

**PAA abstract for session 111 Desire, Intention and Behavior in Fertility and  
Reproductive Health**

**Individual- and Macro Level Determinants of Birth Intentions in Bulgaria: a Multi-  
Level Analysis Based on Survey- and Contextual Data of the Generations and  
Gender Program**

Martin Spielauer

After the 1989 transition, Bulgarian fertility dropped rapidly due to postponement of births and a decrease of second and higher order births, whereas childlessness remained low. In this study we aim at contributing to the understanding of the underlying fertility decision process and its individual- and macro level determinants. We especially emphasize economic variables and social capital as determinants of fertility intentions. In the case of social capital, we stress that it is not only an important resource, but that having children also creates social capital and is seen as an investment in this sense. We find considerable differences in the contribution of the different factors by sex and birth order. Concerning sex-differences, we find higher first birth intentions for females, while males rather postpone. Concerning second births, we observe the opposite pattern: it is the women who make another birth dependent on a series of factors and preconditions.

# **Individual- and Macro Level Determinants of Birth Intentions in Bulgaria: a Multi-Level Analysis Based on Survey- and Contextual Data of the Generations and Gender Program**

Martin Spielauer

In this paper we study individual- and macro level determinants of intentions for first, second and third births in Bulgaria. Until the 1989 transition, the Bulgarian fertility pattern can be characterized by remarkable stable fertility rates around replacement level, very low childlessness and one of the highest rates of two-child families observed in Europe. After 1989, period fertility dropped rapidly due to postponement of births and a decrease of second and higher order births, whereas childless stayed low. In this study we aim at contributing to the understanding of the underlying fertility decision process and its individual- and macro level determinants. Thereby we especially focus on second births as we observe a strong trend towards one-child families and are interested in who – e.g. women and men with which individual and partner characteristics, under which socio-economic circumstances, and within which regional context – do not intend to have a second child.

The study is based on data collected in the first wave of the Bulgarian Generations and Gender Panel Survey 2004 and the Generations and Gender Contextual Database for Bulgaria. The Generations and Gender survey includes a battery of questions concerning birth intentions, related attitudes including subjective evaluations of the impact of a/another child on the financial situation, job opportunities, social relations and personal freedom. Being heavily influenced by the theory of planned behavior, besides attitudes, data are also collected on opinions of relevant others – i.e. social pressure or perceived – and questions concerning the locus of control. The survey collects detailed information on economic activity, income and wealth (respondent, partner, and household), religiosity and value orientation, and - among other retrospective histories - detailed partnership and fertility careers. The Contextual Database complements this individual-level information by a set of regional-level indicators on the socio-economic situation and development (e.g. unemployment and regional economic growth), and a series of other demographic

and welfare state policy indicators. This allows us, to study birth intentions also in their macro-level context.

The main models developed in this study are multi-level logistic regression models. In our analysis we especially emphasize socio-economic variables and social capital as determinants of fertility intentions. Many hypotheses on the sharp fertility drop in transition countries are linked to socio-economic factors: The absolute deprivation hypothesis states that the absolute decline in economic wellbeing as it was experienced in Bulgaria in the 90s would lead to declining fertility among the couples with the lowest living standard. In contrast, the relative deprivation hypothesis suggests, that it is the increased economic aspirations, i.e. gap between achievable and aspired wellbeing, which lowered fertility. Both hypotheses can be tested using GGP data which include both objective and subjective data on income position and economic wellbeing. Another socio-economic explanation is based on the increased opportunity costs for women in the context of declining public family support. Differently to the previous hypotheses, this argument would lead to a reduction of births among highly educated women with high earnings. The fourth hypothesis is linked to the increasing economic uncertainty experienced in Bulgaria after the economic and political transition, especially the new phenomenon of unemployment. Concerning economic variables, besides the individual situation and the evaluation of having a/another child on the financial situation and career opportunities, we find important contextual effects of general unemployment and economic growth which support the uncertainty hypothesis.

In the case of social capital, we stress that it is not only an important resource which might influence fertility intentions, but that having children also creates social capital and is seen as an investment in this sense. Our study hypotheses thus are twofold: first we expect that the availability of social networks increases birth intentions, second we expect that persons for whom relationships created by children are important will be more likely to intend to have a/another child than persons for whom such relationships are not important.

First results of our study indicate considerable differences in the contribution of the different factors by sex and birth order. Concerning sex-differences, we find higher first

birth intentions for females, while males rather postpone. Concerning second births, we observe the opposite pattern: it is the women who make another birth dependent on a series of factors and preconditions of both main study domains, socioeconomic factors and social networks including the availability of family support for childcare and a male partner actively sharing household work.