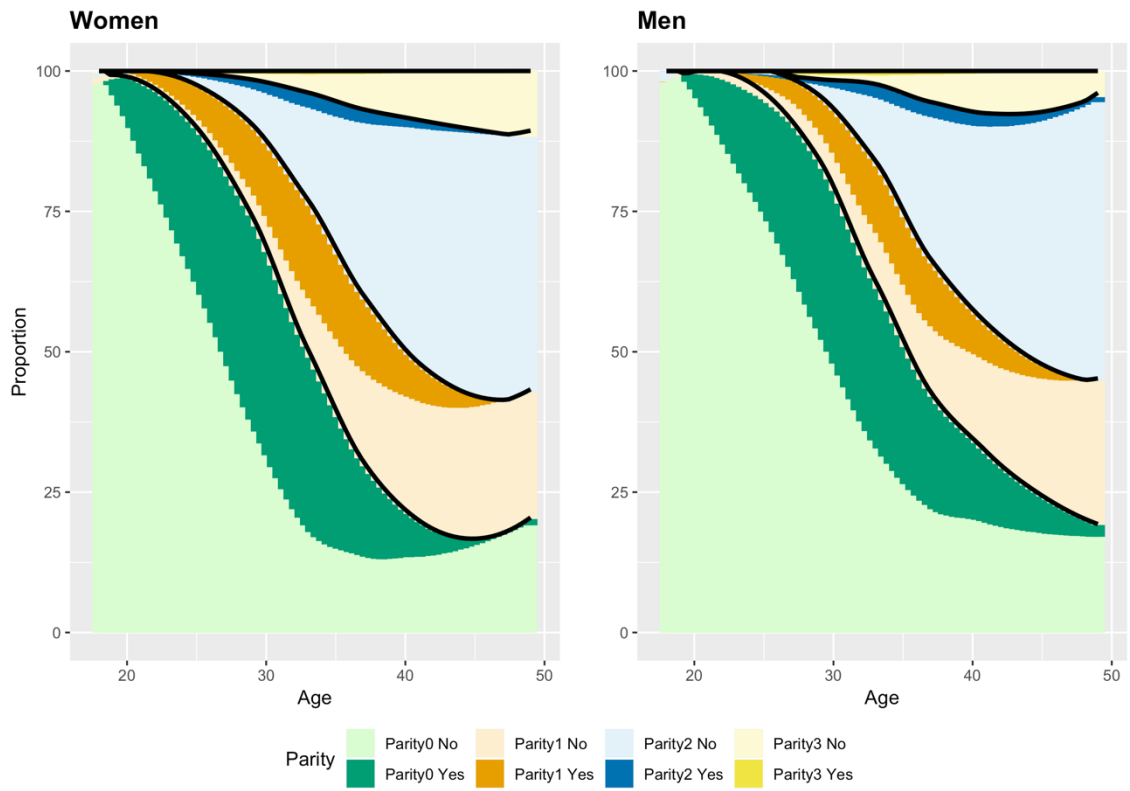
Source: Encuesta Nacional de Fecundidad, 2018. Instituto Nacional de Estadística.

Figure 2. Proportion of men and women with children by age, educational attainment and birth cohort. Men and women born in Spain between 1965 and 1989.



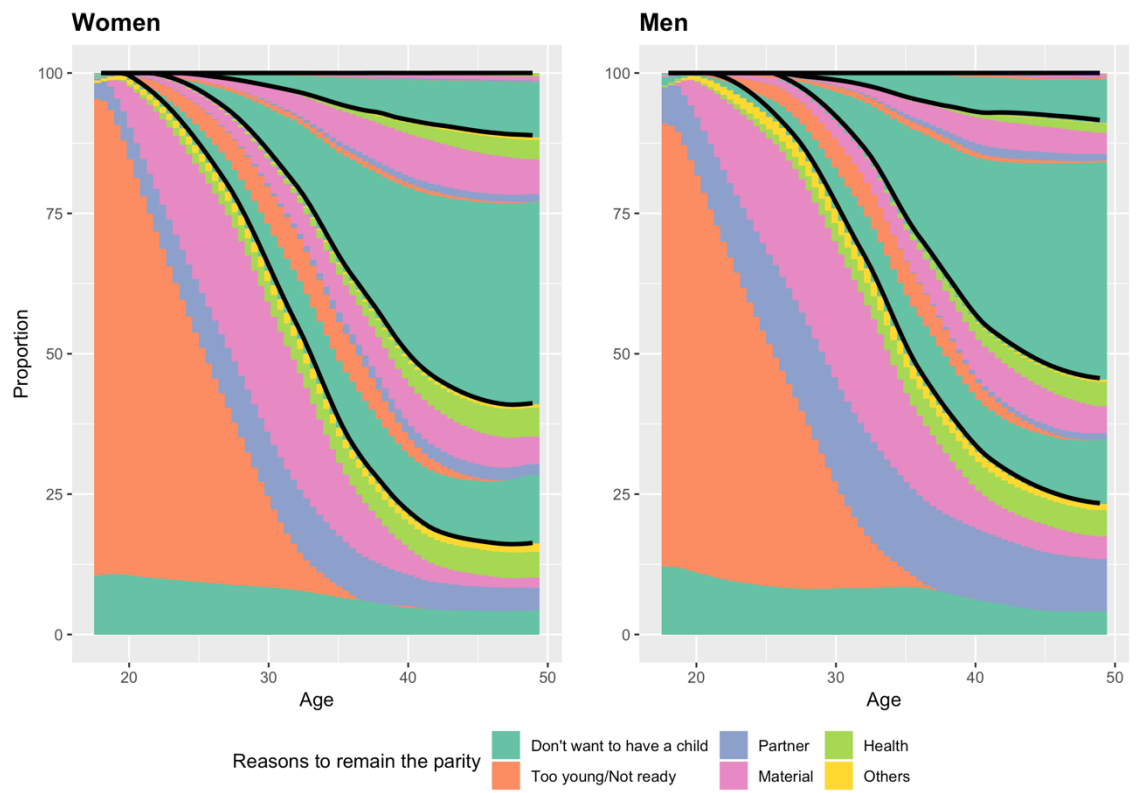
Source: Encuesta Nacional de Fecundidad, 2018. Instituto Nacional de Estadística.

Figure 3. Distribution of women and men by age, parity, and willingness to have a child in the next three years. Spain 2018.



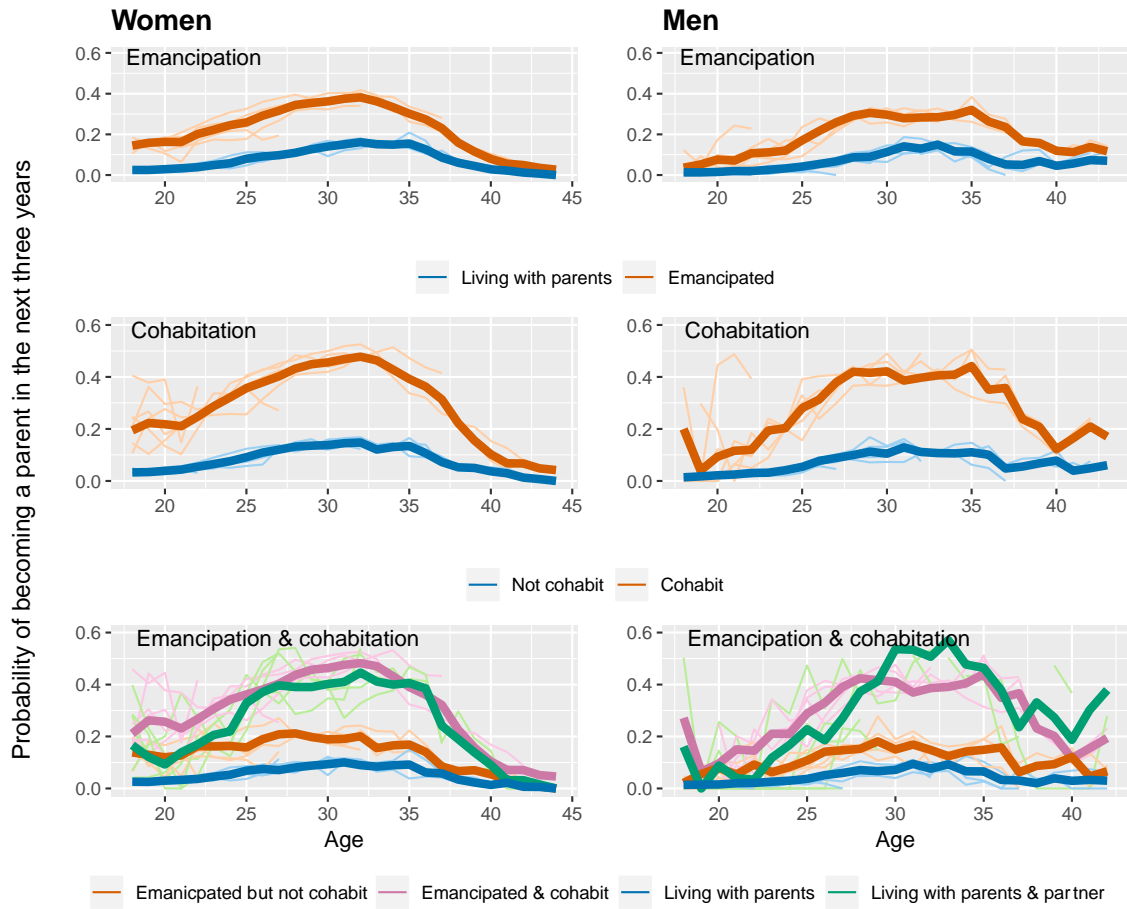
Source: Encuesta Nacional de Fecundidad, 2018. Instituto Nacional de Estadística.

Figure 4. Distribution of women and men by age, parity, and reasons for not having a (another) child. Spain 2018.



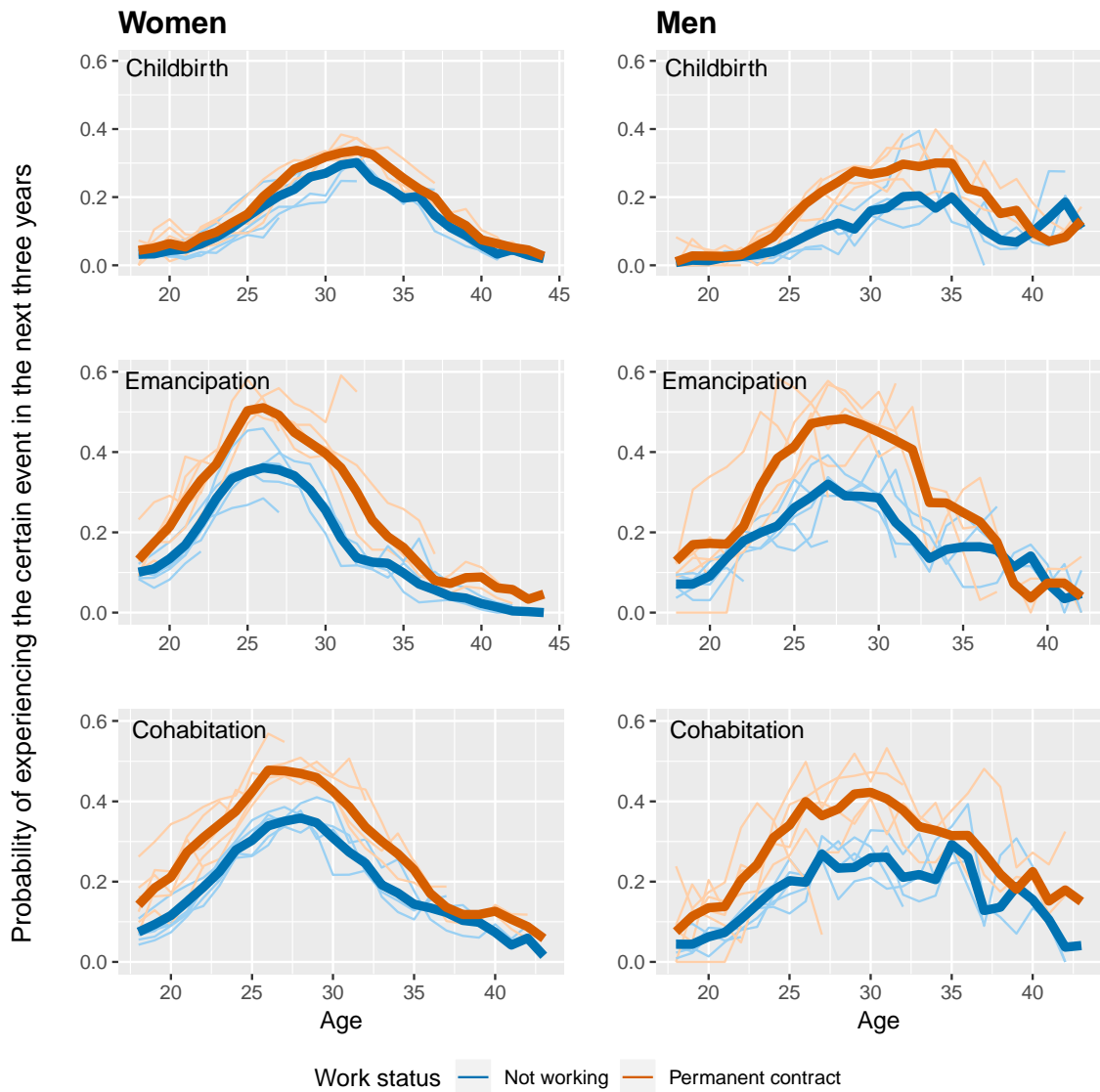
Source: Encuesta Nacional de Fecundidad, 2018. Instituto Nacional de Estadística.

Figure 5. Probability of becoming a parent in the next three year for childless women and men by age and emancipation and union status. Average trends across cohorts of women and men born in Spain between 1965 and 1989



Source: Encuesta Nacional de Fecundidad, 2018. Instituto Nacional de Estadística.

Figure 6. Probability of becoming a first time parent, emancipating and forming a union in the next three years by age and employment status. Average trends across cohorts of women and men born in Spain between 1965 and 1989



Source: Encuesta Nacional de Fecundidad, 2018. Instituto Nacional de Estadística.