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Employment Uncertainty and Fertility Decision-Making – Migrant-Native Disparities in Scandinavia

1. Introduction

In recent decades, Europe has witnessed a persistent decline in fertility, extending even to the Northern welfare states previously considered exceptions (Andersson, 2020; Ohlsson-Wijk and Andersson, 2022). Meanwhile, the Global North has seen a surge in immigration, coinciding with labour market transformations (Gauffin, 2020; European Commission, 2021; Gauffin, Heggebø and Elstad, 2021; OECD, 2022). Increasingly, individuals find themselves in precarious work arrangements, with little job security and few traditional benefits. This phenomenon is especially pronounced among migrant populations overrepresented in insecure employment (Kalleberg, 2000, 2009; Woolfson, Fudge and Thörnqvist, 2014; Rubery, 2015; Gauffin, 2020; Gauffin, Heggebø and Elstad, 2021; Orfao, del Rey and Malo, 2021). Despite these developments, the effect of employment uncertainty, specifically on migrant fertility intentions, has been little studied (Milewski and Mussino, 2018).

Studying fertility intentions offers insight into the underlying norms and structural constraints influencing childbearing decisions (Thomson, 2015; Milewski and Mussino, 2018; Morgan and Rybińska, 2019). Despite its significance, research on fertility intentions, particularly among migrants with distinct values and labor market challenges, remains limited (Milewski and Mussino, 2018). Furthermore, male perspectives on migrant fertility intentions are understudied (Ortensi, 2015).

Prior research consistently associates employment uncertainty with negative impacts on fertility behavior and preferences (Kreyenfeld, Andersson and Pailhé, 2012; Fiori et al., 2013; Alderotti et al., 2021; Alderotti, Mussino and Comolli, 2022). Economic uncertainty, often linked to employment uncertainty, tends to lead individuals to delay or reconsider childbearing (Becker, 1960; Easterlin, 1975; Adsera, 2011; Lundström and Andersson, 2012; Schmitt, 2012; Fiori et al., 2013; Fiori, Graham and Rinesi, 2018; Glavin, Young and Schieman, 2020; Vignoli, Tocchioni and Mattei, 2020; Alderotti et al., 2022; Alderotti, Mussino and Comolli, 2022). Uncertain employment can hinder long-term planning and commitments (Vignoli et al., 2020). Notably, the subjective perception of employment uncertainty negatively influences fertility intentions more than actual employment status (Fahlén, 2013; Neyer et al., 2022). However, it is

expected that for migrants, the mechanism could be different. Therefore, this study aims to analyse how precarious employment differently affects the fertility intentions of migrants and natives in Sweden, Norway and Denmark.

In the migrant social context where employment uncertainty and unemployment is widespread, employment uncertainty could be more normalised than among the Nordic-born, thus having a weaker effect on fertility intentions (see similar hypothesis in relation to the low-educated in Glavin, Young and Schieman, 2020). Similarly, the effect of employment uncertainty and unemployment could be weaker or non-existing if migrants have higher tolerance to uncertainty compared to the Nordic-born individuals. On the other hand, migrants coming from different normative and institutional contexts than Nordic-born could be more likely to react to uncertainty by opting for the 'alternative career' of becoming parents as a source of stability (Friedman, Hechter and Kanazawa, 1994; Schmitt, 2012; Wood and Neels, 2017). Precarious employment could, therefore, positively affect migrant fertility intentions. Nevertheless, following previous research findings on fertility behaviour (Andersson and Scott, 2005, 2007), the counter-hypothesis is that institutional context is decisive in shaping fertility decisions: migrants and the Nordic-born could respond to precarious employment similarly. Lastly, it is expected that the effect of a precarious employment situation on fertility intentions varies depending on the origin region. It is likely that Western migrants respond to employment uncertainty more similarly as natives compared to migrants from other contexts with more cultural and institutional differences (Kulu and Milewski, 2007; Kulu and González-Ferrer, 2014; Carlsson, 2018; Milewski and Mussino, 2018; Andersson, 2021).

2. Research Questions

The primary research question is: **What impact does employment uncertainty have on short-term fertility intentions in Scandinavia among migrants compared to the native population?**

There are also two additional research questions, which are: **Are there gender differences between men and women and do these gender patterns differ between migrants and natives? Does the effect of employment uncertainty on fertility intentions differ by region of origin for migrants?**

3. Methods

3.1. Data and Model Specification

The data used in this study is from the second round of the Swedish, Norwegian and Danish Generations and Gender Survey (GGS), collected in 2021 through online questionnaires and from population registers. The GGS is designed for the study of the causes and consequences of changes in family and fertility patterns (Stockholm University, 2022). The Swedish, Norwegian and Danish GGS-II questionnaires include a new sub-module to study uncertainties and resilience, including questions about perceived job security (Andersson, Dahlberg and Neyer, 2020). These questions allow for the analysis of perceived employment uncertainty on fertility intentions, making the data especially fitting for this study. The GGS data on migration background includes information about the respondent's country of origin and the age when they first came to live in the host country. Therefore, it is well-suited for analysis of the migrant population. The analytical sample includes men and women aged 18-49 who are physically able to have children and not currently expecting or trying. Missing values are dropped on the dependent variable and the main independent variable in each model, but kept as their own category in the control variables to maximise sample size. In all regression analyses, binary logistic regression models are used. Linear probability models are run as robustness checks.

3.2. Dependent and Independent Variables

The dependent variable is derived from the question about short-term fertility intentions. The variable was recoded into a binary variable, where the negative responses Definitely not/ Probably not were coded as 0 and the positive responses Probably yes/Definitely yes as 1.

The first main independent variable is the categorical variable Activity status with categories In education or training, Employed, Self-employed, Unemployed, On maternity or paternity leave, and Others. Particularly the activity status Unemployed reflects an uncertain and marginalised situation in the labour market. The ones on parental leave are excluded from the analysis, as they were not asked about their employment status. The category Employed was further divided by contract type into Permanent employment, Fixed term employment and Temporary employment/No contract. In order to study how the subjective perception of employment uncertainty among the employed affects fertility intentions, the categorical variable Likelihood of job loss is used. Since some response alternatives had few observations, the

categories Very unlikely and Unlikely and the categories Likely and Very likely were combined. Thus, the final variable has categories Unlikely, Unsure, Likely and Missing.

The variable for Migrant background is a dummy with the value 1 for migrants (not born in Sweden) and value 0 for non-migrants (born in Sweden). Additionally, a variable including the different origin regions is created to analyse whether there are differences between migrants coming from different origins. Control variables include Parity, Age, Age squared, Cohabitation status, Education level and Household income.

4. Preliminary Results and Discussion

The preliminary results for this study are based on Swedish data only (N=8082, analytical sample N=4322). In the future similar analyses will be conducted using (pooled) data from all three countries to increase the sample size and enhance the robustness of the models. Given the small number of migrants in the Swedish data (N=1210, analytical sample N=594) it was not possible to look at the effect of the origin country of migrants in these models. However, that will be included in future analyses. The plotted results of all models as predicted probabilities or average marginal effects can be found in Appendix 6.1-6.4.

The results support the hypothesis that a precarious employment situation has a negative effect on fertility intentions in Sweden (see Appendix 6.1 and 6.2). Among women, unemployment seems to lower the propensity to intend childbearing in the near future. For women, being self-employed or employed is positively associated with fertility intentions, following the previous findings that stable employment is positively associated with fertility (Andersson, 2000; Lundström and Andersson, 2012; Mussino *et al.*, 2021; Alderotti, Mussino and Comolli, 2022). The same seems true for fertility intentions – women are most likely to plan childbearing when in stable employment. The probability of intending to have a child is lower when one is in fixed-term or temporary employment for both men and women. This finding gives further support for the hypothesis that employment precariousness has a negative effect on fertility intentions.

The results confirm that there are differences in the effect of employment uncertainty and especially unemployment on fertility intentions between migrants and Swedish-born. Notably, the results support the previous findings that Swedish-born women are less likely to intend or have more children when not employed (Andersson, 2000; Lundström and Andersson, 2012;

Mussino *et al.*, 2021; Alderotti, Mussino and Comolli, 2022). For the migrants the pattern is not as clear. Instead, the unemployed migrant women have the highest predicted probability of stating a positive fertility intention out of all activity statuses. The same is found for men. Regarding the effect of the perception of job security, the results are more uncertain but seem to support the conclusion that migrants are more likely to intend to have children when employment is perceived uncertain (see Appendix 6.4).

There are gender differences in the patterns, but given the relatively high uncertainty in the estimates, it is not yet possible to draw conclusions on whether the magnitude of the difference is more prominent for women than men. Regarding gender patterns, the difference between self-employed migrants and Swedish-born is only found among women and the difference between migrants and Swedish-born in fixed-term employment only among men (see Appendix 6.3). Also, the high likelihood of job loss seems to play a more negative role in the fertility intentions of men in Sweden in general (see Appendix 6.2).

So far, the results of this study suggest that despite the importance of the institutional setting for fertility decision-making, other mechanisms are at play, too: migrants and natives seem to respond differently to labour market uncertainties and especially unemployment.

5. References

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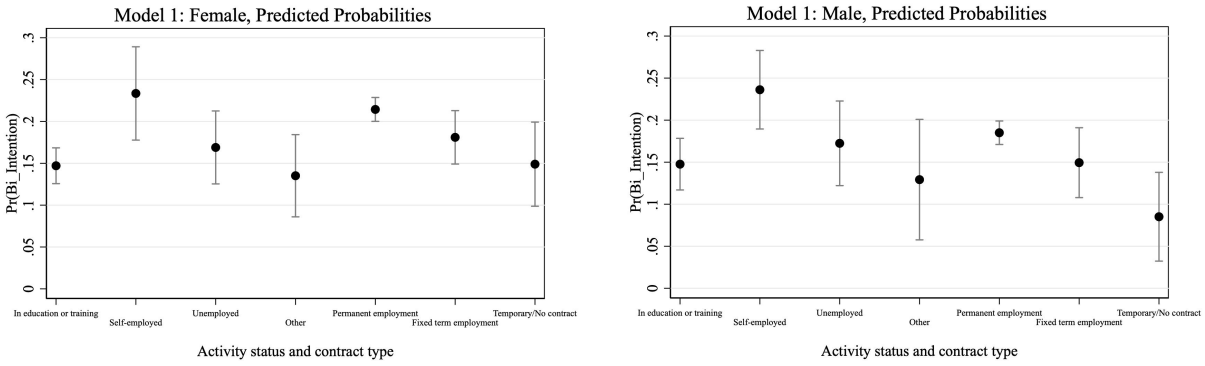
6. Appendix

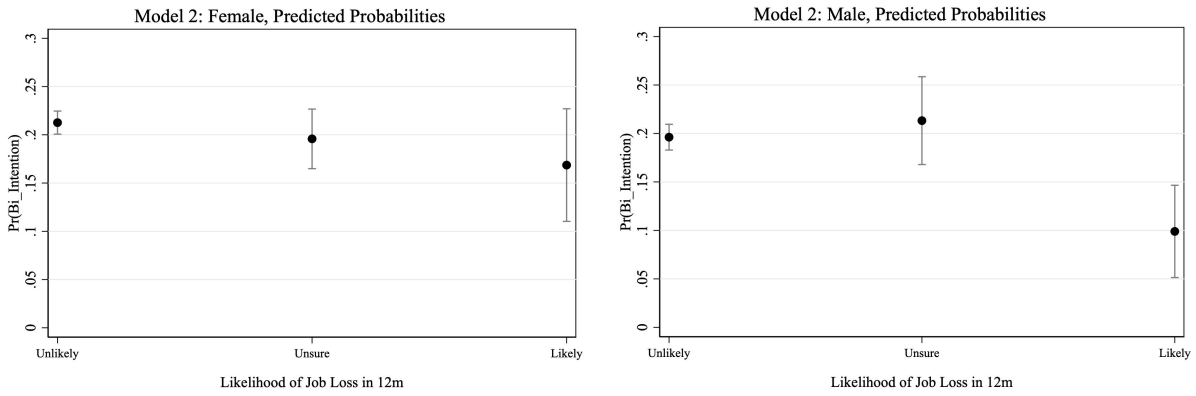
6.1. Model 1: Predicted Probabilities



Predicted probabilities of stating a positive fertility intention by activity status and contract type. Models control for migrant background, age, age squared, parity, cohabitation, education level

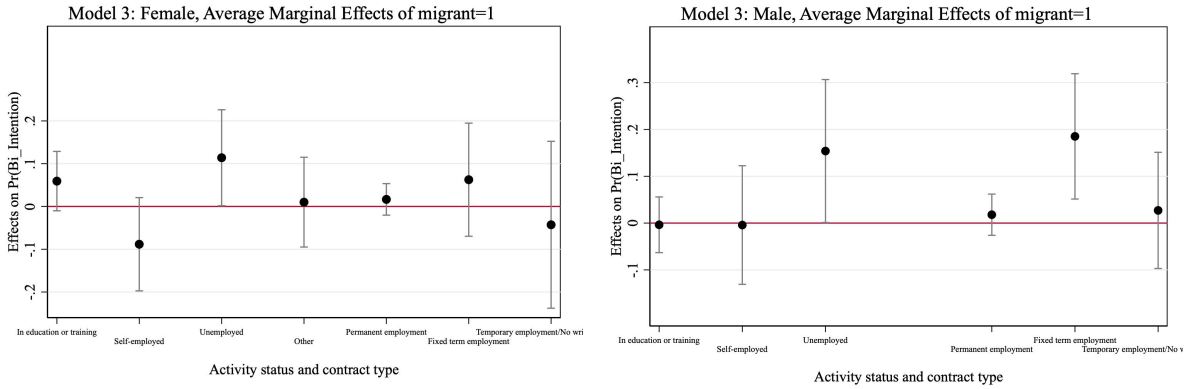
and household income and are stratified by gender. Error bars denote 83.5 % confidence intervals. Unweighted estimates.

6.2. Model 2: Predicted Probabilities



Predicted probabilities of stating a positive fertility intention by the perception of the likelihood of job loss. Models control for migrant background, age, age squared, parity, cohabitation, education level and household income and are stratified by gender. Error bars denote 83.5 % confidence intervals. Unweighted estimates.

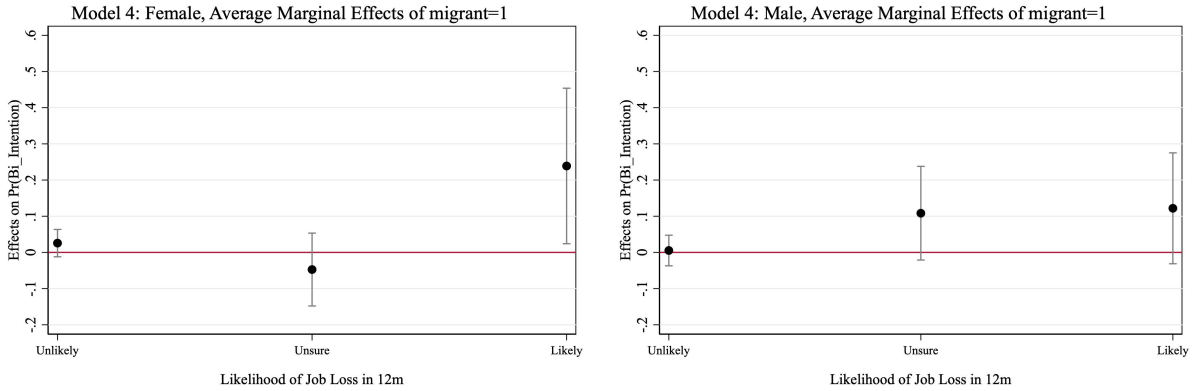
6.3. Model 3: Average Marginal Effects



Average marginal effects of being a migrant compared to being Swedish-born on the probability of stating a positive fertility intention by activity status and contract type. Models control for age,

age squared, parity, cohabitation, education level and household income and are stratified by gender. Error bars denote 83.5 % confidence intervals. Unweighted estimates.

6.4. Model 4: Average Marginal Effects



Average marginal effects of being a migrant compared to being Swedish-born on the probability of stating a positive fertility intention by likelihood of job loss. Models control for age, age squared, parity, cohabitation, education level and household income and are stratified by gender. Error bars denote 83.5 % confidence intervals. Unweighted estimates.