

Job Mobility and the Entry into Parenthood: A Longitudinal Study on Finnish Women

Wioletta Grzenda

SGH Warsaw School of Economics, Poland

Jessica Nisén

University of Turku, Finland

Abstract

The continued postponement of parenthood raises questions about how employment trajectories shape fertility decisions. While previous research has shown that women's labour market attachment is increasingly often positively related to the entry into motherhood, little attention has been paid to the role of job mobility. We address this gap by examining whether the job mobility across employers is associated with the timing of a first childbirth. We formulate two competing hypotheses: frequent job changes may signal career advancement and an improved employer-employee match, increasing the likelihood of entering motherhood; alternatively, job changes may indicate an unstable labour market position, lowering the likelihood of entering motherhood. We utilise Finnish full-population register data on women born in 1979, followed annually from the age of 18 to 39. Job mobility is measured as a time-varying cumulative number of contracts with a new employer, and survival analysis is applied to estimate the hazard of a first birth. Our findings indicate that women who have accumulated more job changes generally have a higher rate of entering parenthood. This association is especially pronounced at older ages. These findings suggest that career progression and an improved employer-employee match may increase women's readiness to enter motherhood. At the same time, the pursuit of a stable and rewarding employment may contribute to the postponement of parenthood, even in a context with strong work-family reconciliation policies.

Introduction

The entry into parenthood continues to be delayed across countries. In Europe, the age at first birth was almost 30 (29.8) in 2023 (Eurostat 2025). A large body of previous research has studied the connections between the labour market attachment and fertility (Matysiak and Vignoli 2008). Existing research shows that, at the individual level, the relationship between labour market attachment and entry into first birth is increasingly positive for women (Matysiak and Vignoli 2025). That means that, over time, the labour market attachment of women has become a prerequisite, rather than a hindrance to the entry into parenthood in Europe (Matysiak and Vignoli 2024). In addition to current employment, also uncertainty of future employment, as evidenced by a fixed-term employment status or a subjective perception of fearing to lose one's job (Alderotti et al. 2021), has been found to associate negatively with the risk of first childbirth, especially for highly educated women (Kreyenfeld 2010). However, previous research has paid limited attention to the role of career stability in terms of moves across employers for women's fertility. We argue that this is a potentially relevant, yet so far overlooked, aspect in the broader discussion on the relationship between women's labour market attachment and fertility. Research on work careers shows that mobility across employers has increased over time, at least in some countries such as Finland (Riekhoff 2022; Riekhoff, Ojala, and Pyöriä 2021). This trend has occurred concurrently as the entry into parenthood has been delayed (Rahnu and Jalovaara 2023). The co-occurrence undermines the relevance of investigating the role of job mobility for fertility behaviour. Today, young adults place a high value on finding a meaningful job and a secure livelihood (Eronen et al. 2022). If women perceive that their chances in the labour market are more limited upon having entered motherhood, they may aim to find a good job match first, with the implication of a delayed entry into motherhood.

We study the relationship between job mobility and entry into motherhood in Finland, a Nordic high-income country with comprehensive support for maternal employment yet low current fertility levels (Hellstrand, Nisén, and Myrskylä 2020) and high levels of childlessness as compared to other countries in Europe (Hellstrand et al. 2025; Nisén et al. 2025). We use Finnish full-population register data of women born in 1979, with annual measures for employment relationships and first births. We employ an event history model for the hazard of a first birth by following women up to age 39. We measure job mobility as a time-varying indicator of the cumulative number of employment relationships with a new employer a woman has had. According to our findings, women with a history of more changes across employers generally have a higher risk of entering a first birth, but the results are sensitive to

the age group studied. We interpret these findings as supporting the idea that women who have progressed in their careers by conducting mobility across employers may perceive themselves to have reached a career stage where they feel ready to commit to parenthood. At the same time, the process of acquiring work experience and new jobs is associated with the postponement of parenthood, even in a country such as Finland, where reconciliation policies support the full-time employment of mothers.

Background and hypotheses

Study context: Finland

The context of Finland is exceptionally interesting to study the relationship between job mobility and entry into motherhood. This is because of documented changes in both family and work spheres – delays in first births and increased job mobility – across cohorts. Moreover, over the last 15 years, there has been an accelerated delay of first births, especially at young ages, which has led to a steep decline of period fertility levels (Hellstrand et al. 2020). Finland represents a Nordic welfare state where family policies support the reconciliation of work and family (Bergsvik, Fauske, and Hart 2021). These include job-protected and income-compensated family-related leaves, universal access to affordable and publicly subsidised childcare to enable mothers and fathers to return to full-time work after childbirth, as well as child-related income support (Daly and Ferragina 2018). Against this background, the declining levels of fertility in Finland and other Nordic countries, with similar welfare systems and relatively high levels of gender equality, have come as a surprise and represent a conundrum (Hellstrand et al. 2021; Ohlsson-Wijk and Andersson 2022).

Despite the general character of this fertility decline, first births have dropped to a greater extent in labour market groups for which the future outlook is more uncertain, as indicated by their higher overall aggregate levels of unemployment; yet level changes in employment alone cannot explain the general fertility decline (Hellstrand, Nisén, and Myrskylä 2022). The relationship between employment and entry into parenthood is generally positive for women in Finland, especially at older ages and for those with higher levels of education (Miettinen and Jalovaara 2020; Vikat 2004), similar to other Nordic countries (Andersson, Kreyenfeld, and Mika 2014; Kreyenfeld and Andersson 2014). Also, women with a temporary work contract delay their entry into motherhood in relatively gender-equal countries, such as the Nordic countries (Alderotti et al. 2021), illustrating the aim for many women to establish themselves in the labour market before embarking on motherhood.

Research on work careers in Finland has found evidence for increased job mobility (Riekhoff 2022), although, similar to other countries, careers have not become more volatile more generally (Riekhoff et al. 2021). Among cohorts born from the 1940s to the 1980s in Finland, women's levels of mobility rose to the same level as men's, and even surpassed them (Riekhoff 2022). This can be connected to the changing role of women in the labour market, as women's levels of education rose strongly and their employment patterns increasingly resembled those of men. In a country with comprehensive policies to support mothers' employment, motherhood could be expected to have a limited impact on opportunities for career mobility. Following this line of thought, job mobility may be expected to have only a limited role in understanding fertility behaviour. However, especially in gender-equal countries such as the Nordic countries, women's labour market attachment is nowadays viewed as a prerequisite for the entry into parenthood: women's earnings matter for family income and women want to maintain their careers (Matysiak and Vignoli 2025). This view highlights the continuing importance of women's employment careers for fertility.

Moreover, even in a relatively gender-equal country such as Finland, the division of work between partners becomes more gendered after the entry into motherhood, and mothers' labour earnings fall relative to their partners (Evertsson, Magnusson, and van der Vleuten 2023). This earnings response is related to the unequal division of parental leave and other gendered practices of paid and unpaid work within families, which are influenced by factors such as gender norms, women's lower pre-birth earnings, and pregnancy-related discrimination. A recent survey study estimated that a fourth of pregnant women in Finland have experienced some form of discrimination in the labour market due to their pregnancy (Attila et al. 2024). Especially long career breaks have negative impacts on subsequent employment (Österbacka and Räsänen 2022) and chances for career progression (Evertsson and Duvander 2011). Persistent gender-unequal practices within couples after the entry into parenthood, alongside discrimination in the labour market, may weaken the prospects for upward career mobility among prospective mothers, especially in a context such as Finland, where norms support long career breaks despite the provision of affordable public childcare (Hiilamo and Kangas 2009).

Competing hypotheses for the role of job mobility for first births

This study sets to test two competing hypotheses. According to our first hypothesis, *job mobility is positively associated with the entry into parenthood (H1)*. More frequent moves across employers may facilitate the entry into motherhood. This may result from a process in

which a woman has managed to change jobs to acquire a position with a better employer-employee match. This may mean a more stable position (e.g. permanent position), higher occupational status, and a higher earnings level, which all may be expected to strengthen her career prospects over the entry into motherhood. Previous research argues that mobility across employers may have become more important over time to acquire higher earnings (Riekhoff 2022). From previous fertility research, in turn, we know that higher earnings are related to a higher risk of entering parenthood (Hart 2015; Jalovaara and Miettinen 2013), and there is evidence for a strengthening association for women over time (van Wijk and Billari 2024). One argument is that the income prerequisites of parenthood may have strengthened over time. If this is the case, then more employer mobility may be required to support this aim. This setting may encourage women to postpone entry into parenthood in search of more work experience and a better employer-employee match before embarking on parenthood.

Our second hypothesis states that *job mobility is negatively associated with the entry into parenthood (H2)*. A higher number of moves across employers may signal an unstable position in the labour market, and thus, may be negatively associated with a woman's willingness to make the long-term commitment of parenthood. Previous research consistently shows that employment instability, as measured by fixed-term employment, is negatively associated with the entry into motherhood (Alderotti et al. 2021). However, previous research has not studied whether changes across employers predict the entry. A cumulative experience of job changes could be viewed to strengthen the perception of employment uncertainty in a way that leaves a lasting "scarring" perception, in cases that move across employers, are involuntary and related to fixed-term contracts.

Data and Methods

Our analysis draws on longitudinal data obtained from Statistics Finland's database. Specifically, we utilised three modules: FOLK Basic, FOLK Employment, and FOLK Family. Additionally, we use the Medical Birth Register to identify first births. The Basic module includes individual-level information from population structure statistics, employment statistics, selected family statistics, and educational attainment data. These data are recorded at the end of each calendar year and generally align with the official Statistics Finland (OSF) figures at the time of publication. The Employment module provides detailed records on individuals' employment status, including information on their employment relationships during the last week of the year. The FAMILY module offers data on household composition, including information on whether the person lived in a cohabiting or married union.

Our study spans the period from 1996 to 2018, selected based on the availability of consistent and comparable employment data. While we tracked births beginning in 1997, we set the start of the observation period to 1996 to allow the measurement of explanatory covariates in the year before measuring a first childbirth. Preliminary analyses on the Medical Birth Register data showed that at least 97% of women who had at least one child did so before reaching the age of 39. Therefore, our analysis was restricted to women who were 39 years old in 2018, whom we observed retrospectively from the age of 17 onwards, and the first birth from age 18. We include only women whom we can observe consistently every year from age 17 onwards until they experience a first birth, emigration, death, or they will reach 39 years old. This restriction is applied for the purpose of having a complete history of women's employment. We include women who were present in the country at the age of 17, including those who were born abroad (3.6%). This sample restriction ensures that we have accurate information on women's educational attainment, because any secondary or tertiary level degree would have required enrolment at age 17 or a higher age. Considering these assumptions, our analytical sample comprised 31,522 women, of whom 23,446 (74.4%) gave birth to a child by the age of 39. Earlier research records that 22 per cent of women born in the late 1970s remained childless at age 44 in Finland (Hellstrand et al. 2025), thus indicating that our study does not capture the latest first births born to women at ages 40 and higher. We expect this limitation to have only a little impact on our main results.

To examine the link between early careers and the timing of a first childbirth, we used two measures based on data from the FOLK Employment module. This database contains information on the encrypted employer code for the employment relationship valid during the last week of the year. Based on this information, we constructed our main explanatory variable, *job mobility*, which describes the cumulative number of employment relationships with a new employer a woman has had from the age of 18 until the year preceding the year of birth of the child (or censoring due to emigration or death). A situation in which a woman returned to work for an employer that she had worked for earlier in her life, after having worked in between for another employer, is defined as having taken up a new job, that is, being mobile across employers.

We additionally include a measure of *recent job mobility*, which captures whether a change in employment status occurred between the year preceding childbirth and the year in which the childbirth took place (or the last year of observation).

Our primary independent variable, *job mobility*, reflects the entire employment history and is constructed analogously to the cumulative job-changes variable used in previous

research in Finland as an indicator for the number of new contracts (Riekhoff et al. 2021). Taking into account the entire employment history, Figure 1 presents information on the frequency with which women have changed employers at a given age. We analysed two-year age groups. Among women aged 18–19, 20–21 and 22–23, the majority had not yet changed employers. In the age groups 22–23 and 24–25, the share of women with one change of employer is the highest. However, after the age of 26, job changes became increasingly common. Notably, a significant proportion of women over the age of 30 had five or more changes of employer. The percentage distribution of women by the number of employer changes before the year of childbirth or censoring is presented in Table 1.

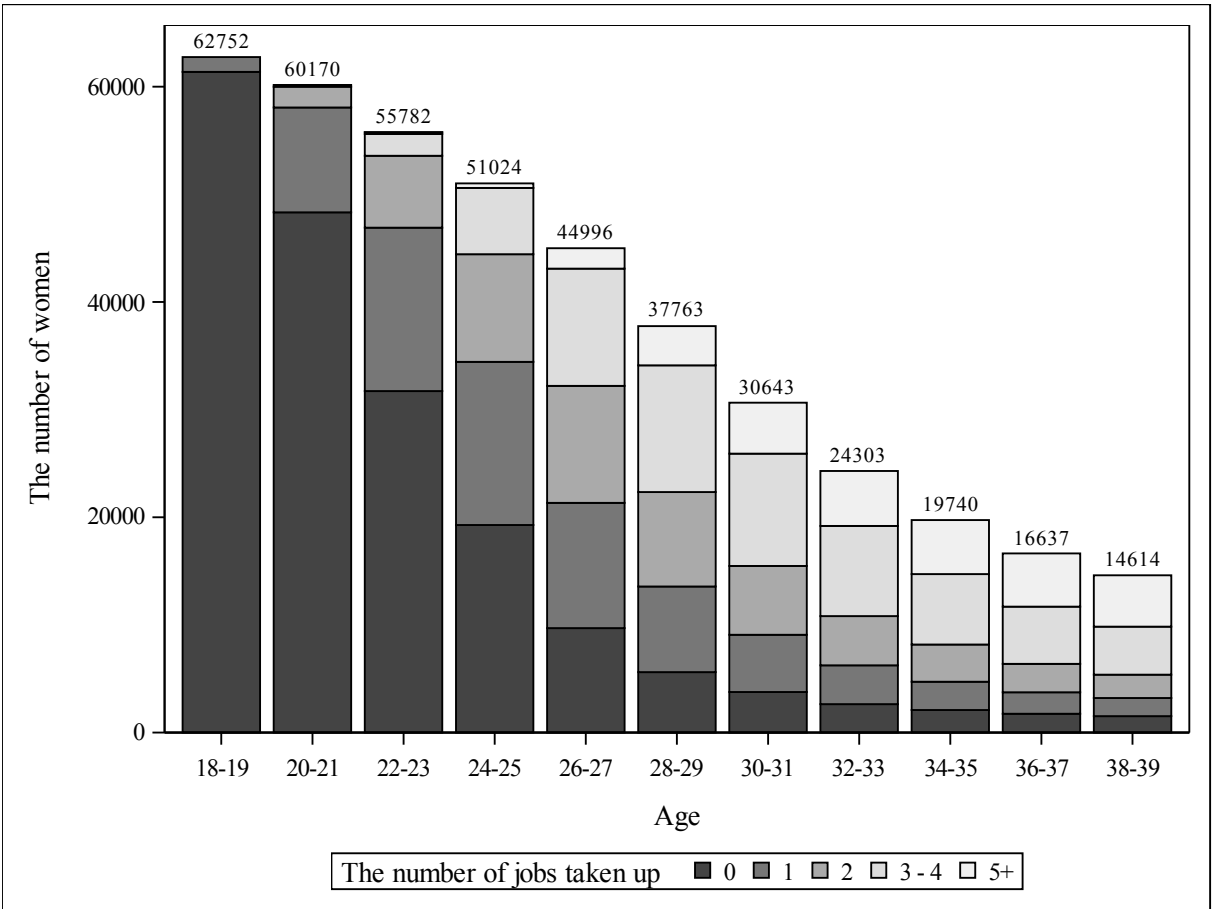


Figure 1. Cumulative number of employer changes by age

Among those who had one change of employer during that time, 82.2% gave birth. For women who had two employment contracts for different employers, the percentage was 78.1%, while among those with three or four employer changes, 71.1% gave birth. In contrast, only 51.8% of women with five or more employer changes gave birth by age 39. These results partially reflect the fact that women who entered motherhood at an earlier age did not manage

to accumulate as many job changes as women who entered motherhood at a later age. An important factor was a change in labour market status between the year preceding childbirth (or censoring) and the year in which childbirth (or censoring) occurred. Among women who experienced such a change, 66.2% gave birth.

In the study, apart from the variable *recent job mobility*, only the variable distinguishing individuals born in Finland from those born abroad (*background*) and the variable describing parental social class (*mother's socioeconomic group*) are time-invariant. We categorise those individuals who were born abroad but whose parents were both born in Finland as having a Finnish background. The *mother's socioeconomic group* was measured when the individual was aged 16 (in 1996). It was constructed by Statistics Finland based on information about their main type of activity, occupation, occupational status, and industry. Individuals were categorised into 15 groups in the original variable; for our study, five main groups were used. We first considered the socioeconomic group of both parents; however, since the characteristics were found to be strongly dependent, the mother's information was used in the final analysis due to the greater number of significant categories compared to the father's in the hazards model predicting a first birth.

The remaining variables are time-varying: main type of activity (*main activity*), educational attainment (*educational attainment*), family type (*cohabiting status*), and municipality of residence (*municipality of residence*). The variable *educational attainment* reflects the highest level of completed education, as defined by the most recent Statistics Finland classification system, which follows the international ISCED classification. Lower than secondary education refers to education at the basic level. Secondary education comprises degrees from both vocational and academic tracks. Lower tertiary refers to a bachelor's degree or equivalent, and higher tertiary to a master's degree. The variable describing the *main type of activity* was constructed based on the information on employment status during the last week of the year, combined with information on whether the individual received student financial aid in the autumn semester. For the variable describing the *municipality of residence*, missing data were observed for the years 1997 and 1998, and these values were therefore imputed using information from 1996. Table 1 presents the distributions of these variables as measured in the year preceding childbirth or censoring (i.e. occurrence of emigration, death, or age 39).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Characteristics	Per cent
Job mobility	
No employer change - 1	25.5
One employer change - 2	18.0
Two employer changes - 3	16.8
Three or four employer changes - 4	24.7
Five or more employer changes - 5	15.1
Recent job mobility	
No employment change - 0	89.4
Employment change -1	10.6
Background	
Finnish - 1	96.4
Other - 2	3.6
Mother's socioeconomic group	
Upper-level employee - 1	12.1
Lower-level employee - 2	34.2
Manual worker - 3	17.0
Self-employed - 4	10.1
Other or unknown - 5	26.7
Main activity	
Employed - 1	75.5
Unemployed - 2	8.4
Student - 3	9.8
Other - 4	6.3
Educational attainment	
Lower than secondary - 1	10.2
Secondary - 2	42.4
Lower tertiary - 3	28.8
Higher tertiary - 4	18.7
Cohabiting status	
Cohabiting or married - 1	74.8
Single - 2	25.2
Municipality of residence	
Urban - 1	76.2
Semi-urban - 2	12.4
Rural - 3	11.3

Note: These variables are measured in the year preceding childbirth or in the last year before censoring.

To study the transition to first birth while accounting for both time-invariant and time-varying covariates, we employed an extended proportional hazards model (Hosmer and

Lemeshow 1999). Let $x = [x_1, \dots, x_k]^T$ denote a vector of independent variables, and $\beta = [\beta_1, \dots, \beta_k]$ represent a vector of regression coefficients. The proportional hazards model defines the hazard function as follows:

$$h(t \vee x) = h_0(t) \exp(x\beta),$$

where $h_0(t)$ denotes the baseline hazard rate. The generalisation of the proportional hazards model is a model containing both time-invariant and time-variant variables. Then, the vector of covariates is specified in the following form: $x(t) = [x_1, \dots, x_{k_1}, x_1(t), \dots, x_{k_2}(t)]^T$, where x_i for $i=1, 2, \dots, k_1$ denotes the time-invariant covariate, and x_j for $j=1, 2, \dots, k_2$ denotes the time-variant covariate. The hazard rate for a model with time-invariant and time-variant variables is defined as:

$$h(t \vee x(t)) = h_0(t) \exp\left(\sum_{i=1}^{k_1} \beta_i x_i + \sum_{j=1}^{k_2} \delta_j x_j(t)\right).$$

The dependent variable is the time, measured from the age of 18 until the occurrence of the first birth or censoring due to reaching age 39, emigration, or death. Using the proposed model, we examine how changes in key characteristics influence the risk of first birth over time. Particular focus is placed on the relationship between the frequency of employer changes and the entry into parenthood.

In the first stage of the analysis, we considered the proportional hazards model with time-invariant covariates to test the proportional hazards assumption for variables that remain constant over time, namely, *recent job mobility*, *background* and *mother's socioeconomic group*. However, this assumption was not satisfied for none of the variables. As a result, the time axis was divided into sub-episodes based on the hazard function estimated using non-parametric methods, and the transformed variables were included in the main model. Thus, in the main model, the variables that changed over time - *job mobility*, *main activity*, *educational attainment*, *cohabiting status*, and *municipality of residence* - were treated as time-variant variables, whereas *recent job mobility*, *background*, and *mother's socioeconomic group* were included as time-invariant variables.

Results

Job mobility and the entry into motherhood

In the first stage of our study, we examined the hazard functions (Figure 2) derived from the survival functions for groups defined by the *job mobility* variable. Women are observed starting at age 17; therefore, the time shown on the graph is measured from that age. The

results indicate that the risk of first birth changes over time and is related to how many jobs a woman has had with different employers. Women who had not changed employers yet were at the highest risk of entering parenthood between the ages of 20 and 26, where the hazard of first birth was generally very low. Thereafter, their first-birth risk gradually declined and remained at a very low level once they reached the age of 32. Women who had one employer had the highest likelihood of having a first child between the ages of 24 and 31. Starting at age 22, women with one change of employer had a higher first-birth hazard than those who had not changed employers yet. Moreover, between the ages of 22 and 26, one change of employer was most strongly associated with entry into parenthood compared to women who had multiple employers. Women who had two changes of employers had the highest chances of becoming mothers between the ages of 26 and 30. Those who changed employers three or four times experienced the highest first-birth risks between the ages of 28 and 31 compared to other women. Women who changed employers five or more times had the highest first-birth risk starting at age 32, relative to the other women. Clearly, our results demonstrate that women who accumulated more changes between employers postponed their entry into parenthood.

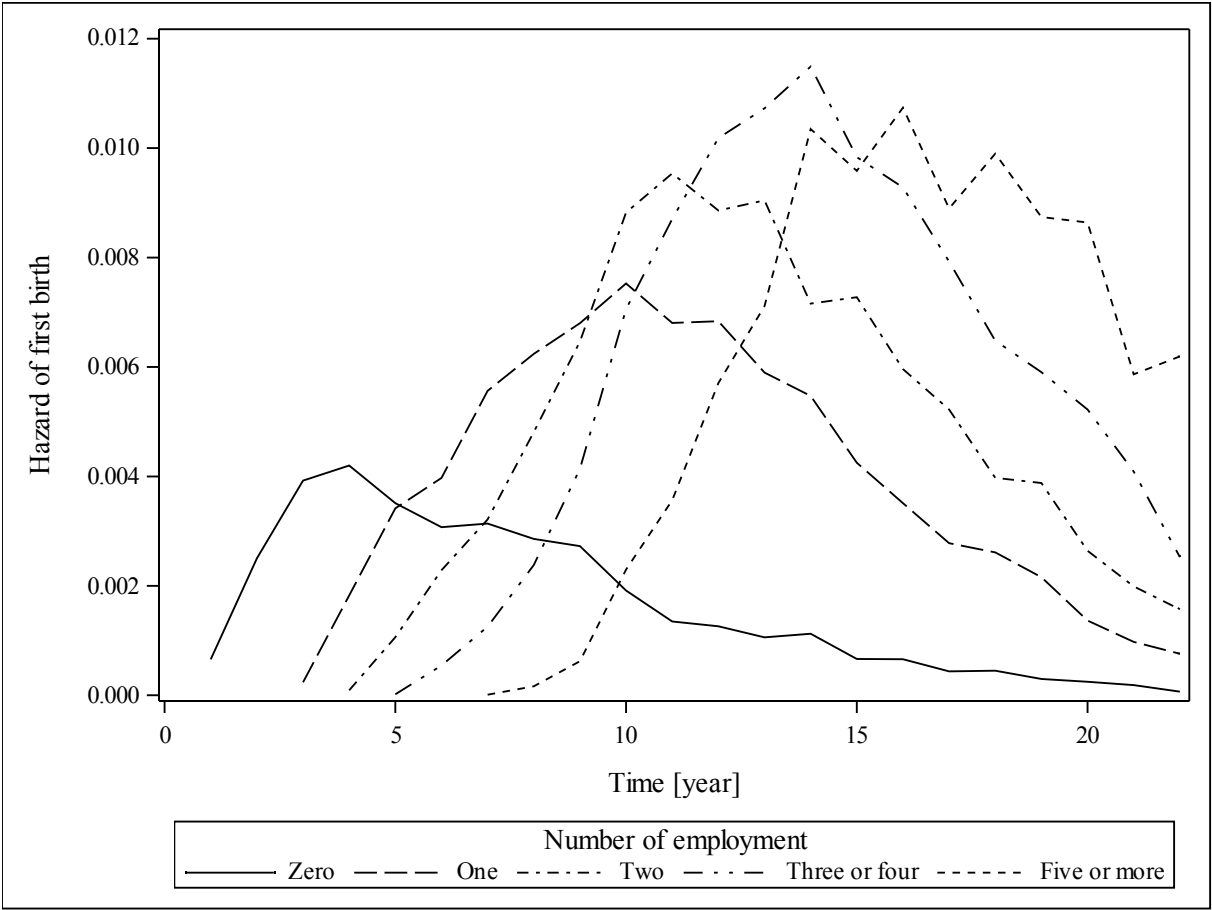


Figure 2. The hazard functions for groups defined by the *job mobility* variable.

The hazard function analysis for women with different numbers of changes across employers showed that the effect of this characteristic on entry into parenthood depends on women's age. Moreover, women who gave birth at an earlier age had less time to change employers. The use of a generalisation of the proportional hazards model allowed us to account for all employer changes from age 18 onward (Table 2). The results indicate that women who had never changed employers had a 44% lower first-birth hazard compared to those who had changed employers only once. In contrast, women who had changed employers more than once had higher chances of entering parenthood. Specifically, those with two employer changes had a 27% higher first-birth hazard than women who had worked only for one employer. Women who had changed employers three or four times had a 70% higher first-birth hazard than women who had changed employers once, and those with five or more changed employers had nearly 2.5 times higher first-birth hazard compared to women with only one job. These results indicate that women enter motherhood at a higher rate once they have changed employers many times.

Table 2.

Extended proportional hazards model of entry into parenthood.

Covariate	Parameter estimate	Standard error	p-value	Hazard ratio
Job mobility (ref. One employer change- 2)				
No employer change - 1	-0.583	0.021	<.0001	0.56
Two employer changes - 3	0.237	0.022	<.0001	1.27
Three or four employer changes - 4	0.532	0.021	<.0001	1.70
Five or more employer changes - 5	0.916	0.027	<.0001	2.50
Recent job mobility (ref. Employment change -1)				
No employment change (<=35 years old) - 0	0.083	0.023	0.0004	1.09
No employment change (>35 years old) - 0	-1.419	0.083	<.0001	0.24
Main activity (ref. Unemployed - 2)				
Employed - 1	0.966	0.050	<.0001	2.63
Student - 3	-0.114	0.052	0.0283	0.89
Other - 4	2.493	0.051	<.0001	12.09
Educational attainment (ref. Higher tertiary - 4)				
Lower than secondary level - 1	-1.086	0.030	<.0001	0.34
Secondary level - 2	-0.744	0.020	<.0001	0.48
Lower tertiary - 3	-0.339	0.020	<.0001	0.71
Cohabiting status (ref. Single - 2)				
Cohabiting or married - 1	1.560	0.023	<.0001	4.76
Municipality of residence (ref. Urban - 1)				
Semi-urban municipalities - 2				

Rural municipalities - 3	0.104 -0.057	0.019 0.021	<.0001 0.0059	1.11 0.95
Background (ref. Other - 2)				
Finnish (<=31 years old) - 1	0.433	0.038	<.0001	1.54
Finnish (>31 years old) - 1	-0.802	0.040	<.0001	0.45
Mother's socioeconomic group (ref. Upper-level employee - 1)				
Lower-level employee (<=29 years old) - 2	0.569	0.026	<.0001	1.77
Lower-level employee (>29 years old) - 2	-0.215	0.026	<.0001	0.81
Manual worker (<=29 years old) - 3	0.725	0.029	<.0001	2.07
Manual worker (>29 years old) - 3	-0.228	0.035	<.0001	0.80
Self-employed (<=29 years old) - 4	0.645	0.034	<.0001	1.91
Self-employed (>29 years old) - 4	-0.224	0.039	<.0001	0.80
Other or unknown (<=29 years old) - 5	0.883	0.027	<.0001	2.42
Other or unknown (>29 years old) - 5	-0.242	0.030	<.0001	0.79

The *job mobility* variable included in the model described each woman's employment history up to the year preceding childbirth or censoring. We also considered a complementary variable, *recent job mobility*, which indicates whether a change in employment status occurred between the year preceding childbirth and the year in which the childbirth took place (or the last year of observation). Our model indicates that a change in employment status between the year preceding childbirth and the year in which childbirth occurred was associated with a slightly higher risk of having a child only among younger women (aged up to 35). In contrast, for women over the age of 35, a change of employment status between the year preceding childbirth and the year of childbirth (or the last year of observation) was associated with a 76% lower risk of giving birth. It should be noted that the employment change may, in some cases, have taken place after the first birth, as the comparison made here is between the current and previous calendar year.

The role of other characteristics for the entry into motherhood

Using the proposed model, including measures of *job mobility* and *recent job mobility*, we were also able to assess the impact of other time-varying characteristics, such as *main activity*, *educational attainment*, *cohabiting status*, and *municipality of residence*, on the first-birth hazard. In the context of our study, the *main activity* variable was also very important. The results indicate that employed women had more than twice the first-birth hazard compared to non-employed women. Women who were in education had a 11% lower first-birth hazard than those who were unemployed. In contrast, other women (i.e., those outside the

unemployed and student categories) had as much as a twelvefold higher risk of first birth compared to unemployed women.

For the variable describing *educational attainment*, we found that women with lower levels of education than the master's level had lower first-birth hazards compared to the most highly educated group. Specifically, women with less than a secondary education had a 66% lower risk of first birth compared to women with a master's degree. Women with secondary-level education had a 52% lower risk, while those with a lower tertiary-level of education had a 29% lower risk, in both cases compared to the most highly educated women (i.e. women with a higher tertiary-level education).

Moreover, women who were cohabiting or married had nearly a fivefold higher first-birth hazard compared to other women. Women residing in semi-urban municipalities had an 11% higher first-birth hazard compared to those living in urban municipalities. In contrast, women living in rural municipalities had a 5% lower first-birth hazard than their urban counterparts. For the time-invariant variables, *background* and *mother's socioeconomic group*, their association with entry into parenthood was influenced by the woman's age.

Sensitivity analyses

To evaluate the robustness of our findings, we conducted a series of sensitivity analyses (Table 3). These were designed to test whether the observed associations between women's employment trajectories and the transition to first birth were influenced by sample restrictions or specific subgroups of women. These analyses allow us to assess the stability of the results across different subgroups and model specifications, and to identify whether the mechanisms linking employment mobility and first-time childbearing differ by age, education, or sector of employment. First, we restricted the analysis to women observed only up to age 29, to focus on the role of employment mobility at younger ages. Second, we investigated potential heterogeneity in the relationship between employment mobility and fertility by running the models separately for women with and without tertiary-level education. Third, following the possibility that job mobility might be underestimated in the public sector, as we do not capture changes between different workplaces within a municipality or within a government agency, we re-estimated the models excluding women employed in the public sector, and limiting the sample to those working in the private sector.

The model for women up to the age of 29. At the beginning, we analysed women's employment and family trajectories up to the age of 29. The results obtained are generally consistent with those observed for women up to the age of 39. The risk of first birth among

women who had not changed employers yet, compared to those who had one change of employer, was slightly lower than in the full sample. For women who had changed employers twice, the first-birth risk decreased slightly, and for those with three or four employer changes, it declined further compared to the full sample. Among women under the age of 29 who had five or more changes of employers, this factor proved statistically insignificant. The weaker association between the number of moves and a first birth risk among young women, as compared to the whole sample of women, may indicate that very frequent employer changes at a young age signal instability in the early work career, rather than career advancement and a better employer-employee match. The effect of the recent job mobility was also statistically insignificant for young women, although the direction of its influence was consistent with the results obtained for the full sample. The results showed that, when analysing the entire sample, the impact of this factor varied over time, and for young women who did not change employment status, the risk of a first birth was only slightly higher compared to the others. The estimated associations of other variables with the first birth rate were mainly similar to those in the whole sample of women, with some exceptions. There was no significant difference in the risk of a first birth between those with a lower or higher tertiary education. As for the main activity, the relative risk of a first birth among the employed as compared to the unemployed was higher among young women, but positive in both cases. Moreover, among younger women, the first-birth risk was slightly higher for those who were in education than for those who were unemployed, while this was not the case for the whole sample. This may be due to the much smaller share of students in the whole sample as compared to women aged up to 29.

Models for women of different levels of education. When comparing women without a tertiary level education to those with a tertiary level education, it can be observed that the effect of the number of employer changes on the risk of first birth followed a similar pattern in both groups as in the whole sample. Only in the case of five or more employer changes, the relative risk of a first birth as compared to the case of having one change of employer was higher among women with less than tertiary education as compared to women with tertiary education. For the variable describing a change of employment status between the year preceding childbirth and the year of childbirth (or the year before and of censoring), the results for women aged over 35 were similar in both educational groups and resembled the findings for this age group in the full sample. However, among younger women without a tertiary level education, the effect proved statistically insignificant, unlike in the whole sample. Among women educated to a tertiary level, the findings were consistent with those

obtained for the entire sample of women. These results reflect that the results in the whole sample showing a negative relationship between recent mobility and a first birth risk are driven by women who have attained a higher tertiary degree and are aged 35 or younger.

Model for women working in the private sector. In the final stage of the analysis, we estimated the model for women employed in the private sector. The employment sector was determined based on information about the type of ownership of the enterprise in which the person was employed at the time of the last survey. Analysing *job mobility* and *recent job mobility*, we found that the results obtained are consistent with those found for the whole sample of women observed from the age of 18 until age 39. The only exception was the hazard ratio estimate for *recent job mobility* among women aged up to 35, which turned out not statistically significant. However, its magnitude and direction remained consistent with the results obtained for the full sample.

Table 3. Extended proportional hazards model of entry into parenthood.

Covariate	Model 1 For women up to age 29		Model 2 Less than tertiary		Model 3 Tertiary (lower or higher)		Model 4 For women working in the private sector	
	p-value	Hazard ratio	p-value	Hazard ratio	p-value	Hazard ratio	p-value	Hazard ratio
Job mobility (ref. One employer change - 2)								
No employer change - 1	<.0001	0.47	<.0001	0.50	<.0001	0.32	<.0001	0.56
Two employer changes - 3	<.0001	1.16	<.0001	1.33	<.0001	1.34	<.0001	1.26
Three or four employer changes - 4	<.0001	1.21	<.0001	1.90	<.0001	1.81	<.0001	1.77
Five or more employer changes - 5	0.3695	1.05	<.0001	2.97	<.0001	2.59	<.0001	2.67
Recent job mobility (ref. Employment change -1)								
No employment change (lack of division in model 1; <=35 years old in models 2, 3 and 4) - 0	0.2385	1.04	0.7888	0.99	<.0001	1.30	0.1223	1.05
No employment change (lack of division in model 1; >35 years old in models 2, 3 and 4) - 0			<.0001	0.21	<.0001	0.25	<.0001	0.20
Main activity (ref. Unemployed - 2)								
Employed - 1	<.0001	3.12	<.0001	3.55	<.0001	1.69	<.0001	2.06
Student - 3	0.0005	1.25	<.0001	1.85	<.0001	0.26	0.7575	0.98
Other - 4	<.0001	14.43	<.0001	17.33	<.0001	5.38	<.0001	10.96
Educational attainment (ref. Higher tertiary - 4)								
Lower than secondary level - 1	<.0001	0.33	-	-	-	-	<.0001	0.32
Secondary level - 2	<.0001	0.59					<.0001	0.47
Lower tertiary - 3	0.1862	0.96					<.0001	0.70
Cohabiting status (ref. Single - 2)								
Cohabiting or married - 1	<.0001	4.94	<.0001	3.65	<.0001	9.42	<.0001	4.30
Municipality of residence (ref. Urban - 1)								
Semi-urban municipalities - 2	<.0001	1.19	0.0507	1.05	0.0004	1.11	<.0001	1.10
Rural municipalities - 3	0.0600	0.96	0.0001	0.91	0.0509	0.94	0.0006	0.92
Background (ref. Other - 2)								
Finnish (<=22 years old in model 1; <=31 years old in models 2,3, and 4) - 1	<.0001	2.59	<.0001	1.75	<.0001	1.71	<.0001	1.58

Finnish (>22 years old in model 1; >31 years old in models 2,3, and 4) - 1	<.0001	0.73	<.0001	0.37	<.0001	0.59	<.0001	0.44
Mother's SES (ref. Upper-level employee - 1)								
Lower-level employee (<=22 years old in model 1; <=29 years old in models 2,3, and 4) - 2	<.0001	3.25	<.0001	1.59	<.0001	1.38	<.0001	1.82
Lower-level employee (>22 years old in model 1; >29 years old in models 2,3, and 4) - 2	0.0015	1.11	<.0001	0.63	<.0001	0.82	<.0001	0.79
Manual worker (<=22 years old in model 1; <=29 years old in models 2,3, and 4) - 3	<.0001	3.50	<.0001	1.72	<.0001	1.45	<.0001	2.13
Manual worker (>22 years old in model 1; >29 years old in models 2,3, and 4) - 3	<.0001	1.33	<.0001	0.65	<.0001	0.77	<.0001	0.77
Self-employed (<=22 years old in model 1; <=29 years old in models 2,3, and 4) - 4	<.0001	3.43	<.0001	1.68	<.0001	1.51	<.0001	1.93
Self-employed (>22 years old in model 1; >29 years old in models 2,3, and 4) - 4	0.0009	1.15	<.0001	0.63	<.0001	0.82	<.0001	0.80
Other or unknown (<=22 years old in model 1; <=29 years old in models 2,3, and 4) - 5	<.0001	4.11	<.0001	1.96	<.0001	1.55	<.0001	2.48
Other or unknown (>22 years old in model 1; >29 years old in models 2,3, and 4) - 5	<.0001	1.35	<.0001	0.61	<.0001	0.80	<.0001	0.74

Discussion

This study investigated the relationship between job mobility and the entry into parenthood. Our findings provide new evidence showing that job mobility, measured as the cumulative number of employment relationships with a new employer, is positively associated with the transition to first birth among women born in 1979 in Finland. These results support the hypothesis (H1) according to which frequent employer changes may reflect career progression and an improved employer-employee match, which in turn is positively associated with the entry into parenthood. The observed pattern resonates with previous research suggesting that women's employment (Matysiak and Vignoli 2025) as well as a certain income level (van Wijk and Billari 2024) may be viewed, perhaps increasingly, as prerequisites for family formation. Our findings suggest that the path to such employment, in which women consider themselves ready to become mothers, may involve multiple job changes. It may include a search for more work experience, a more secure position, a higher occupational status, or a higher level of earnings. Recent research from the US suggests that women often change jobs as a strategy to better reconcile work and family life, seeking employment conditions that are more flexible, autonomous, or supportive of family responsibilities (Yarger and Brauner-Otto 2024). Plausibly, even in the context of the current study, job changes may not indicate “scarring” employment instability, but rather a proactive approach to shaping a career trajectory that accommodates parenthood.

While our analyses show that having accumulated a higher number of job changes is associated with a higher risk of having a first birth, it takes time to accumulate experience across employers. Therefore, job mobility is also likely to lead to a postponement of parenthood. Indeed, the age-specific hazard functions clearly reveal that women with more frequent job changes tend to delay childbirth, with the highest first-birth risks occurring at later ages. This suggests that while frequent employer changes may ultimately facilitate parenthood, they may also contribute to its postponement. This interpretation is further supported by our finding that a recent change in employment status is associated with a lower likelihood of entering parenthood for women at ages 35 and below and with a tertiary education. Career-oriented women delay their entry into motherhood until a job change has occurred. Such findings resonate with broader demographic trends in Finland and other high-income countries, where the entry into parenthood continues to be delayed (Hellstrand et al. 2021; Rahnu and Jalovaara 2023).

This interpretation is not entirely unexpected, even in a country such as Finland, where women typically return to the labour market after childbirth, yet mothers' (job-protected) career breaks are relatively long (Hiilamo and Kangas 2009). A recent survey study estimated that a quarter of mothers have experienced some form of discrimination in the labour market due to their pregnancy (Attila et al. 2024). Generally, women may delay having children if they perceive that it could have negative consequences for their careers. Our results suggest that highly educated women tend to delay motherhood in connection with recent job mobility, but the relationship of accumulated mobility with the first birth risk is similar for women with and without tertiary-level education. Previous literature stresses that primarily women with higher levels of education delay their entry into motherhood until they have achieved a certain level of career stability and economic security (Alderotti et al. 2021; Nitsche and Brückner 2021). This behaviour is consistent with a long-term life-course strategy in which educational investment and career consolidation take precedence over family formation. In contrast, among less-educated women by age 35, we find no relationship with recent job mobility and first birth risk. This may indicate more precarious employment (Adsera 2017) or less careful career planning among the less educated (Musick et al. 2009). Conversely, highly educated women, given their stronger attachment to the labour market, may be able to time their childbirth to coincide with a more favourable moment in their careers.

More broadly, women's tendency to accumulate job opportunities before childbirth may reflect broader life priorities of contemporary young adults. A Finnish survey conducted among individuals aged 20 to 29 years indicated that achieving a stable relationship, meaningful employment, financial security, and well-being were prioritised over friendships and parenthood (Eronen et al., 2022). In other words, in present-day Finland, a meaningful job and secure livelihood are viewed as more pertinent life goals than having children. This insight describes the Finnish low-fertility landscape and suggests that career-related reasons postpone parenthood. Our study cannot provide direct evidence of changes over time, as our analysis was focused on the cohort of women born in 1979. However, given the rise in job mobility in Finland across cohorts and concurrent delay of first births, it is plausible that mobility across employers is connected to the trend of postponed parenthood.

Limitations

In our study, we considered variable values as defined for each calendar year of observation. Data measured with monthly precision would have been a valuable extension to our analysis. Unfortunately, apart from information on the timing of childbirth, such data were not

available for this study. Job mobility might be underestimated in the current study for women working in the public sector, as we do not capture changes between different workplaces within a municipality or within a government agency. Therefore, we conducted sensitivity analyses where women working in the public sector in the last year of observation were excluded. The findings regarding job mobility were robust to this exclusion, with the partial exception of recent mobility. More broadly, our results remain descriptive in nature, as we are not able to assess the causal drivers of the timing of a first birth. Factors other than job-related factors may lead to a delay of childbirth, which in our models is associated with an increasing number of accumulated job changes. However, our results are robust in showing that a higher first birth rate for women is associated with more accumulated job mobility at higher ages. They robustly show that women who accumulate many job changes also end up having their first child later.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that job mobility accumulated over the work career is positively associated with the transition to first birth among Finnish women. The findings suggest that frequent employer changes may reflect career advancement and an improved employer-employee match, which enhances women's readiness to enter parenthood. However, the postponement of childbearing among women with a high level of accumulated job mobility also suggests that early career advancement may delay family formation, even in contexts with relatively strong work-family reconciliation policies. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of how employment trajectories shape fertility decisions and highlight the importance of considering job mobility for childbearing behaviour.

References

- Adsera, Alicia. 2017. "Education and Fertility in the Context of Rising Inequality." *Vienna Yearbook of Population Research* 15:63–92.
- Alderotti, Giammarco, Daniele Vignoli, Michela Baccini, and Anna Matysiak. 2021. "Employment Instability and Fertility in Europe: A Meta-Analysis." *Demography* 58(3):871–900. doi: 10.1215/00703370-9164737.
- Andersson, Gunnar, Michaela Kreyenfeld, and Tatjana Mika. 2014. "Welfare State Context, Female Labour-Market Attachment and Childbearing in Germany and Denmark." *Journal of Population Research* 31(4):287–316. doi: 10.1007/s12546-014-9135-3.

- Attila, Henna, Tarja Baumgartner, Aku von Bell, Sara Koivuranta, and Marjut Pietiläinen. 2024. "Raskaussyrjintä Suomessa: Vuoden 2024 Väestötutkimuksen Tuloksia."
- Bergsvik, Janna, Agnes Fauske, and Rannveig Kaldager Hart. 2021. "Can Policies Stall the Fertility Fall? A Systematic Review of the (Quasi-) Experimental Literature." *Population and Development Review* 47(4):913–64.
- Daly, Mary, and Emanuele Ferragina. 2018. "Family Policy in High-Income Countries: Five Decades of Development." *Journal of European Social Policy* 28(3):255–70. doi: 10.1177/0958928717735060.
- Eronen, Eija, Wilma Niskanen, Roosa Veijola, and Jenni Simonen. 2022. *Sä Teet Tän Elämän Itelles. Alle 30-Vuotiaiden Nuorten Aikuisten Näkemyksiä Hyvästä Elämästä.*
- Eurostat. 2025. "Fertility Indicators." Retrieved (https://doi.org/10.2908/DEMO_FIND).
- Evertsson, Marie, and Ann-Zofie Duvander. 2011. "Parental Leave—Possibility or Trap? Does Family Leave Length Effect Swedish Women's Labour Market Opportunities?" *European Sociological Review* 27(4):435–50. doi: 10.1093/esr/jcq018.
- Evertsson, Marie, Charlotta Magnusson, and Maaïke van der Vleuten. 2023. "Social Stratification by Gender and Parenthood: The Importance of Family Formation, Gender Roles, and Ideals."
- Hart, Rannveig Kaldager. 2015. "Earnings and First Birth Probability among Norwegian Men and Women 1995-2010." *Demographic Research* 33:1067–1104.
- Hellstrand, Julia, Linus Andersson, Lars Dommermuth, Peter Fallesen, Ari Klængur Jónsson, Marika Jalovaara, and Mikko Myrskylä. 2025. *Growing Divergences: A Research Note Forecasting Ultimate Childlessness by Education in the Nordic Countries.*
- Hellstrand, Julia, Jessica Nisén, Vitor Miranda, Peter Fallesen, Lars Dommermuth, and Mikko Myrskylä. 2021. "Not Just Later, but Fewer: Novel Trends in Cohort Fertility in the Nordic Countries." *Demography* 58(4):1373–99. doi: 10.1215/00703370-9373618.
- Hellstrand, Julia, Jessica Nisén, and Mikko Myrskylä. 2020. "All-Time Low Period Fertility in Finland: Demographic Drivers, Tempo Effects, and Cohort Implications." *Population Studies* 74(3):315–29. doi: 10.1080/00324728.2020.1750677.
- Hellstrand, Julia, Jessica Nisén, and Mikko Myrskylä. 2022. "Educational Field, Economic Uncertainty, and Fertility Decline in Finland in 2010–2019." *MPIDR Working Paper* 22:1–52. doi: 10.4054/MPIDR-WP-2022-022.
- Hiilamo, Heikki, and Olli Kangas. 2009. "Trap for Women or Freedom to Choose? The Struggle over Cash for Child Care Schemes in Finland and Sweden." *Journal of Social Policy* 38(3):457–75.

- Hosmer, David W., and Stanley Lemeshow. 1999. *Regression Modelling of Time to Event Data*. Wiley New York.
- Jalovaara, Marika, and Anneli Miettinen. 2013. "Does His Paycheck Also Matter? The Socioeconomic Resources of Co-Residential Partners and Entry into Parenthood in Finland." *Demographic Research* 28:881–916.
- Kreyenfeld, Michaela. 2010. "Uncertainties in Female Employment Careers and the Postponement of Parenthood in Germany." *European Sociological Review* 26(3):351–66. doi: 10.1093/esr/jcp026.
- Kreyenfeld, Michaela, and Gunnar Andersson. 2014. "Socioeconomic Differences in the Unemployment and Fertility Nexus: Evidence from Denmark and Germany." *Advances in Life Course Research* 21:59–73.
- Matysiak, Anna, and Daniele Vignoli. 2008. "Fertility and Women's Employment: A Meta-Analysis." *European Journal of Population* 24:363–84.
- Matysiak, Anna, and Daniele Vignoli. 2024. "Family Life Courses, Uncertain Futures, and the Changing World of Work: State-of-the-Art and Prospects." *European Journal of Population* 40(1):19.
- Matysiak, Anna, and Daniele Vignoli. 2025. "The End of an Era. The Vanishing Negative Effect of Women's Employment on Fertility." *Disia Working Paper* 2025/02.
- Miettinen, Anneli, and Marika Jalovaara. 2020. "Unemployment Delays First Birth but Not for All. Life Stage and Educational Differences in the Effects of Employment Uncertainty on First Births." *Advances in Life Course Research* 43:100320. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.alcr.2019.100320>.
- Musick, Kelly, Paula England, Sarah Edgington, and Nicole Kangas. 2009. "Education Differences in Intended and Unintended Fertility." *Social Forces* 88(2):543–72. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.0.0278>.
- Nisén, Jessica, Sebastian Klüsener, Johan Dahlberg, Lars Dommermuth, Aiva Jasilioniene, Michaela Kreyenfeld, Trude Lappegård, Peng Li, Pekka Martikainen, Karel Neels, and others. 2025. "Economic Conditions, Education and Parity-Specific Fertility: A Sub-National Regional Study Across 15 Countries in Europe." *Population, Space and Place* 31(6):e70074. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.70074>.
- Nitsche, Natalie, and Hannah Brückner. 2021. "Late, but Not Too Late? Postponement of First Birth among Highly Educated US Women." *European Journal of Population* 37(2):371–403. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10680-020-09571-z>.
- Ohlsson-Wijk, Sofi, and Gunnar Andersson. 2022. "Disentangling the Swedish Fertility

- Decline of the 2010s.” *Demographic Research* 47:345–58.
- Österbacka, Eva, and Tapio Räsänen. 2022. “Back to Work or Stay at Home? Family Policies and Maternal Employment in Finland.” *Journal of Population Economics* 35(3):1071–1101. doi: 10.1007/s00148-021-00843-4.
- Rahnu, Leen, and Marika Jalovaara. 2023. “Partnership Dynamics and Entry into Parenthood: Comparison of Finnish Birth Cohorts 1969–2000.” *Advances in Life Course Research* 56:100548. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.alcr.2023.100548>.
- Riekhoff, Aart-Jan. 2022. “Good or Bad (in) Stability? A Cross-Cohort Study of the Relation between Career Stability and Earnings Mobility in Finland.” *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 77:100674. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2022.100674>.
- Riekhoff, Aart-Jan, Satu Ojala, and Pasi Pyöriä. 2021. “Career Stability in Turbulent Times: A Cross-Cohort Study of Mid-Careers in Finland.” *Acta Sociologica* 64(4):437–58.
- Vikat, Andres. 2004. “Women’s Labor Force Attachment and Childbearing in Finland.” *Demographic Research* 3:177–212.
- van Wijk, Daniël, and Francesco C. Billari. 2024. “Fertility Postponement, Economic Uncertainty, and the Increasing Income Prerequisites of Parenthood.” *Population and Development Review* 50(2):287–322.
- Yarger, Jennifer, and Sarah R. Brauner-Otto. 2024. “Women’s Work Characteristics and Fertility Expectations.” *Population Research and Policy Review* 43(2):26. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11113-024-09866-7>.