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Fertility Intentions and Their Realisation: Insights from the Polish Generations and Gender Survey

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**FERTILITY INTENTIONS AND THEIR
REALISATION: INSIGHTS FROM THE POLISH
GENERATIONS AND GENDER SURVEY**

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to investigate the link between fertility intentions and outcomes in Poland. Previous studies detected large differences between countries in the extent to which childbearing plans are realised. Specifically, failure to realise an intention to become a parent was found to be particularly common in the post-socialist countries. We use the two waves of the Polish Generations and Gender Survey, conducted in years 2010/2011 and 2014/2015, to verify whether the same can be observed for Poland. We find that approximately 35% of respondents, who at wave 1 intended to have a child in the next three years, actually got one by wave 2. The results are in line with those obtained in other post-socialist countries. For respondents who did not get a child between wave 1 and 2, we analyse the stability of their fertility plans. Both realisation and stability of fertility intentions vary markedly by gender and parity.

Keywords

Fertility intentions, realization and stability of fertility intentions, Poland.

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Fertility Intentions and Their Realisation: Insights from the Polish Generations and Gender Survey

Zuzanna Brzozowska and Monika Mynarska

1. Introduction

With increasing availability of effective contraception couples are gaining more and more control over their fertility. Already in the 1980s it was expected that under a new contraceptive regime, a decision to have a child would be made “only when it is felt this would enrich a relationship or realize more of the potential of the individuals concerned” (van de Kaa, 1987, p. 26). However, even though it can be assumed that nowadays parenthood is a result of a reasoned decision, this decision remains “imperfect” (Mencarini, Vignoli, & Gottard, 2015, p. 14). On the one hand, not all family plans get realised and there seems to be a substantial gap between intended and actual family size (e.g. Liefbroer, 2009; Philipov, 2009; Sobotka et al., 2015; Testa & Toulemon, 2006; Beaujouan and Berghammer 2017). On the other hand, even in highly developed countries a non-negligible share of births are declared as unintended or mistimed (Mosher, Jones, & Abma, 2012). Consequently, researchers who investigate fertility decision-making need to consider two stages of the process: formation of an intention to have a child and realisation of this intention.

Childbearing intention is usually defined as a precise plan to have a child in a given time-frame. It is shaped by individual’s desires, preferences or attitudes but also influenced by person’s resources and abilities: it is a product of what a person wants to do and what he or she feels capable of doing (Ajzen, 1991; Miller, 1994, 2011). The literature on determinants of fertility intentions has been rapidly growing in recent decades. Researchers have investigated how childbearing plans depend on age, union status or parity (e.g. Liefbroer, 2009; Philipov, Speder, & Billari, 2006; Regnier-Loilier & Vignoli, 2011; Thomson, 1997), as well as on their educational attainment and economic activity (e.g. Berrington & Pattaro, 2014; Modena & Sabatini, 2012; Philipov et al., 2006). Attitudes towards children and other personal beliefs and values, including religiosity or gender attitudes have also been analysed (e.g. Bernardi, Ryser, & Le Goff, 2013; Dommermuth, Klobas, & Lappegard, 2011; Miettinen, Basten, & Rotkirch, 2011). These studies improve our understanding of conditions that facilitate or hamper fertility: they examine who makes plans to have children and when. The plans, however, are not always realised. They may also change as new circumstances unfold.

To investigate the stability and realisation of fertility intentions panel data with repeated measures of intentions and information on reproductive behaviour are necessary. Such data became available in the 1990s for instance in the United States (National Survey of Families and Households and National Longitudinal Survey of Youth; (Heaton,

Jacobson, & Holland, 1999; Quesnel-Vallée & Morgan, 2003; Schoen, Astone, Kim, Nathanson, & Fields, 1999) or Great Britain (British Household Panel Survey (Berrington, 2004). However, they did not provide a clear comparative picture as in each survey fertility intentions were defined and operationalised differently (see Philipov & Bernardi, 2012 for a thorough overview). The Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) has been a game changer: it is the first survey which offers unanimous theoretical framework for studying childbearing intentions in the international context.

The survey was developed in 2000, and from the very beginning the prospective design and focus on intentions have been its central features (Vikat et al., 2007). The conceptualisation of intentions drew heavily on the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). To date, 20 countries have conducted at least one round of the survey; 12 of them have completed and released data for multiple rounds (programme web page, <http://www.ggp-i.org/>). Across all countries and waves, respondents of reproductive ages have been systematically asked about their intention to have a (another) child in the next three years (short-term intentions). Additionally, long-term fertility plans have been measured for those not intending a child in the following three years. The availability of the first wave of the GGS data greatly stimulated research on determinants of fertility intentions in the European context and, importantly, made cross-national comparisons possible (Klobas & Ajzen, 2015; Neyer, Lappegård, & Vignoli, 2013; Tanskanen & Rotkirch, 2014). The subsequent survey waves have provided opportunity for more systematic analyses of the stability and realisation of fertility intentions.

As yet, a few GGS-based studies on realisation of fertility intentions have been published (Dommermuth, Klobas, & Lappegård, 2015; Regnier-Loilier & Vignoli, 2011; Spéder & Kapitány, 2014). These first analyses revealed marked cross-country differences in the extent to which childbearing plans are followed by actual births. Among those intending to have a child within three years at the first wave, only 22% realised their intention by the second wave in Bulgaria, around 30% in Georgia and Hungary and over 40% in France and Germany (Spéder & Kapitány, 2014). The share of realised intentions to have a child was even higher – close to 60% – in Norway, where data on childbearing behaviour were retrieved from administrative registers (Dommermuth et al., 2015). A failure to realise fertility intentions appears to be “a key aspect of the post-communist fertility transition” (Spéder & Kapitány, 2014, p. 393) and the differences between eastern and western European countries call for further analyses.

Against this background, we investigate the extent to which childbearing plans are realised in Poland. The first wave of the Polish GGS was conducted in years 2010/2011 (Kotowska & Józwiak, 2011) and made it possible to explore Poles' fertility intentions (Mynarska, 2011) and their determinants (Mynarska & Styrac, 2014). With the second wave of data collection, carried out in 2014/2015, we are able to verify the realisation and stability of these intentions. To date, the realisation of fertility intentions in Poland has been investigated only for four selected cohorts of young women, living in Warsaw and Poznań (Frątczak & Jeleń-Osiecka, 2015). In the aforementioned study, 31% of women who had intended to have a child in 2007 became mothers by 2010. The GGS data allow us to verify

whether similar results can be found for the nationally representative sample of women and men in reproductive ages.

In the first step, we describe fertility intentions of Poles as declared at the first wave of the Generations and Gender Survey. We focus on the short-term childbearing intentions and their realisation but for a more comprehensive picture we additionally provide information on respondents' long-term plans. Next, we investigate whether intentions to have a child expressed at the first wave were followed by an actual birth by the second round of the data collection. If the intention was not realised or if a respondent had not intended to have a child, the stability of the intention is verified. Thus, we capture a complete dynamic of reproductive intentions and behaviours between 2010/2011 and 2014/2015.

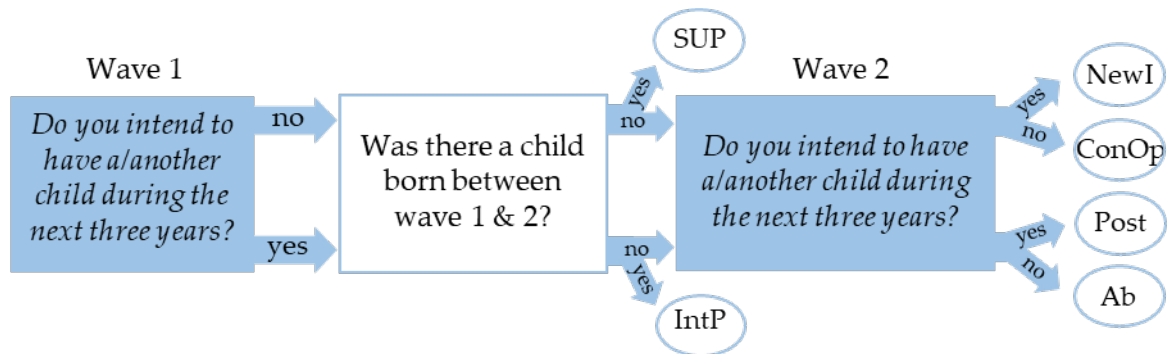
2. Data and Methods

We used the first and second wave of the Polish Generations and Gender Survey (Kotowska & Jóźwiak, 2011) conducted in the years 2010/2011 and 2014/2015, respectively. From the 19,987 respondents who had taken part in the first wave 12,417 were re-interviewed at wave 2. For our analyses, we kept only those respondents who were asked about their fertility intentions at both waves, i.e. aged 18-45 at wave 1 and 22-49 at wave 2. That left us with an analytical sample of 4,826 respondents, of which 2,815 were women and 2,011 were men. All analyses were conducted using data weighted with the post-stratification weights.

Our analyses are based on the question 'Do you intend to have a(nother) child in the next three years?' asked at both waves. Depending on the answer to this question and on whether a child was born between the first and second wave, we classify the respondents into six groups (see Figure 1).

Following the names of the categories given by Spéder and Kapitány (2009), those who at wave 1 declared they intended to have a child within the following three years and got a child by wave 2 are called *intentional parents* (IntP). If a child was born between wave 1 and 2 although the respondent did not plan to have one in the coming three years, we classify him or her as a *sooner-than-intended/unintended parent* (SUP). Further, in case of no child born between the first and second wave, we look at how the respondents answered the question on childbearing intentions at wave 2. If at both waves they intended to have a child within the following three years, they were described as *postponers* (Post); if someone expressed an intention at the first wave, but abandoned it at the second, he or she was labelled an *abandoner* (Ab). Those who consistently did not plan a child at any of the two waves and did not get one between them constitute the group of the *consistently opposed* (ConOp), and those who had no short-time childbearing intention at wave 1 but changed their mind when asked at wave 2 are the *newly intending* ones (NewI).

Figure 1: Respondents' classification based on their fertility intentions and on whether a child was born between wave 1 and 2



Note:
 SUP = sooner-than intended/unintended parents
 IntP = intentional parents
 Post = postponers
 ConOp = consistently opposed
 Ab = abandoners
 NewI = newly intending

In order to fully capture Poles' overall childbearing intentions, for the first wave we also use the question "Supposing you do not have a/another child during the next three years, do you intend to have any (more) children at all?" which had been asked to those respondents who had not intended to have a child in the following three years.

3. Results

3.1. Childbearing Intentions

In general, half of the respondents did not intend to have a(nother) child at all (Figure 2); among those who did want a (further) child, 57% intended to have it within the following three years, whereas 43% preferred to make this step further in the future. These numbers should be considered with caution, however, as childbearing intentions vary substantially by parity. Figure 2 shows that among childless respondents less than 20% do not intend to ever have a child. Among the childless respondents who wanted to become a parent one day, the intention to postpone parenthood to a more distant future was slightly more common than the intention to do so in the following three years.

Among parents with one child, over half intended to have (a) further child(ren), preferably in the nearest future (43%) rather than later (11%). Respondents with two or more children were reluctant to increase their family size: less than one respondent in ten intended to do so (of which two-thirds would have liked the next child to be born within

the following three years). The differences between respondents with and without children in the preferred timing of a child indicate that the transition to parenthood tends to be shifted to further future, whereas being a parent shortens the favoured time frame for childbearing. However, women and men with and without children, seem to have somewhat different timing preferences (Figure 3).

Figure 1: Childbearing intentions by parity in wave 1

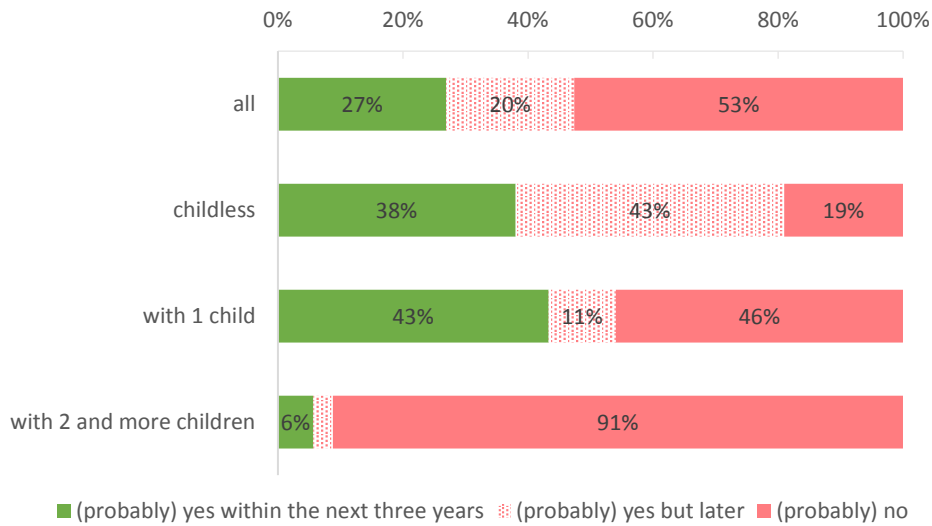
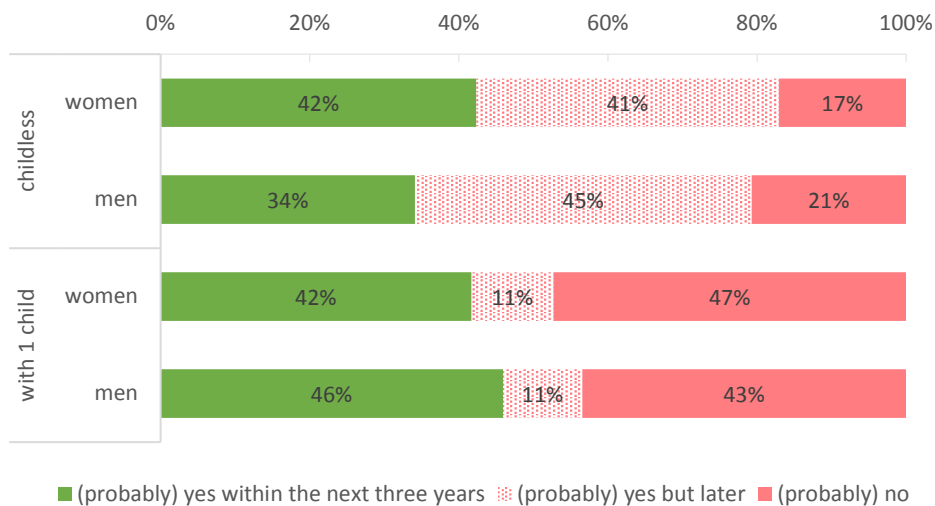


Figure 2: Childbearing intentions by parity and sex in wave 1



Note: Results for women and men with two and more children not shown because of small number of respondents expressing an intention to have a further child. In addition, childbearing intentions and their timing of parents of two and more children did not seem to differ with respect to sex.

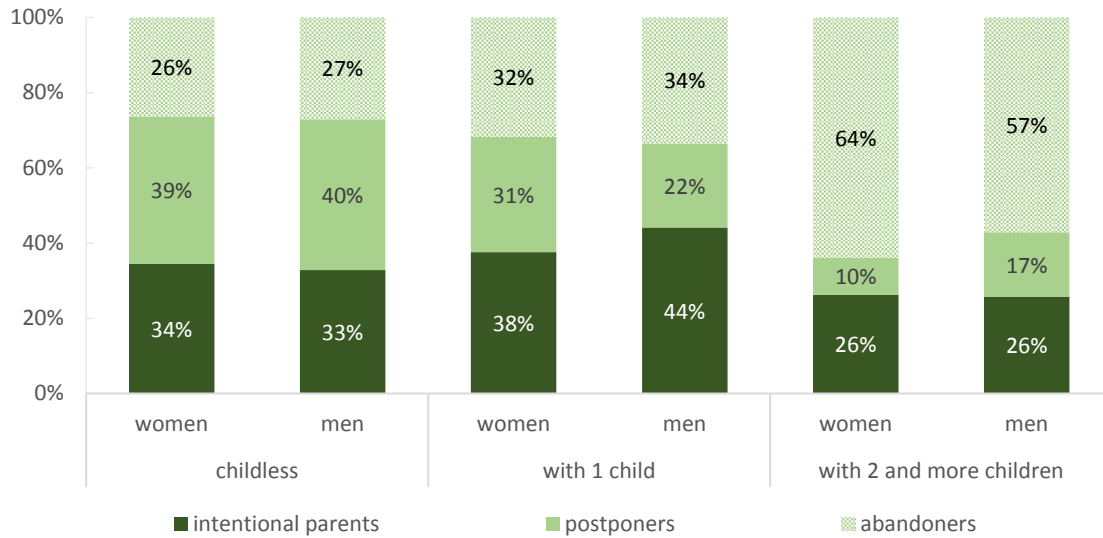
Childless women more often than men intended to have a child within the next three years (42% and 34%, respectively); childless men tended to express an intention to become a parent further in the future (45% as opposed to 41% among women). They also did not intend to ever have a child slightly more often than women (21% compared to 17%). For parents the relationship between gender and childbearing intentions and their time frame changed: fathers of one child intended to have the second child within the following three years more often than mothers (46% to 42%) and they declared no childbearing intentions less often (43% as opposed to 47%). We can speculate that as child care usually burdens mothers much more than fathers, women tend to be less enthusiastic about the idea of a second child than men.

In the next section we show how many of the respondents who had intended to have a child within the following three years actually got it by the time of the second survey wave four years later. We also look at whether unrealised intentions and intentions not to have a child remain stable. In view of the substantial gender and parity differences in childbearing intentions, we perform all the analyses separately for men and women having zero, one and two or more children. Numbers for the whole sample are provided in the Appendix for reference.

3.2. Realisation of Short-Term Childbearing Intentions

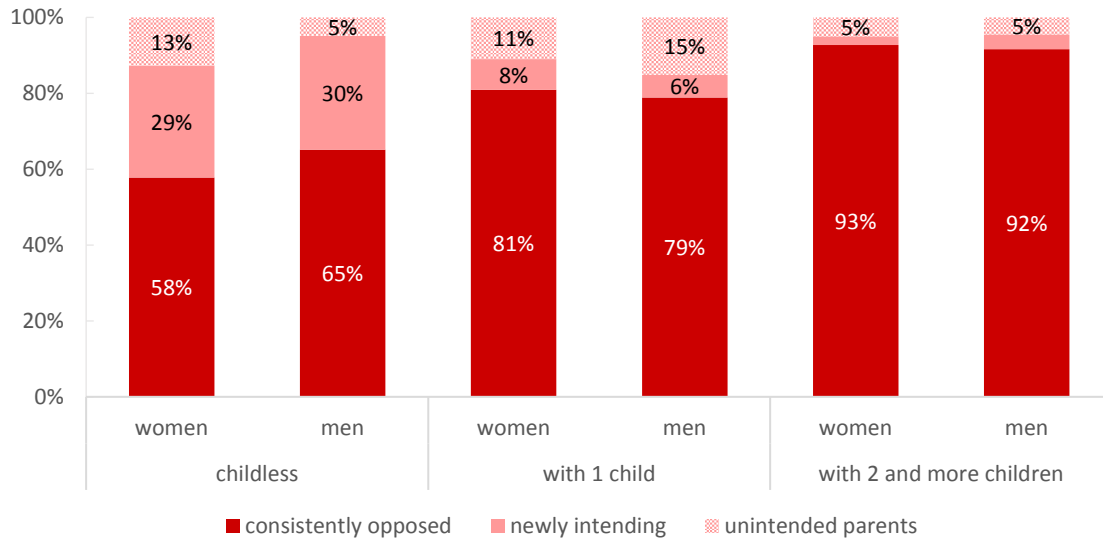
With respect to realising the intention to become a parent within the next three years, childless women and men did not substantially differ from each other (Figure 4): one-third got a child by the time of the second wave. Among those who had not fulfilled their intention, the majority upheld their plan to have a child in the nearest future when asked about it at the second wave, whereas the rest abandoned this plan. Parents of one child were more successful in achieving their childbearing goals: 44% of fathers and 38% of mothers had a second child when re-interviewed after four years. Men who had not realised their intention tended to abandon it altogether (34% compared to 22% of those who postponed their plans, i.e. who at the second wave still planned to have a second child within the following three years). Women, by contrast, were equally divided into abandoners and postponers. Among parents of more than one child the gender pattern reversed: women were more likely to abandon their childbearing intentions (64% vs. 57% among men) and less likely to postpone them (10% as opposed to 17% for men). In this group, the proportion of those who by the second wave realised their fertility intention was markedly lower (26%) than among childless respondents and parents of one child.

Figure 3: Realisation of the intention to have a child within the next three years, by sex and parity



Among those who at the first wave did not intend to have a child within the following three years, more than eight respondents in ten fulfilled their intention and did not get a(nother) child by the time of the second wave (Figure 5). However, around 30% of those who were childless at wave 1 changed their mind and at wave 2 they declared a plan to become parents in the nearest future. This number was much lower among parents (8% of mothers and 6% of fathers of one child, and 2% and 3%, respectively, among parents with more children). Furthermore, one childless woman in eight became a mother by the time of the second wave although she had not intended it at the first wave. The share was much lower among childless men: only one in twenty. Importantly, even though these respondents became parents despite declaring no such intention at the first wave, their parenthood was not necessarily accidental. As it was discussed in the introductory section, intentions change over time and as respondents finish education, find a job or enter a union, they might start thinking about having a child. Thus, the label *sooner-than-intended or unintended parents* simply means that respondents classified to this category did not plan to have a child in the following three years, when asked in 2010/2011, but got one by the time of the second wave.

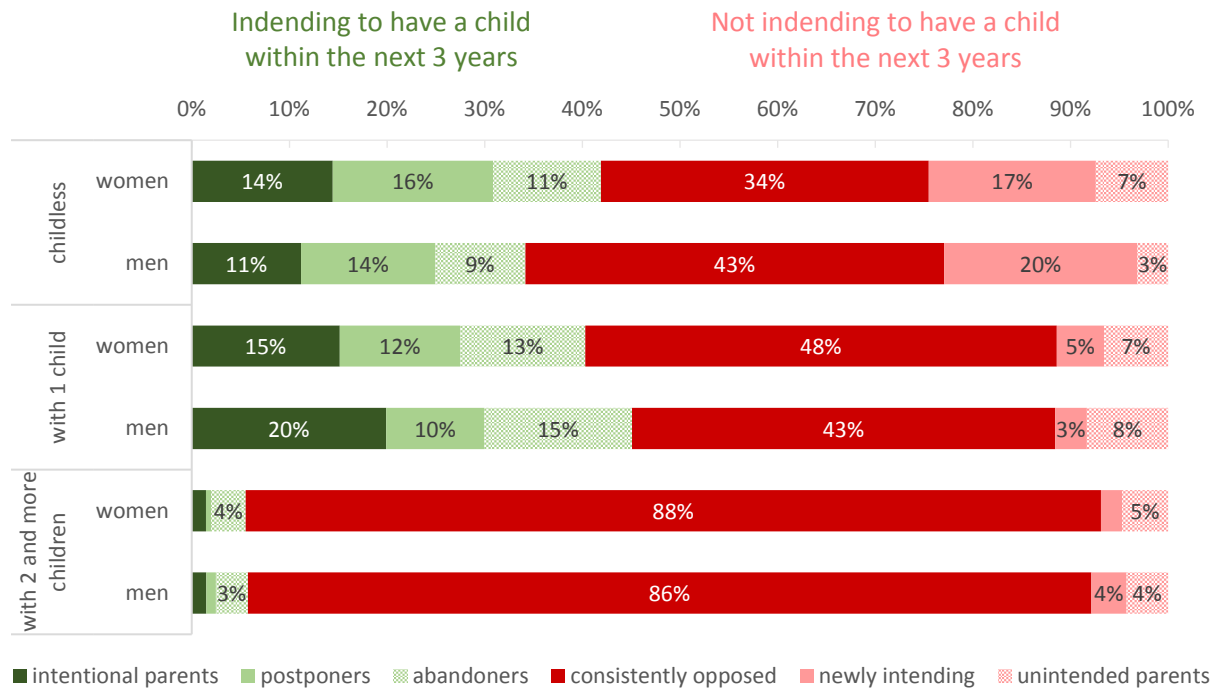
Figure 4: Realisation of the intention not to have a child within the next three years, by sex and parity



Finally, figure 6 shows the complete classification of respondents based on their childbearing intentions and actual reproductive outcomes between the survey waves (see section *Data and methods* for a detailed description of the categories). Clearly, Polish women and men seldom plan to have another child if they already have more than one: close to 90% could be described as *consistently opposed* when it comes to their childbearing intentions (did not plan to have a child either at the first or second wave, and did not get one between the two interviews). This number halved among respondents with one child and with no children at wave 1. For childless men and fathers of one child the share of the *consistently opposed* was equal (43%), whereas among childless women it was substantially smaller than among mothers of one child (34% to 48%). About one childless woman in five and one childless man in six had revised their short-time childbearing intentions between the survey waves, falling into the category of *newly intending*: in the first wave they stated they did not intend to have a child within the following three years but declared the opposite in the second wave. The proportion of the *newly intending* was much lower among parents.

The number of *sooner-than-intended* or *unintended parents* varied surprisingly little by parity, especially among women: 7% of women with no children or with one child and 5% of those with more children got a baby between wave 1 and 2, despite having declared no such intention at wave 1. For men, the share was twice as high among fathers of one child (8%) as among childless men and fathers of two or more children. Fathers of one child were also the most successful in fulfilling their intention to have a child within the next three years: one man in five became an *intentional parent*. On the other hand, men with one child abandoned their intention to have a child in the nearest future almost as often (15%) as women with one child (13%) but slightly more often than childless respondents (11% among women and 9% among men). Not surprisingly, *postponers* were to be found mostly among childless women (16%) and men (14%); for one-child parents the numbers were four percentage points lower.

Figure 5: Classification of respondents with respect to their childbearing intentions stated at wave 1 and 2 and to their actual fertility outcomes between the waves, by sex and parity



4. Summary and Conclusions

The availability of the GGS-PL panel data opens new research perspectives especially with regard to topics related to family formation and childbearing. The first wave of the survey, conducted in 2010/2011, allowed for exploring factors that facilitated or hampered fertility intentions of Poles (e.g. Mynarska & Styrz 2014, Mynarska & Wróblewska, forthcoming). The second wave, carried out four years later, gives us a unique opportunity to verify whether these intentions have been realised. For the first time, it is possible to analyse realisation and stability of short-term childbearing plans in a nationally representative Polish sample. Importantly, the sample is large enough to allow for separate analyses by gender and parity. Especially the latter distinction proved to be important. Our analyses showed that fertility intentions of Polish women and men vary greatly by parity: whereas 80% of childless respondents and over a half of those with one child intended to have a (further) child, parents of more than one child rarely planned to enlarge their families. Interestingly, also the level of realisation of these intentions differed by parity. Among parents of one child who intended to have a second one, 38% of women and 44% of men realised this plan. For parents of two or more children – positive intention (i.e. intention to have a child) was realised only in a quarter of cases. Among the childless individuals, the rate of realisation fell in between the two categories of parents and reached 33-34%.

Among the respondents who at the first wave declared that they intended to have a child in the following three years, 35% realised this plan. In the majority of cases, declarations were not followed by actions. Does it mean that studying intentions is fruitless? Not at all, given that among the respondents who did not have any childbearing plans as many as 93% did not change their parity by the second wave. The highest shares of those who had an “unintended” child were seen among parents of one child. Once again it should be emphasised that even though we labelled these births “unintended”, we can only say they were not intended at the moment of the first survey. It is possible that some of the respondents simply changed their mind between the waves. Indeed, if we consider the respondents, who did not have any child between the two waves, quite a few of them changed their fertility intentions in the meantime. A notable share of childless individuals started to think about becoming parents by the second wave. In other cases, intention to have a child was abandoned.

All in all, if we consider all information on intentions and their realisation presented in the paper, we see three distinct patterns of behaviour, depending on parity. Childless individuals generally plan to become parents, but they do not rush this step. Their intentions develop with time and they also tend to postpone childbearing more and more. Parents of one child plan to have a child soon slightly more often than their childless peers and are more successful in realising these plans. Interestingly, the rates are higher for men: they seem more determined than women to reach the family size of at least two children. Finally, as far as parents of two or more children are concerned they are generally highly reluctant to enlarge their families.

As GGS-PL is part of an international research programme and similar panel surveys have been conducted in several other countries, we are also able to interpret the Polish results in the European perspective. Spéder and Kapitány (2014) documented that the low rate of realisation of fertility intentions is typical of the post-socialist countries and the Polish case is not much different. In Bulgaria, Georgia and Hungary intention to have a child was realised in 22-32% of cases (Spéder & Kapitány, 2014), while in the Polish sample it was 35%. The realisation rates are meaningfully higher in Germany or France (42-43%, Spéder & Kapitány, 2014), let alone those in countries like Norway (60%, Dommermuth et al., 2015).

Spéder & Kapitány (2014) argued that failure to realise childbearing intentions, observed in the post-socialist countries, “can essentially be traced back to the discrepancies between the value system and structural conditions of childbearing” (p. 413). This explanation is likely to apply to the Polish case as well. Poles place a high value on family and children (Fokkema & Esveldt, 2008; Testa, 2012) and they want to become parents (Mynarska, 2011). However, the economic and institutional constraints often play against their plans (Mynarska & Styrac, 2014). Unstable labour market, changes in regulations and family policies, difficulties in the housing market – they all might hamper the realisation of childbearing intentions. Further research is needed to verify these effects and to investigate whether any other factors contribute to the relatively low realisation rates in Poland.

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Appendix

Table 1: Realisation of the intention (not) to have a child within the next three years, all respondents

No short-term intention to have a child		Short-term intention to have a child	
consistently opposed	80%	intentional parents	35%
unintended parents	7%	postponers	33%
newly intending	13%	abandoners	32%
	100%		100%

Table 2: Classification of respondents with respect to their childbearing intentions stated at wave 1 and 2 and to their actual fertility outcomes between the waves, all respondents

No short-term intention to have a child	consistently opposed	59%
	unintended parents	5%
	newly intending	9%
Short-term intention to have a child	intentional parents	9%
	postponers	9%
	abandoners	8%
		100%

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