

Book Reviews

Childlessness in Europe: Contexts, Causes, and Consequences, by M. Kreyenfeld, D. Konietzka, (eds.). Springer Open, Switzerland, 2017, pp. xi+370, ISBN: 978-3-319-44665-3.

In demography, childlessness is an emerging area of concern. There exists a close linkage between fertility decisions and childlessness in every society. This issue has been debated in Western Europe and now developing countries also started debating it. From the feminist point of view, it is argued to replace the term 'childlessness' with 'childfree'.

The book under review edited by Michaela Kreyenfeld and Dirk Konietzka is the collection of seventeen chapters which focus on childlessness across Europe. The book illustrates different dimension of childlessness like fertility desires, economic uncertainty, marriage pattern, government policies etc. The book is divided into five parts. The first part provides the overview of childlessness in Europe, the second part deals with country-wise studies, the third part is focusing on women's education and childlessness, fourth part includes fertility ideals, biographical decision and assisted reproduction, and last section is all about the consequences of childlessness. Part A of this book comprises two chapters related to an overview of childlessness in Europe. Chapter 1 presents changing behavioral pattern and increasing share of permanently childless women and men since the mid-twentieth century, issues and conceptual problems. While, Chapter 2, effectively explains long-term childlessness trends among women in Europe. It is an extensive study of European countries with a population of over 1 million. The study critically evaluates different types of data of childlessness in selected regions in Europe. The study analyses childlessness vertically for the cohort born 1900 and thereafter in Europe.

The six papers included in Part B of this book deal with country studies across Europe. Chapter 3 examined how childlessness varies for both men and women with considerable educational variation. Barrington has shown women with tertiary education have high level of childlessness, while there is a rising trend of third and fourth births among low educated women. Chapter 4 emphasizes about high fertility rates and comparatively low childlessness trends in male and female in France and shows the conflict between rises in educational attainment, particularly for women, and employment and parenthood. Chapter 5 discusses about the long term trends in childlessness in East and West Germany. Findings suggest that in East Germany child bearing is universal and women are fully involved in job market but in West Germany there exists a great collision between childlessness and educational attainment. Chapter 6 examines the differentials in fertility outcomes in Switzerland and Austria considering similar pattern in population size, standard of living and socio-economic setting. The study has observed that religious beliefs play an important determinant in fertility decision. Chapter 7 explores trends in childlessness in Finland as the country is very liberal and secular in their attitude towards family policy. Findings show that childlessness is higher among least educated men and women. Chapter 8 shifts the focus from Europe to childlessness in the United States. It is a comparative study between white and black Americans. The study shows that childlessness was higher among black compared to white but the trend was reversed with the cohorts born in the early 1940s.

The two papers included in Part 3 which focus specifically on women's education and childlessness. Chapter 9 explores affiliation of education and childlessness in Sweden and Austria.

The result finds women are planning their family according to their specific education line in Sweden, while in Austria there is very strong relation between higher education and childlessness. Chapter10 concentrated on association between childbearing behavior and education of eastern and western Germany and observed a convergence. The findings suggest that East German is more likely to have children at the time of pursuing higher education compared to West German. The study has adopted multi-level analysis and shown that a women's decision regarding motherhood depends on stable employment status, while, women with an insecure job or abundant career resources often postpone their family formation.

Part 4 consists of four chapters dealing with fertility ideals, decision making and reproduction. Chapter11 have used six waves of panel data to investigate the formation and development of intimate relationships and families in Germany. The descriptive study showed that the desired number of child decreases with the age among women compared to men. Later, the multivariate analysis comes out with the fact that a number of children born and women's age affect fertility decision but partnership and economic conditions do not influence to alter the decision. Chapter12 is based on qualitative analysis and tries to capture the difference in upbringing, attitude, ideology towards life course and fertility behavior. Chapter13 and 14 deal with prevalence of assisted reproductive technology of Germany and Europe respectively. In Germany, 14000 children were born in 2012 by following the application of ART. Though the usage is increasing in Germany but it is restricted for some special groups only. European study explored that there is significant variation in ART uses over Europe mainly due to affordability, reimbursement levels and because of the social and cultural norms surrounding childbearing.

Last three chapters actually focus on the consequences of being childless and describe how it affects men and women mentally, physically, economically in their older age. Chapter15 explores that unsatisfying marriage relationship may affect men physically and mentally in a greater extent compared to women. Chapter16 investigates how social institutional set-up differs in East and West Germany for elderly mother. Chapter17 deals with the elderly population across 11 European countries and have examined different parental status, presence of social network, and different dimension of intergenerational exchanges.

In brief, this book is resourceful and contribute to understand the complex phenomenon of European childlessness and fertility behavior. The authors have utilized all existing data very extensively and some studies have conducted primary survey to get better insights. But in my own assessment, the book mostly focuses on childlessness in early nineties, throws very limited light on childlessness after fertility treatment. However, this book has made a significant effort in the field of childlessness and provides various new insights for further research.

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