

Is 40 the New 30? Increasing Reproductive Intentions and Fertility Rates beyond Age 40

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Introduction

Across the highly developed countries, reproduction trends of the last half a century are characterised by a continuous shift of parenthood towards more advanced reproductive ages [1–3]. The trend to later childbearing has been fuelled by a broad array of cultural and social changes such as higher education expansion, rise in gender equality and in women's employment, changes in partnership behaviour, rising economic uncertainty and shifts in family-related values and attitudes (e.g., [4]). Late reproduction has progressed hand in hand with a trend to a smaller family size, with two-child families becoming most prominent with respect to both fertility ideals and actual family size [5,6].

Initially, among women and men born in the 1950s and 1960s, later parenthood typically implied having children in their late 20s and early 30s rather than in their early- to mid-20s or in late teenage years. This trend was compatible with their desire to complete education and achieve relatively stable employment before starting a family, but also with their smaller family size preferences. Indeed, Habbema et al. [7] show that 90% of women intending to have two children and starting their pregnancy attempts around age 30 will eventually be able to reach their desired family size. Thus, for European women born between 1952 and 1972, later reproduction was not necessarily associated with lower fertility at a country level [8].

However, among the generations born in the 1970s and 1980s, many women were still childless in their mid-to-late 30s or even early 40s, and a substantial share still intended to have children [2,3]. This trend has potentially serious implications for women's and couples' fertility and well-being, and also for the future fertility rates across highly developed countries. Women planning pregnancies in later reproductive ages experience a rising risk of pregnancy complications, miscarriages and infer-

tality [9,10]. Therefore, many women postponing parenthood will not be able to realise their reproductive plans.

Highly educated women are at the forefront of delayed reproduction: level of education is closely related to later employment entry and parenthood postponement [11,12]. They also experience higher childlessness, although not everywhere: the Nordic countries saw the educational gradient in childlessness reverse, with lower-educated women now staying most often childless [13,14]. Highly educated women, who have invested in their career, face steeper opportunity costs of having children in terms of their potential loss of income and career interruption, especially in uncertain times or in countries where career is less compatible with parenthood. This may motivate them to postpone having children to minimise career disruption. On the other hand, findings from Finland and Sweden show that lower-educated women often have larger families, also because they are more likely to experience union disruption and 're-partnering' than the higher-educated women [15]. Union instability may thus motivate them to have another child at a more advanced age.

This chapter partly builds upon our earlier contributions on fertility and reproduction at more advanced reproductive ages, especially the study of Sobotka and Beaujouan (2018) [2]. We draw on vital statistics, register and survey data for European countries to outline the main trends in late reproduction, focussing on fertility plans and actual fertility rates among women past age 40. We pay special attention to education differences in late fertility and to trends in late reproduction among highly educated women. As data on late reproductive intentions and late fertility by education are not available for most countries, we illustrate the education stratification from survey and register data