

The Gender Differences in the Burden of Having Children: Evidence from Life Satisfaction Data

Abstract

This paper studies how having children relates to the gender difference in life satisfaction. For this purpose, the study first employs a household bargaining model to examine the relationship between the gender difference in the parenting burden and the fertility decision of couples. The results indicate that, for the gender with less bargaining power, both the parenting burden and the chance of having more children than their ideal increases, lowering their life satisfaction.

To test these predictions, this paper uses data from World and European Integrated Values Survey 1981–2008 and examines how the gender difference in the impact of having children on life satisfaction varies across welfare regimes. To assess the robustness of the results, this study also compares the gender difference in the ratio of individuals who have more children than their ideal number (Ratio of Excess Births) across welfare regimes.

The results show that the gender with the higher parenting costs, generally women, obtain lower satisfaction from having children. However, in welfare regimes where extensive childcare supports are provided, such as in social democratic and liberal counties, both the women's disadvantages in life satisfaction and REB are smaller. The opposite is true in developing countries and NIEs. Furthermore, in comparison to developing countries, the low fertility in NIEs can be explained by greater parenting costs for both women and men. NIEs also stands out in a sense that women bear much heavier parenting burdens than men. From a policy-making perspective, these results point to the importance of reducing women's burden of parenting to raise fertility in lowest-low fertility countries.