

ESS22-008 - Family outcomes of assortative mating: New insights based on couple-level survey/register data

Abstract

Background. The reversal of the gender gap in education had major implications for the rules guiding assortative mating, as evidenced by rising shares of couples where she is more educated than him (female hypogamy). The wider implications of this radical shift for demographic and economic behaviours, decision-making, and gender equality within couples remain under-researched. Current research on the topic is limited due to a lack of large-scale longitudinal data on couples. Advances in research on the demography, economics, and sociology of hypogamy necessitate datasets of the kind that we design as part of this project, i.e. large-scale survey data linked with high-quality register data on education, income, employment trajectories, union dynamics, births, and child outcomes. The data designed for the project are an ideal basis for interdisciplinary research on mating markets and the formation of cohabiting unions, the effects of assortative mating on fertility and infant health, and the consequences of childbirth for within-couple income inequality.

Objectives. The project is divided into three interlinked work packages (WP) that follow a life-course logic. WP1 models the selection into and out of different types of partnerships (assortative mating and union dissolution) as a basis for subsequent analyses of the effects of rising hypogamy on demographic and economic outcomes. WP2 looks at the effects of assortative mating on fertility and infant health; WP3 investigates the differing effects of childbirth on within-couple income inequality among different types of cohabiting couples.

Research questions: The overarching research question focuses on the mechanisms that link hypogamy in couples with predicted behavioural outcomes such as later union formation, higher union dissolution risks, delayed entry into motherhood, and lower infant health. We investigate the role played by selection into hypogamic unions in conjunction with the role played by where couples live. Moreover, we ask how socioeconomic status (in terms of education, potential income, and occupational class) and status dissimilarity among cohabiting partners affect the size of the penalty associated with childbearing for women relative to men.

Theoretical framework and hypotheses: We draw on an interdisciplinary set of theories including economic labour supply theory, exchange bargaining theories, and normative perspectives on maternal employment and within-couple inequality.

Innovation: Using novel data with fine spatial granularity, we extend previous work on the associations between couple types and outcomes like union stability, fertility, infant health, and child penalties to estimate causal effects of assortative mating and to investigate the mechanisms that drive these effects.

Methods: We apply diverse panel data methods, including event history analyses, spatial analyses of mating markets, and instrumental variables approaches.

Scientific disciplines:

Economic sociology (50%) | Demography (50%)

Keywords:

education, assortative mating, hypogamy, couples, fertility, motherhood, child penalties

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Further links to the persons involved and to the project can be found under

<https://www.gmbh.wwtf.at/funding/programmes/ess/ESS22-008/>