Are family values multidimensional? Evidence from the last three decades in Europe

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Abstract

Although family values and their changes lie at the heart of family research, their operationalisation has drawn rather scant attention of family researchers. The existing but scattered evidence suggests family values consist of several dimensions changing at various pace. Yet, most analyses have ignored it: family values are usually defined either very narrowly, as answers to single questions, or very broadly, as a combination of answers to a battery of more- and less-closely linked questions. This might contribute to the weak empirical fit of the Second Demographic Transition (SDT) concept, the to-go framework in family demography.

This paper aims to test the following hypothesis: family values comprise separate (inter-correlated but clearly distinguishable), and so reducing them to one single dimension leads to biased predictions of family change. It answers two research questions:

Q1: How coherent are family values?
Q2: How biased is the prediction of family changes when using one single family-value index as compared to separate indices for each dimension?

I address Q1 by performing factor analysis on a battery of attitudinal SDT-related questions taken from four EVS waves (1990, 1999, 2008 and 2017). This generates factor-analysis based indices of family values for each respondent. In order to answer Q2, I apply multivariate OLS country-level regression models and compare the performance of two kinds of family-value indices as predictors of family changes: one-dimensional (as commonly used in previous literature) and multi-dimensional (as computed within Q1) ones. The family-change indicators come from Eurostat, OECD and Human Fertility Database.