

Extended abstract EPC – Who Needs an Own Child to Be Fulfilled? Attitudes toward Parenthood at the Intersection of Migrant Status, Gender, and Religiosity

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RQ and Background

As population diversity continues to grow in Germany and other European countries, questions regarding the demographic implications of migrants' assimilation processes have been arising. Fertility patterns of migrants and their descendants are often viewed as key indicators of integration (Kulu et al., 2019). Previous research has mainly focused on fertility behaviour of migrant women, revealing considerable variation across migrant generations and origin groups (Adserà & Ferrer, 2015). Gender patterns and attitudes in regards to fertility have been less explored, even though they may provide a more long-term indicator of socio-economic assimilation and acculturation processes of migrant populations (Milewski & Mussino, 2018) and allow insights into processes of modernization and value change among diverse migrant populations. Some previous research indicates assimilation of migrants' attitudes towards those predominant in the host country over time and subsequent generations – for example in regards to gender ideology or attitudes towards the usage of Assisted Reproductive Technologies (Milewski & Haug, 2020; Röder & Mühlau, 2014). However, other studies point to persistent differences among some migrant groups regarding their fertility and family attitudes, for example regarding child gender preference or acceptability of abortion (Carol & Hank, 2020; Carol & Milewski, 2018). As the value of children and associated motivations for childbearing differ between different cultures around the globe (Nauck, 2007), investigating potentially diverging attitudes towards parenthood between natives and immigrant populations is essential for understanding fertility dynamics in low fertility contexts.

Furthermore, research shows that religion plays an important role in migrants' structural and cultural integration to host societies (Kogan et al., 2020) and impacts fertility and family attitudes, with more religious migrants (and natives) tending to maintain more traditional attitudes (Diehl et al., 2009) or showing a disadvantage regarding fertility knowledge (Milewski & Haug, 2022). However, its specific role and influence may vary depending on which dimensions of fertility/family attitudes are investigated and which indicators of religion or religiosity are considered (Carol & Milewski, 2018). Additionally, some studies identify gendered differences in the extend of assimilation to majority culture (Röder & Mühlau, 2014), while other find no differences between migrant men and women regarding their family and fertility attitudes (Carol & Milewski, 2018).

We therefore ask *whether the importance of parenthood differs between migrants and natives in Germany and whether these differences vary by gender. We pay special attention to the moderating role of religion/religiosity in shaping fertility attitudes*, as religion may influence processes of migrant

socio-cultural assimilation and fertility. By examining attitudes towards parenthood for men and women separately, gender-specific fertility attitudes of male and female migrants (descendants) and natives are explored, giving insights into underlying gender role expectations. We thereby add to the developing research field on fertility of migrant men – whose experiences and perspectives have often been overlooked – and contribute to the study of migrants' fertility and family attitudes.

Theoretical Considerations and Hypotheses

Our theoretical considerations are derived from frameworks on migrant fertility and migrant assimilation. Migrants and their descendants may adapt fertility attitudes to those of the majority population but these assimilation patterns might be gendered and vary across religious groups and by individuals' religiosity.

H1: Based on theoretical considerations on the role of socialisation shaping attitudes and behaviour in the later life course, we assume that migrants, immigrating from countries that have overall higher fertility and lower childlessness than Germany, maintain related attitudes and, thus, are more likely to agree that women and men need to have children for a fulfilled life.

H2: Following classical assimilation theory, the differences between migrants and natives diminish over subsequent generations, we thus assume that descendants of migrants have attitudes that diverge from that of the first generation (and may become more similar to that of the majority population).

H3: Due to gender differences in assimilation processes, we expect migrant (descendant) women to hold attitudes more similar to majority culture than migrant (descendant) men.

H4: Assuming a moderating role of religiosity, we expect differences in attitudes between migrants (descendants) and natives to vary by religiosity and religiosity to impact the main association of migrant generation and attitudes.

Data and Methods

Using data from the first wave of the German Family Demography Panel Study (FReDA) (Bujard et al., 2025) from 2021, we look at male (N= 7.413) and female (N= 9.269) migrants, migrant descendants, and natives, aged 18-50. Our two outcome variables capture how strongly respondents agree with the statement that women, respectively: men, need to have children to have a fulfilled life. Respondents can rate their agreement from 1 – 5, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “neither agree nor disagree” to “strongly agree”. For purposes of descriptive analyses, we have combined these into categorical variables distinguishing between “(strongly) agree”, “neither” and “(strongly) disagree”. For first steps into the multivariable analyses, we combine this further into “(strongly) agree” vs. all else. We conduct multivariable logistic regression analyses to assess whether agreement on the importance of mother-

or fatherhood differs between the different migrant and religious groups and which socio-demographic factors might be associated with potential differences.

Results

Descriptive Results. Descriptive results show that only a minority of respondents agrees that having a child is necessary to have a fulfilled life (around 13%). The likelihood of agreement differs between men and women – with women being overall less likely to agree – but is similar regarding the expectations for men and women to have children. Moreover, we do find differences according to migration background and religiosity: Compared to German natives, higher shares of migrants agree that women need to have children to be fulfilled – particularly among men, where over 30% of first-generation migrants agree that women need children to be fulfilled, compared to 17% of second-generation migrants and 13% of native men (Figure 1). Agreement that women need children also differs according to religiosity (Figure 2), with higher shares of moderately and highly religious respondents deeming parenthood to be important compared to those that indicate low religiosity. Patterns of agreement to the parenthood norm for men (not depicted here) are similar, with only slightly higher levels of overall agreement among men compared to women.

Preliminary Multivariable Results. Controlling for age, educational attainment, parent/childless status and partnership status, we find no significant differences in the probability of non-/low religious migrants' descendants to agree that a woman needs to have children to be fulfilled compared to non-/low religious natives (Figure 3). Non-/low religious first-generation migrants, however, have a higher probability of agreeing that children are necessary, both among men and women. All religious groups are more likely to consider having children to be essential than their non-/low religious counterparts, with medium to highly religious first-generation migrant men being most likely to agree and furthest from the non-/low religious reference group. The results for agreement to the statement that a man needs to have children to be fulfilled follow the same pattern, though gender differences are slightly more pronounced, especially among religious first-generation migrants.

Conclusion and Outlook

These results highlight that gender and religion play an important role in shaping fertility attitudes of migrants and their descendants, as well as their assimilation to majority culture, with migrant descendant women and less religious migrants having attitudes more similar to the native majority population. Next steps include further distinguishing migrant groups by different origin contexts, investigating the role of religious affiliation, as well as diving deeper into the role of education.

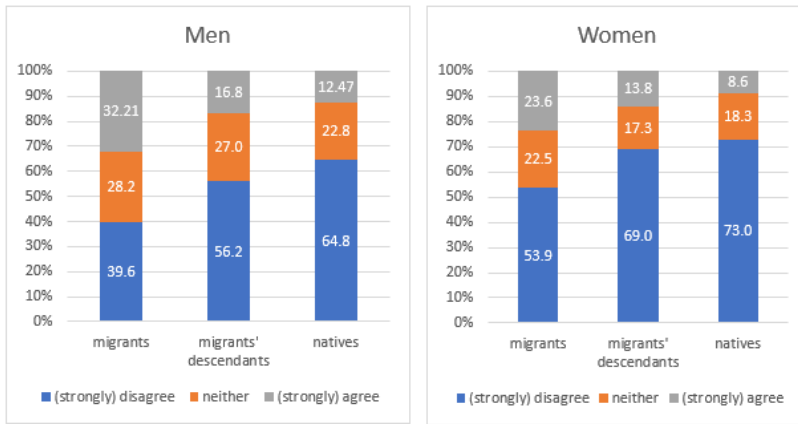


Figure 1. Agreement to the statement "A woman needs to have children to have a fulfilled life" by migration background. Data: FReDA wave 1. Weighted analyses. Men: N=7413, Women: N=9269.

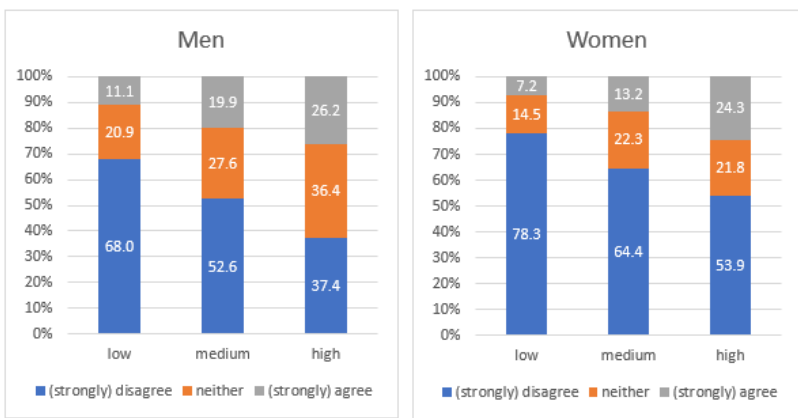


Figure 2. Agreement to the statement "A woman needs to have children to have a fulfilled life" by religiosity. Data: FReDA wave 1. Weighted analyses. Men: N=7413, Women: N=9269.

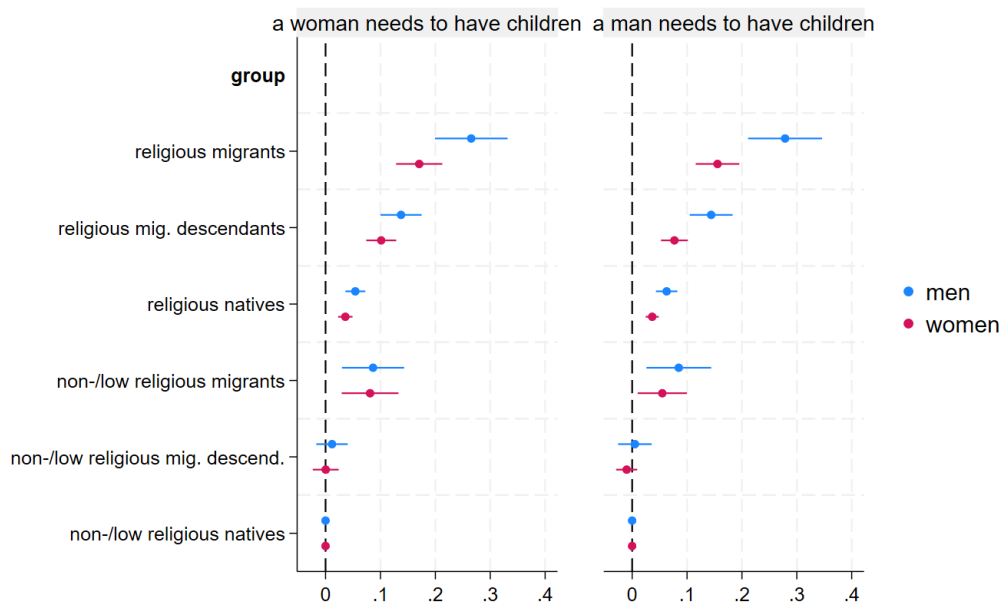


Figure 3. Agreement to the statement "A woman/man need to have children to have a fulfilled life." Data: FReDA wave 1. Men: N=7413, Women: N=9269. AMEs. Controlled for: age, educational attainment, parent/childless and partnership status. "mig. descend." = migrants' descendants.

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