Do Parents Matter?

Intergenerational Ties and Fertility Intention in a Low Fertility Context

Feinian Chen
University of Maryland, College Park
Yingchun Ji
Yong Cai
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
Zhenzhen Zheng
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
Wang Feng
University of California, Irvine
Baochang Gu
Renmin University of China

Extended Abstract for PAA 2011

How do parents influence fertility decisions of their children? In the classic fertility literature, demographers approached this question from two different directions. One line of inquiry focuses on less developed areas and can be traced back to writings by Lorimer (1954) and Davis (1955). It has been argued that parental influence comes through living arrangements, that is, living with parents (i.e., extended family households) is conducive to higher fertility, because the cost of children and childcare is born by other members of the household, rather than by the children exclusively. The proposition has been widely discussed and tested empirically, especially in countries experiencing simultaneous transitions in fertility and family structure (Burch & Gendell 1970, Freedman et al. 1982, Thornton & Fricke 1987, Weinstein et al. 1990). The other line of research mostly centers on developed countries and examines the intergenerational transmission of fertility behavior/preference by emphasizing the role of parental values, norms and socialization in shaping their children's family size preferences (Anderton et al. 1987, Axinn, Clarkberg & Thornton 1994, Axinn & Thornton 1993, Thornton 1980). Some recent research particularly highlights the impact of single parenthood on teen childbearing (Barber 2001).

This paper is inspired by these two research traditions in the classic fertility literature. We make an attempt to integrate the literature on family structure and cultural/normative (parental values, norm and socialization) effects and examine multidimensional influences of intergenerational ties on women's fertility preferences. It is set in a country that has recently completed its fertility transition: China. China's fertility has remained at the below-replacement level since the early 1990s, arguably a joint outcome of the dramatic economic development and one-child policy (Cai 2008 & 2010; Gu et al. 2007; Wang 1996). On the one hand, one might argue that a strict family planning policy, increasing childrearing/education costs and individualistic orientation, and an overwhelming desire to "get ahead" in the economic ladder in

a rapidly developing economy, may leave little room for parents to play any role in their adult children's fertility decisions. On the other hand, research evidence continues to point to the persistence of the historically strong parent-child relationship and the filial norms throughout the life course of parents and children alike in China (Whyte 2003). While the nuclear household is the dominant family form, co-residence with parents remains common in China. Further, for parents and adult children who do not live together, they often maintain a high level of exchange and contact- manifested by the construction of a "modified" or "networked" extended family (Logan & Spitze 1996). Thus, it is reasonable to expect parents to exert a certain degree of influence on their children's fertility preferences. With the one-child policy to be phased out imminently (yet indefinitely), it is crucial to understand the linkage between intergenerational relationship and fertility in today's China.

Using data from a large-scale survey in Jiangsu province—one of the most populous and economically developed provinces in China, we examine parental influences on married women's fertility preferences in multiple dimensions. Given the strong patriarchal and patrilocal tradition in China, we contrast the influences of parents versus parents-in-law throughout the analysis. First, in terms of the structural context, we will examine the effect of currently family structure (co-residence with parents/parents-in-law or not) on fertility intention. In addition, we will extend beyond the traditional fertility literature on family structures in several ways. First, past studies were often on the pronatalistic effects of co-residence under high fertility regimes. In the current study, we examine the linkage between co-residence and fertility intention in a low fertility context, and thus offer new insights of the role of parents and the family organization. Second, we will not only examine the effect of co-residence, but also the proximity of parents/parents-in-law. Third, previous studies on family structure often have to make the assumption that co-residential parents help with childcare, without any direct evidence. In this study, we will be able to examine the effect of actual/perceived availability of childcare provision by grandparents.

Second, in a cultural/normative dimension, we will examine the effect of the size of family of origin as well as fertility desires of parents/parents-in-law. Because of the fertility transition and family planning policy, parents' fertility intention for their children may be very different from their own. We will document the cultural transmission of norms across generations (or the lack of it). We will also examine whether grandson preference by parents/parents-in-law will have any influence on fertility intention, given the strong son-preference tradition in China.

Third, we will explore the role of emotional ties between parents and adult children. The survey specifically asks the respondent to subjectively evaluate how important the parents and parents-in-law are in influencing her fertility decision. This could act as a moderating factor for the effect of family structure and family size of origin on one's fertility desire.

Finally, we treat fertility preference as a fluid rather than a static concept. One of the key principles of life course studies is "the timing of lives." Fertility preference is likely to evolve

over the life course and responds to changing life circumstances. We will conduct subsample analysis of married women with no children and those with children, as an attempt to document life stage differences. Furthermore, two waves of panel data will allow examination of the synchronization of changing life circumstances and fertility desire. For example, for this part of the analysis, we can include single women in wave 1 and will be able detect whether any subsequent change in marital status or living arrangements with parents/parents-in-law would result in any change in fertility desire. We will elaborate our analytical strategy in the following sections of the paper.

Data and Variables

Data

The research site of this study is Jiangsu province, China. Located in the lower reach of Yangtze River, Jiangsu embraces Shanghai to the southeast and faces the Pacific Ocean to the east. It is one of China's most populous and economically advanced provinces. Its economy is tightly integrated into the global economy, with 60 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) from export. This study uses data from Jiangsu Fertility Intention and Behavior Study (JFIBS). JFIBS is a longitudinal mixed method study that collects data on women's fertility intention and childbearing behaviors in Jiangsu, China. Two waves of survey have been conducted in six counties in Jiangsu, China in 2007 and 2010, respectively. The survey adopts a two-stage clustered sampling design. First, a weighted sampling scheme helps to randomly select the primary sampling unit, either a rural village or an urban neighborhood. Second, every women aged between 18 and 40 years are selected for a face-to-face interview, using a standardized survey questionnaire. Overall, the survey asks questions to 18,638 women regarding their fertility intention and behavior. The sample age structure is consistent with data for the same six counties from the Women Information System of Jiangsu Province, and with that from the 2000 National Census (Zheng et al. 2009). The second wave of the survey was conducted in early 2010. For preliminary analysis presented in this abstract, we use a sample of 14,730 married women interviewed in the first wave (2007). The second wave of data will be included in the longitudinal analysis when it is available in the next month or so.

Measurement

Fertility Intention. The JFIBS has an extensive number of questions on fertility intention. In the full paper, we will later test for sensitivity of different coding schemes, particularly how to code those who have expressed uncertainty and to compare the difference between married women with no children and those with children. For our preliminary analysis, we construct a simplified dichotomous variable of fertility intention: 0 for those intending to have no or one child and coded as 1 for those intending to have more than one child.

Living Arrangement. This variable is based on the question "What is your parents' living arrangement?" The same question was asked to collect information on parents-in-law's living arrangement. We will distinguish parents/parents-in-law's proximity by 1) co-residence, 2) living in the same village or urban neighborhood, and 3) for living further away. For the preliminary analysis, the variable is collapsed into two categories: co-residence vs. other arrangements.

Childcare Provision. The survey also asks a question regarding whether the respondent knows the parents' and parents-in-law's attitude regarding their willingness to provide childcare for their daughter/daughter-in-law. We will measure 1) whether parents/parents-in-law helped with childcare (for women with children), 2) whether parents indicated their willingness to help, and 3) whether the woman felt that they would be willing to help. For the preliminary analysis, the variable is collapsed into two categories: available vs. not available.

Size of Family of Origin and Grandson Preference. Number of siblings is used to approximate the size of the family that the respondent grew up with. We also measure husband's number of siblings. We further measure whether parents/parents in-law have expressed any preference for a grandson.

Emotional Ties and Parental Fertility Desire. We consider several moderating variables in influencing the effect of family structure/family size on fertility intention. We use one question from the survey to measure emotional ties between the respondent and the parents: "Will you consider your parents' opinions when faced with decision-making regarding fertility?" There are also four questions on parents' and parents-in-law's fertility attitudes: 1) "You should have children." 2) "You should have children as early as possible." 3) "(They) wish you to have a girl/boy" and 4) "(they) wish you to have at least a son and a daughter." These variables are not included in the preliminary analysis, but will be incorporated into the full analysis.

Control variables. At the same time, we also control for the respondent's sociodemographic characteristic and socioeconomic status. The respondent's age, age at first marriage if she was married at the time of survey, residence (ruran/urban), and migration status are controlled. Education, Hukou status, employment, occupation sector, and household income are used to measure the respondent's socioeconomic status. Parental education, and occupation and income will be included to indicate the parents' socioeconomic status. All these control variables will be included in the full analysis.

Analysis Strategy

Our analysis will consist of two steps. In the first step, we use the cross-sectional data at wave I and use logistic regression to model fertility intention of whether one intends to have more than one child or not. The focus of the analysis will be the multidimensionality of parental influence: through living arrangements, size of family of origin, the availability of parental help with childcare, and their fertility desires (e.g. grandson preference). We will then contrast the

influences of parents versus parents-in-law and will further examine the moderating effect of emotional ties between generations. At the same time, we will take into account weights, strata, and clustering issues of the JFFIBS data in the analysis.

The second part of the analysis makes use of the longitudinal data. We will use lagged-dependent variable and fixed-effect logit regression models to examine whether any *changes* in the life circumstances will lead to changes in fertility intention in a four year interval. The focus of analysis in the second part is whether changes in intergenerational ties lead to any shift in women's fertility intention. The use of fixed-effect models will also help to control for unobserved heterogeneity. For example, does moving out of the parents-in-law's house decrease the desire of wanting more than one child? We will also examine whether other changes in life, for example, whether a job change will prompt changes in fertility intention and whether that effect could be conditioned by intergenerational ties. For example, for those with strong parental support for childcare may not alter their fertility intention, even when they move to a more demanding job sector. In contrast, those without such support may have to adjust their fertility plan accordingly.

Preliminary Results

In our preliminary analysis, we examine the bivariate relationships between married women's fertility intention (wanting more than one child versus wanting one or no child) and four dimensions of intergenerational ties with parents and parents-in-law respectively: co-residence, availability of childcare help from grandparents, family size of origin (whether women/their husbands having siblings or not), and grandson preference by the parental generation. Preliminary results (see Figures 1 and 2) suggest that intergenerational ties do matter and there are noticeable differences between the influences of parents versus that of parents-in-law. For example, married women who live with their parents are about 4% more likely to intend to have more than one child, than those who do not live with their parents. In contrast, co-residence with parents-in-law does not have much of an effect. This is very interesting, given the strong patrilineal tradition in China. Availability of childcare by both parents and parents-in-law promotes married women's fertility intention of having more than one child by around 5%. Those with parents or parents-in-law with a grandson preference are also more likely to have a stronger desire for having more than one child. Interestingly, the size of family of origin of both the woman and her husband is not positively related to married women's fertility intention, as much previous research have suggested. Rather, those (or their husbands) without a sibling when growing up are 8% more likely to intend to have more than one child than those with siblings.

In our subsequent multivariate and longitudinal analysis, we will further explore the relationship between parental influences and fertility intention in contexts. For example, could the above relationships be moderated by fertility desires of parents (or in-laws) or the strength of emotional ties with parents (or in-laws)? Could the relationship be conditioned by a difference in local family planning policies in urban and rural areas? Could changes in living arrangements

lead to a change in fertility desire? We will also conduct subsample analysis, by contrasting married women with children versus those without. We will also follow the single women at wave I and examine whether changes in marital status lead to adjustments in their fertility intention. Answers to these questions will help to document the multidimensionality of parental influences on women's fertility intention in the low fertility setting of China.

Figure 1. Fertility Intention by Parental Characteristics

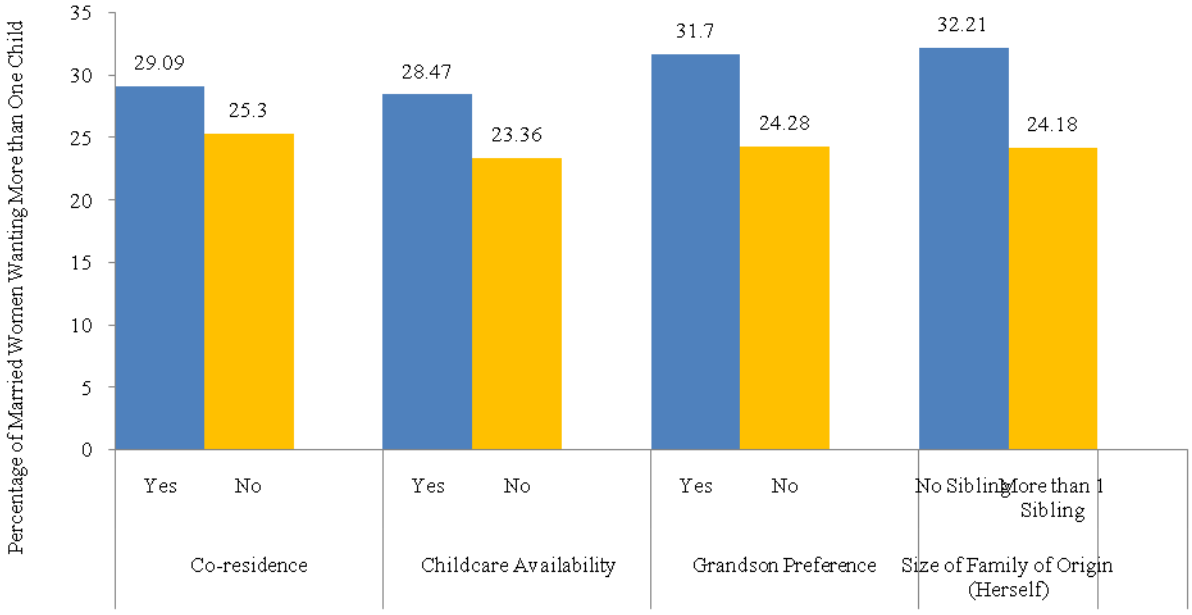
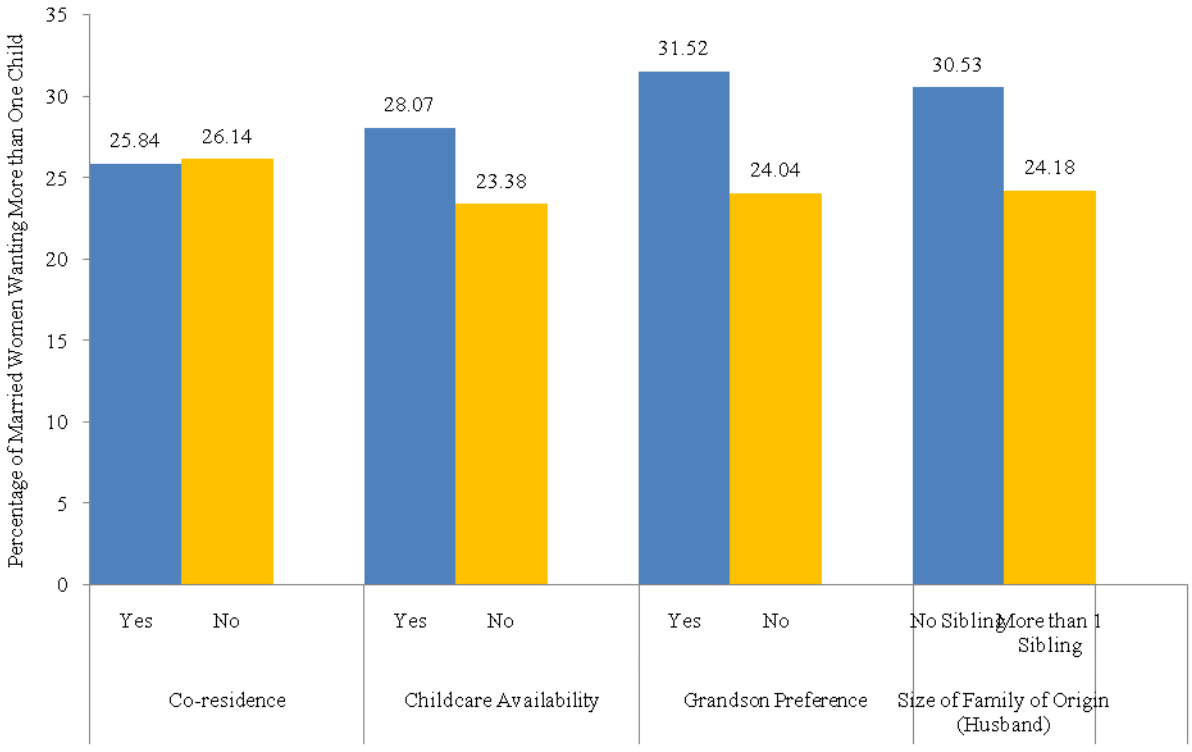


Figure 2. Fertility Intention by Parents-in-law' Characteristics



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