

## Feeling Torn: Ambivalence and Fertility Intentions in Poland

Extended abstract for the European Population Conference 2026

### Background and Motivation

Becoming a parent is often associated with joy, fulfilment, and meaning—but also with responsibility, stress, and loss of autonomy. The coexistence of these positive and negative perceptions gives rise to ambivalence toward parenthood, a psychological state of mixed or conflicting feelings. Despite its theoretical relevance, ambivalence has rarely been measured in large-scale, population-based studies, and its links to fertility intentions remain insufficiently understood (Gómez et al., 2019).

In the Polish *Generations and Gender Survey* (GGS-II, wave 1), two complementary approaches to measuring ambivalence were implemented. First, as in several other GGS countries, Poland included a module based on Miller’s TDIB framework (Mynarska & Raybould, 2020), which captures positive and negative motivations for having children. These items make it possible to identify *structural ambivalence*, understood as the coexistence of positive and negative views or motives related to parenthood—perceptions of both its costs and its benefits (Miller et al., 2016; Miller et al., 2021; Van Harreveld et al., 2015).

In addition, and unique to the Polish GGS, three new national items were introduced to measure *subjective ambivalence*—that is, individuals’ consciously perceived mixed feelings and internal conflict (Pinquart et al., 2008, 2010). These items assess the extent to which respondents agree that parenthood brings both joy and worries, that they have mixed feelings about having (another) child, and that they feel a conflict between “heart” and “mind” when considering childbearing.

Building on this design, our study addresses two central research questions:

1. **How do structural and subjective ambivalence relate to each other?**

Do individuals who simultaneously recognise both positive and negative aspects of parenthood also *feel* ambivalent about it?

2. **How are both forms of ambivalence linked to fertility intentions and their uncertainty?**

Does subjective ambivalence translate into greater indecision about future childbearing, above and beyond motivational ambivalence?

### Data and Methods

The analyses will draw on data from the Polish *Generations and Gender Survey* (GGS-II, wave 1), collected in 2025–2026 among adults aged 18–59 using a mixed CAWI/CAPI design. The fieldwork is expected to conclude in April 2026, which will make it possible to present preliminary findings based on the first available data release.

Items based on the Miller’s model will make it possible to classify respondents into four motivational profiles reflecting different combinations of positive and negative childbearing motives: pronatal, ambivalent, indifferent, and antinatal. This typology captures the structure of underlying

motivations and provides a framework for comparing them with respondents' subjective feelings of ambivalence. Correspondence and regression analyses will be employed to examine how these motivational profiles relate to the three national items measuring subjective ambivalence, and to identify whether subjective ambivalence emerges primarily among those who are structurally ambivalent or whether it also appears in other motivational groups. Next, regression models will test how both types of ambivalence relate to short-term fertility intentions and to the uncertainty expressed in those intentions ("not sure" response category).

These analyses will make it possible to assess whether subjective ambivalence operates as a distinct psychological mechanism linking motivational conflict to reproductive indecision. The availability of large-scale, representative data from the Polish GGS provides a unique opportunity to validate previous findings from small convenience samples and to examine the emotional component of ambivalence in population-level research on fertility behaviour.

## References

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