

Socio-economic status and male and female fertility in 13 EU countries

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Abstract

In evolutionary terms, the common observation that people in lower socio-economic groups have more children defies explanation. I attempt to resolve this conundrum by analysing the relationship between socio-economic status and fertility, stratified by sex, across Europe. I use the Survey of Health, Aging, and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) database, which contains information about individual income, education, and completed fertility of ~41,000 individuals in 13 EU countries. I hypothesise that the observed relationship between income, education and fertility is driven by sex-differences in mate preference and number of fertile years. For men, investing time to acquire a high status improves their chances of finding a partner, but women must postpone reproduction, which decreases fertility. As expected, I find that women with higher income and education have lower fertility. Highly-educated men also have lower fertility than their less-well-educated counterparts. Income, however, has a positive effect on number of children of highly-educated men and on the probability that a man will have children. In comparison to historical and contemporary small-scale societies, the wealth fertility relationship in European countries for women is reversed. For men, wealth still enhances fertility although the effect size is small.