

The link between personality and fertility - is it different for males and females?

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Abstract:

Fertility is a phenomenon which is influenced by various factors. Among them is the personality of the partners. However the association of personality and fertility might differ between the partners. The analysis of differences in the impact of personality traits on male and female fertility behavior is the focus of our study. We use the Big-five personality inventory, including neuroticism, openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness to measure the personality of both partners. Our study contributes to the small international literature on this research question by using the SOEP, a particular long lasting panel study. In making use of the exhaustive length of the SOEP, we are able to overcome major shortcomings of the previous studies, which have been based on either cross-sectional or retrospective data. Two aspects, directly linked to the strength of the SOEP study go beyond prior research in this field:

- 1) We analyze 25 survey waves, thus capturing almost the full fertile life-span of the individuals under analysis. This makes our research question accessible to more refined empirical methods, such as the event history approach.
- 2) We gain access to an *annual* observation of key characteristics related to fertility choices like social and economic status, or partnership characteristics provided with the SOEP. Hence, we can differentiate, whether and if which personality traits are capable of influencing fertility behavior *directly*, and which personality characteristics operate *indirectly*, e.g. by affecting job stability, or career attachment, thus promoting or delaying childbearing decisions.

Our findings show that highly conscientious and extravert men have a higher likelihood to become a father. These effects, however, operate indirectly by improving breadwinner qualities through a stable employment career (Conscientiousness), and by improving chances on the partner market (extraversion). Among women, extensive levels of agreeableness and neuroticism foster the transition to motherhood. The only characteristic, which reveals the same direction of effect of a personality trait, for both men and women, is openness to new experience, which is negatively associated with the transition to parenthood, and which remains stable after controlling for several covariates.