In recent decades, fear and discontent have increasingly become salient traits of Western societies. Academic interest in the conceptualization and impact of this general state of discontent has come from a number of fields within the Social Sciences, more specifically Social Psychology and Political Science. In these fields, the feeling of societal pessimism has been described as "a feeling of a generalized negative certainty" (Bennett, 2001, p.181) – the perception that things are not moving in the 'right' direction in society. In this contribution, I argue that societal pessimism is also likely to affect individuals' life course expectations. I base this assertion on recent scientific discourse that has increasingly emphasized how individuals consider not only structural constraints that foster economic uncertainty when making fertility choices for example, but also their own subjective narrative of what the future may hold (Lappegard et al., 2022; Vignoli et al., 2020).

In this contribution I address two key research questions: 1) Can we identify different developmental trajectories of fertility expectations in reproductively aged adults? 2) Is there an association between self-reported societal pessimism and the different trajectories of fertility expectations? What is important to note is that in contrast to the (understandable) focus on short-term fertility intentions, prevalent in family sociology and social demography, I examine individuals' generalized fertility expectations which do not necessarily require having a specific intention to achieve that goal soon (Philipov & Bernardi, 2012). While short-term fertility intentions are substantially influenced by current life circumstances, such as relationship status and financial stability, fertility expectations are more likely to encapsulate an individual's personal vision for their future. Thus, this contribution explicitly investigates whether an individual's perception of the broader societal future is intertwined with their conception of their own, intimately personal future.

Data and operationalization of key concepts

I use data from the Dutch Longitudinal Internet studies for the Social Sciences (LISS) panel which is administered by CentERdata at Tilburg University, the Netherlands

(https://www.dataarchive.lissdata.nl). LISS is based on a true probability sample of Dutch households, which is drawn from the population registers by Statistics Netherlands. The participants complete surveys online every month, with questionnaires on several core domains (e.g., family and household) being fielded once a year.

The analytical sample was chiefly determined by the availability of data from the "Initial Questionnaire" module of LISS which is the first questionnaire administered to newly starting LISS panel members. This questionnaire is completed only once – when an individual joins the panel. As of 2010, this module also included 18 questions addressing the participants' beliefs about the living conditions of the coming generation. The analytical sample was restricted by two additional considerations: 1) individuals were asked about their fertility expectations if they were 16 or older and younger than 45 (women) or 50 (men); and 2) the choice to focus on participants who had no children or fewer than two children at the time when they joined LISS. Based on these considerations, the analytical sample was 3,076 individuals (53.0% female). Descriptive statistics are displayed in *Table 1*.

Societal pessimism. The key predictor of interest was operationalized using 18 questions from the module "Initial Questionnaire" (distributed at entry into the LISS panel, starting in 2010). The respondents were presented with the following instructions, "You will first see 6 screens, each one displaying three areas of life for which you are asked to indicate how you believe the living conditions will be for the coming generation." The response scale ranged from 1 = *much worse than today* to 7 = *much better than today*, with a clearly defined mid-point of 4 = *the same as today*. The respondents could also indicate "I don't know" (which was recoded as missing). The six screens covered the following topics: social relationships (e.g., stability of love relationships), financial future (e.g., purchasing power), social mobility and inequality (e.g., housing), paid work (e.g., employment opportunities), well-being (e.g., sense of well-being), and physical environment (e.g., water and air quality). The scale was recoded so that higher value corresponded to the expectation that the future of the coming generation

will be much worse than today (across the years, the reliability of the full scale ranged from $\alpha = .86$ to $\alpha = .92$).

Fertility expectations. The fertility expectation trajectories are derived based on the respondents' annual response to the question "*Do you think you will have [more] children in the future?*" which was administered during the yearly "Family and Household" questionnaire. The response options were "*Yes", "No",* and *"I don`t know*". The average number of fertility expectations reported by the participants was 4.85 (*SD* = 2.32), with about 52% reporting these expectations three or more times.

Analytical approach

First, a joint latent class model will be estimated using Latent GOLD version 6 in order to identify trajectories of fertility expectations, while simultaneously modelling the transition to a(nother) birth. This approach allows for the identification and description of distinct subgroups (i.e., classes) within a population that exhibit similar patterns of change over time (Vermunt, 2010). The method is especially useful when studying longitudinal data as in this study. For the LCA analyses, individuals will be followed from their entry into the panel until the end of (their) observation period, until they have a(nother) child, or until they age out of the analytical sample (i.e., reach the age of 45 for women and 50 for men).

To determine the number of classes, models with an increasing number of classes will be analyzed. The optimal number of classes will be determined by the relatively lower Bayesian information criterion (BIC), as well as, by an evaluation of the bivariate residuals for longitudinal data. Finally, the minimum class size is determined as 5% of the total sample size to justify a trajectory as a separate class.

In the next step, the resulting classes of fertility expectations will be used as an outcome variable in a multinomial logistic regression, with societal pessimism at the start of observation as key predictor.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for full analytical sample and separately for parents and non-parents at first observation

	All *n* = 3,076		Parents, *n* = 477		Non-parents, *n* = 2,599	
	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*
Societal pessimism (future of next generation is 1 = *much better than today*, 7 = *much worse than today*)	4.01	0.92	4.22	0.94	3.98	0.92
Fertility expectations at first observation ("Do you think you will have [more] children in the future?")						
Yes	0.61		0.51		0.63	
No	0.13		0.26		0.11	
I don't know	0.26		0.23		0.26	
Fertility expectations at last observation ("Do you think you will have [more] children in the future?")						
Yes	0.53		0.28		0.57	
No	0.20		0.46		0.15	
I don't know	0.27		0.26		0.27	
Number of fertility expectations reported until censoring	4.85	2.32	4.22	2.03	4.95	2.35
Control variables						
Self-reported satisfaction with financial situation at first observation (0 = not satisfied at all to 10 = entirely satisfied)	6.14	2.08	6.40	2.07	6.10	2.08
Year of entry into LISS[1] (i.e., timing of measure of societal pessimism)						
2010-2012	0.18		0.19		0.18	
2013-2015	0.32		0.36		0.32	
2016-2018	0.27		0.25		0.27	
2019-2021	0.23		0.20		0.24	
Age at first observation	26.59	8.48	34.45	6.18	25.14	8.05
Has a partner at first observation	0.55		0.86		0.50	
Female	0.53		0.53		0.53	

Notes. [1]Does not add up to 1.0 because of rounding.

References

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