

INTER-GENERATIONAL CONFLICTS OVER REPRODUCTIVE DECISIONS: A CROSS-CULTURAL EXAMINATION OF PARENTAL PRESENCE EFFECTS ON AGE AT FIRST BIRTH

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IUSSP Cyberseminar

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Discussion points

This is a very interesting and well-argued paper attempting to understand how parent's presence may influence reproduction in the next generation. The paper uses a rich dataset with information from 19 societies mostly representing pre-demographic transition scenarios. I enjoyed reading this paper and have provided a few comments and points of discussion.

Introduction and Background

The background is nicely couched in theoretical models from bio-demography. It would be informative to conclude the description of these testable models by summarizing the hypotheses being tested by this paper – these are clearly stated in the Abstract, but not within the body of the paper.

Methods

The map is great but will need more color contrast.

While I agree it is unreasonable to describe the data collection for each of the studies, it would be useful to include a bit more info on the sample in S1; for example sample size; Years of data collection; A reference to a website or publication where the data are described in detail.

I would like to know more about how the dataset was combined.

The methods of analysis should be described – you do so much in the paper and it will be useful to know the methods that are being used.

Results and Discussion

Before showing results, it would be very helpful to see descriptive statistics – for example, table 1 shows mean effects on child's age at first birth, but first can you please let us know what the mean and the range is of age at first birth, as well as parents' presence?

The effects of parents on daughters' but not on sons' age at reproduction should be anticipated more by the background section. There is some interpretation of these relationships in the Discussion section,

but I found that discussion a bit one-sided – the interpretation is focused on the pre-reproductive usefulness of sons and daughters to the parents. That may be an important consideration for parents, but I am not sure if it is even the most important one – surely parents (and probably adolescents) must perceive costs and benefits in terms of finances, social standing, and health resulting from a child's reproductive event, that would be different for sons and daughters. It will be important to discuss more in the Background what the implications of reproduction are for young men and women themselves (in terms of the cost and benefit to their health, social standing etc.) as well as the implications for parents of having a daughter vs. a son have a baby (in terms of financial and social status costs of benefits). From a cost perspective, whether we mean financial, health, or social cost, probably across cultures it's a bigger deal for a daughter to have a child than for a son to do so – this should be considered.

Effects of mothers vs. fathers seem to not be very different – can you interpret this in terms of the kinds of investments mothers and fathers are making, or the level of monitoring or influence that each parent would have? Can you also point out the correlation between mother's and father's presence?

The word “institution” is used across social sciences to mean very different things, and it will be important to state in the Intro/Background what kind of institutions you are interested in and to justify within the context of the literature why such institutions are expected to be important for reproductive outcomes and more specifically why they would moderate the effect of parent's presence on children's reproduction.

It would also be important to distinguish among these institutions, some of which seem to be very closely knit into the intergenerational relationships while others are more external to it. For example, if would not be unreasonable to think of wage labour presence as an external factor to the parent-child relationship, but ambilocal presence is not just an institution of the culture, it is directly intertwined with how parents would be investing and monitoring their children – it may mean the difference between daily vs. yearly contact between adult generations! Therefore, these two types of institution variables should be treated separately both in terms of conceptual framing of their effect and in terms of modeling strategy.

Finally, I would expect one of the important considerations in the intergenerational conflict featured here would be gender preferences – I suppose this would be categorized as an institution in the paper. I wonder if you have considered including this among the factors to account for.

You can see this paper raised a lot of exciting questions and ideas for steps forward. It's a stimulating project, a massive accomplishment, and much fun to read! I look forward to enjoying the final publications!