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Abstract

Who prefers marriage?

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Background and purpose of the study

“The golden age of marriage” was in the 1960s and in the beginning of the 1970s in Europe. Since those years marriage rates have declined in most European countries. Younger generations have married less and at older ages (Kiernan 1996). Female total first marriage rates have declined from around 1.00 in 1960 to around 0.58 in the Nordic countries, 0.55 in Western Europe, 0.60 in the South, and 0.52 in the East. At the same time the mean age of women at first marriage has increased in the Nordic countries from 23.6 years to 29.3 years, in the western European countries from 23.7 years to 27.8 years, in the southern countries from 25.1 years to 26.7 years, and in the eastern countries from 22.5 years to 25.0 years (Council of Europe 2003).

Some of this decline of marriage rates and the change towards later age at marriage are related to the rise of cohabitation. Unfortunately available international statistics do not cover cohabitation, but, for example, in 1970 85% of all families in Finland were married couples with or without child(ren) and 2% cohabiting couples, but in 2002 only 67% were married and 20% cohabiting (Statistics Finland 2003). Increased divorce and separation rates tell us also their own language about the fragility of marriage (Kiernan 1996). One of the most important explanatory factors behind these changes has been the existence of a very strong normative and attitudinal shift from traditional values to individualism (Palomba & Moors 1995). Improved reliability and better accessibility of contraceptives have markedly been related to this increasing freedom of choice. Also increased opportunities of women in the fields of education and paid labour are strongly related to the new and expanded possibilities of women in family life and actually in the entire way of life.

Our interest is to find out what kinds of people prefer marriage to cohabitation or other forms of partnership in different European countries. Is marriage losing its popularity among the young, is cohabitation becoming the norm also in those countries where it has so far been relatively rare? We want to know how these preferences vary according to age, education, gender, present living arrangement, income, religiousness, and country. We are also interested in what kind of reasons young adults themselves see there are for marriage postponement or renouncement among young adults in different countries, and do these vary according to age, gender, marital status, or education groups?

Data and methods

This study uses survey data from the DIALOG-project (IPPAS Database). In DIALOG, altogether 14 European countries conducted a survey ('Population Policy Acceptance', PPA2-survey) on attitudes and opinions about family, children and trends in family formation, values towards family and working life, opinions about family policy measures and on future plans to have children. Surveys were conducted around 2000-2003. This presentation focuses on questions related to preferred living arrangements among 20-40-year-old men and women in eight European countries and factors related to these preferences. One of the chosen countries is from the North, representing the Nordic countries with quite high gender equality (Finland, N=1424), two of the countries are from the western part of Europe (Germany, N=1798, and the Netherlands, N=715), one from the Catholic south, where family has been traditionally highly valued (Italy, N=2522), and three countries from the East (Estonia, N=472, Poland, N=2017, and Slovenia, N=777). We will use logistic regression to examine factors related to preferred living arrangements, and cross-tabulations and Kruskal-Wallis test when examining differences in reasons for postponement/renouncement of marriage.

Expected results

It is expected that the data could show whether there are differences between preferred living arrangements in different countries and to what extent they are related to different factors in these countries.