

Structural Determinants of Fertility Intention: A Factorial Survey Experiment in Six Countries

It is widely recognized in demographic theories that structural constraints, such as the financial costs of child-rearing, future economic uncertainties, and gender inequities, play a central role in shaping individual fertility intentions. However, previous research often examines these factors in isolation, and this fragmented approach has limited theoretical integration and the formulation of effective policy measures. By employing a factorial survey experiment, we integrate five dominant theoretical perspectives on structural constraints into a unified framework, manipulating the degree of each constraint to assess its relative importance in shaping fertility intentions. The experiment was conducted across six countries with diverse institutional contexts: the United States, Spain, Sweden, urban China, South Korea, and Japan. This approach allows us to examine how the significance of each theoretically identified constraint varies across different settings. The findings indicate that economic factors, particularly the financial burden of raising children and uncertainties regarding future economic conditions, are the most critical structural constraints. They are followed by insufficient workplace and intergenerational family support, as well as gender inequity. In contrast, social norms and values related to fertility were found to be the least influential. Moreover, the relative importance of these structural constraints varies by gender and national contexts, reflecting differences in cultural norms, family dynamics, and institutional frameworks. By integrating multiple perspectives into a unified framework, this study underscores the predominant role of economic factors in shaping fertility intentions, even amid broader cultural shifts associated with demographic transitions and individualistic values.