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Family

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Abstract

Family policy gained considerable relevance which is reflected by the current public attention to family issues. In regard to many recommendations of the KVI in 2001 improvements can be reported which family research profited from in a considerable way. However, pertaining to quality and content progress in data provision since the beginning of the 21st century was limited. Particularly, the availability of longitudinal data to study social and family related processes on different levels and regarding different dimensions of family development has to be extended. Data are needed not only to describe family change in an adequate way but also to model the structural and non-structural determinants and ‘outcomes’ of couples’ and family dynamics or family relationships over time – both retrospectively and prospectively. Therefore, additionally to an improved family related report system provided by the official statistics prospective panel studies collecting longitudinal (socio-)structural and non-structural information on the dynamics of individuals’ living arrangements over time are urgently needed.

Keywords: family research, longitudinal data, family dynamics

1. Introduction

Family policy gained considerable attention and the need for more and precise information on various aspects of family dynamics is strong. This is well reflected by the current public attention to family issues of various kinds. It does not only hold true for family demography in the narrower sense (living arrangements, nuptiality and divorce, fertility) but also for with aspects of the internal dynamics of close relationships in unions and families (quality and benefits of intimate relationships, parenting, intergenerational relationships, effects of poverty, intra-family violence). These topics often lie on the border line between social, economic, and psychological research.

Even though there is strong public attention family research had not been considered in the first round of expertises initiated by the KVI in 2001. Still, besides the expertises on population (by Kreyenfeld and Scholz) and intergenerational relationships (by Nauck and Steinbach) in this round only this expertise addresses family research explicitly. Family related issues are not well represented in face of the broad range of research fields.

However, the KVI in 2001 made several recommendations, which are of particularly relevance for the field of family research. One can refer to:

- conducting a census;
- long term institutionalisation of the GSOEP
- more support of prospective and retrospective cohort studies to allow longitudinal analyses of individual development and life courses;
- continuation of the ALLBUS and the ISSP;
- improved access to aggregated as well as individual-level data and provision of scientific use microdata files and institutionalisation of “Forschungsdatenzentren”;
- provision of opportunities to connect data from different data sources.

Pertaining to nearly all of these recommendations, improvements since 2001 can be reported from which family research profited in a considerable way. Particular progress was made in regard to the access to large data sets (Micro-Census) of the official statistics allowing more valid and detailed description and analysis of changing demographic family structures over time. A census has not materialized up to now but is in the planning phase. Provision of data for longitudinal studies has been stabilised. Family issues also were covered in recent ALLBUS-, ISSP-, and ESS-Surveys in a more detailed and adequate way. However, in terms of sample sizes and content progress since the beginning of the 21st century was limited. It

seems that the availability of longitudinal data to study social and family related processes on different levels of family development still has not been extended sufficiently – as will be argued below. The newly started Panel Study of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics (PAIRFAM) is one step to overcome this deficit in Germany.

2. Research Questions of Family Science

2.1 Main Research Fields

Family research has to be multidisciplinary and spans the disciplines Demography, Psychology, Sociology, Economics, but also Anthropology, Pedagogic, Political Science, or Law. Very briefly the main research fields will be addressed in a systematic way from an analytical point of view (Huinink 2008).

Family and social structure (the macro-perspective of family research): The demographic and socio-structural change of the family and living arrangements as well as their structural and institutional embeddedness in our functionally differentiated society are investigated. Subfields of research are:

- Demography of the family and family types
- Social structure and social inequality of families
- Family as a social institution in welfare states
- Family and subsystems of the society: demands and achievements of the family related to other subsystems of the society

Family as a social group (the meso-perspective of family research): The dynamics the social relationships in private households and families of different kinds and during different phases of family development are investigated. Subfields of research are:

- Social interaction in couples and families
- Household production and organising the everyday life in couples and families
- Socialisation, parenting, and parental transmission
- Intergenerational relationships

Family development over the life course (the micro-perspective of family research): The behaviour of individual actors and their motivational structure connected with family development as one interdependent part of the individual life course is investigated. Subfields of research are:

- Mating, establishing partnership, family formation and extension
- Stability and breaking up of couples' and family relationships
- Family life and its effects on other domains of the individual life course

2.2 *Development in Theory and Methodological Challenges*

Investigations in these fields of family research are connected to different theoretical approaches requiring different data for empirical investigation, and using different methods of data analysis. Already a brief overview over some theoretical developments and the methodological challenges going along with them as well as a review of the progress in regard to methods of data analysis very clearly show which kind of data are needed to make further progress in family research. Theoretically and methodologically, family research in Social Sciences has made considerable progress by overcoming cross sectional concepts and implementing longitudinal approaches of theoretical and empirical analysis. Family research has profited from new strategies of data collection, especially panel and retrospective survey designs (Mayer 2000; Seltzer et al. 2005). Refined methods of panel and event history analysis allow considering different levels of analysis and different dimensions of the life course in the study of couples' and family dynamics (Blossfeld and Rohwer 1995; Wu 2004; Singer and Willett 2003, Halaby 2004).

Adequate *theoretical framework* exists or is being developed. The main theoretical paradigm follows a multi-level life-course approach of individual welfare production over time. The rationale of this welfare production can be based on different versions of a theory of individual action over the life course. It uses assumptions about the interdependency between individual action, its contextual conditions on different levels of social processes, and the various strongly interrelated dimensions of the individual life course – family life is one of them (Feldhaus and Huinink 2008).

On the macro level, social change of the structural and institutional context of the family in the society is investigated and cohort analysis allows distinguishing period, age and cohort effects. On the meso-level the impact of the middle-range social context, the local infrastructure (e.g. child care systems), social networks, working conditions, neighbourhoods, etc. are analysed, even though very frequently yet. On the micro level of family units and couples more and more dynamics of interpersonal relationships of different kinds over time are studied. Individual family related behaviour has to be perceived as embedded in all these strata of situational conditions changing over time.

This means specific requirements in regard to data needed in family research. From a substantive point of view the following *methodological challenges* can be referred to:

Third variable phenomenon: The question of spurious correlation is in longitudinal research of specific relevance, particularly in self-referential or path-dependent processes like the life course of individuals. One theoretical approach in family research referring to that is Hakim's preference theory. It assumes that much of the relationship between family activities and work in later life is preconditioned by early adopted attitudes (Hakim 2000).

Selection and adaptation: The matter of selection and adaptation over the life course is again due to the fact that life courses are self referential processes (Lesthaeghe 2002). Particularly, if we deal with intentions, values, aspirations, or frames of action (socio-psychological indicators) we have to assume selective effects on behaviour as well as adaptation operating in regard to these factors. The choice of relevant persons in the social network could be influenced by the process of selection and adaptation.

Substitution and complementarity: The life course is a multidimensional process, but we know little about relations of substitution and support between different dimensions of welfare production in different life domains like family and work.

Anticipation: Actors learn from the past and they are restricted in their degrees of freedom for action by past decisions and past behaviour. Knowing this they anticipate future consequences as well as expected changes in the conditions of their action. Future life course transitions or the 'shadow of the future' therefore gain relevance for decisions on current behaviour (Nauck 2001).

Couple's perspective: Individual level family research in Sociology is still strongly focused on single actors and often fails to link the perspectives of partners and family members (Lyons and Sayer 2005).

Cultural comparison: A big deal of international diversity in family dynamics is due to cultural differences which often are rooted in processes which took place centuries ago. An example for the relevance of cultural differences which were emerging only decades ago are the different patterns of family development and living arrangements of parents in East and West Germany. Until now the crucial cultural parameters are not very well identified empirically even though we know that socio-structural differences between the populations of the two Germanys do not explain the diverging behavioural patterns in a satisfying manner.

Still there are blind spots in understanding the complex individual decision processes over the life time. Particularly, one can assess a lack of interdisciplinary theory building integrating

demographic, economic, sociological, and psychological approaches and a lack of adequate longitudinal data allowing an adequate empirical analysis.

3. Status Quo: Data Bases and Access

Even though in many aspects one can report considerable improvements of data provision in general – given the requirements mentioned above – there are still severe deficits to be mentioned.

Following the recommendations of the KVI in 2001 addressing structural macro- and micro-data for the demographic analysis of family dynamics, great progress has been made. One reason is a better access to data from official statistics. Also the provision by family related data from social surveys in the national and international context has been improved. However, cross-sectional data enriched by retrospective information are still dominant. Non-structural information (socio-psychological indicators) mostly is only available from cross-sectional surveys or panel studies with long gaps between the few panel waves. Longitudinal data of this category is still lacking by now.

3.1 Official Statistics

Data from official statistics primarily support the descriptive effort on reporting family structure und its change but increasingly also serve for data supply allowing to model and investigate family dynamics analytically. This is primarily due to the better access to the data of the Micro-Census.

Statistics of marriage, divorce, and fertility are available but can only be used for descriptive purposes. Up to the year 2007 parity specific birth statistics cannot be calculated on the basis of data from Vital Statistics and the proportion of childless men or women of a particular cohort cannot be estimated in a proper way.

Huge progress has been made in regard to the use of Micro-Census data in family research – especially in family demography. Not only a gaining relevance for descriptive purposes can be highlighted but also the fact that more and more well differentiated and sophisticated statistical models of family formation and development have been analysed using data from the Micro-Census (for example: Duschek and Wirth 2005; Kreyenfeld 2001; Kreyenfeld and Geißler 2006; Lengerer and Klein 2007; Lengerer et al. 2007; Wirth 2007; see also the expertise on Demography).

Up to now however, there are shortcomings users have to struggle with. A heavily discussed shortcoming was that only those children of respondents were considered who lived in the selected household. Also and surprisingly enough, questions on the day care provision of children had been skipped in the last Micro-Census Act in 2005.

Using panel data of the Micro-Census suffers from the fact that respondents who change their place of residence drop out of the sample. This means that the panel-subsample gets more and more selective because mobile respondents are underrepresented. If migration behaviour is correlated with a dependent variable of interest biased results of analyses can be expected. Nonetheless it has been investigated whether the panel data of the Micro-Census can be used for longitudinal analyses. Kreyenfeld et al. (2007) show that the selectivity does not seem to be problematic in case of studying family formation.

Some other surveys of the Federal Statistical Office which are of importance for family research should be mentioned: The second time use survey added considerable information for research of household production in families and households. The Sample Survey of Income and Expenditure can be used to study the economic situation of families and households. The “Sozialhilfestatistik“ (social benefits) and the „Statistik der Jugendhilfe“ (various micro-data sets dealing with institutions of providing services for children and adolescents) are relevant for family research and are available for several years. These opportunities are not yet used in family research that much.

3.2 *Survey Data*

To date longitudinal data for family research are provided by large scale studies like the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP, Wagner et al. 2007), the German Life History Study (GLHS, Mayer 2000), the Family Survey of the German Youth Institute (Bien and Marbach 2003), or the Cologne “Gymnasiastenstudie” (Meulemann 1995). The family relevant part of the GSOEP has been extended considerably over time. A questionnaire dealing with new born and very young children (aged 2-3 and 4-6) and the subsample of adolescents (aged 16-17) should be mentioned in this context.

The GSOEP, the Family Survey, the GLHS, and the Cologne “Gymnasiastenstudie” contributed to a considerable shift in the longitudinal analysis of family dynamics. The GSOEP and the GLHS focus on socio-structural as well as demographic data and socio-economic issues. Therefore, they do not allow the study of the interrelatedness between psychological and social dynamics and process of decision-making concerning family or intimate relationships.

Studies on fertility and family dynamics which go beyond this “structural bias” are primarily cross-sectional surveys as it was the case with the Family and Fertility Surveys (FFS) conducted in the early 1990s which are used until today in international comparative studies. The same is true for the ALLBUS, the European Social Survey (ESS), and the German Family Survey. However, the latter includes a three-wave-panel as a subsample but with a lag of six years between the waves. The Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) conducted under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE, Vikat et al. 2007) will also provide panel data. The time interval between the waves is also quite large here (three years). The German partner in this programme is the *Bundesinstitut für Bevölkerungsforschung*. The first wave of the German GGS was conducted in 2005, in 2006 a migration sample was added (Ruckdeschel et al. 2006; Ette et al. 2007), and data collection of second wave of the German sample started in 2008.

The German Youth Institute is running several surveys which are of importance for family research: Among others one should mention the Youth Surveys addressing the living conditions and social and political orientations of adolescents and young adults (started in 1992; cross-sectional representative surveys among young people in Germany aged 16 to 29 resp. 12 to 29) or the Children's Panel which is a longitudinal study started in 2001. It provides data on children's living situations and the impact of living conditions on children's individual development.

Socio-psychological determinants of couples' and family behaviour are more and more considered in prospective surveys. This is less the case in regard to its social embeddedness (social networks, kinship networks) or the support of investigating couples' and family dynamics as co-development of ‘linked lives’ (Elder 1994). Multi-actor designs providing original data on attributes of several related persons has not been well established so far. An important exception in Germany is the GSOEP which allows combining information of the members of a household.

Longitudinal data to study living arrangements of the elderly are provided by SHARE (Börsch-Supan et al 2003). Two waves with respondents ages 50 and more have been collected so far, the third is on the way. Also the first and the second version of the “Alterssurvey” should be mentioned which contributed considerably to the increasing knowledge about this aspect of family life. But these studies have not been designed as panel studies and are limited in analysing the dynamics the family life of old people (Kohli and Szydlick 2000; Tesch-Römer et al. 2006).

To summarize: One can conclude that nearly all fields of family research profit from information provided by large scale data sets and the research infrastructure improved considerably. However, the richness of the data often is still quite restricted – given the theoretical and methodological challenges referred to above.

3.3 International Perspectives

To give an adequate overview over the international situation is not possible in this expertise. Some of the already mentioned German surveys have international counterparts (like the GSOEP) or are part of international programmes. The latter, for example, is true for the GGS, the ESS, and the SHARE project.

Internationally, as far as prospective longitudinal studies of the recommended kind and with a particular focus on family issues are concerned, one has to refer to the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study. It is conducted by the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute in co-operating with some Dutch universities (NKPS; Dijkstra et al. 2004). The research questions focus on issues of intergenerational relationships and solidarity in kinship systems. Two waves of an extensive face-to-face interview have been conducted (Wave 1 in 2002-2004, Wave 2 in 2006-2007).

In Britain important longitudinal data sources (besides of the BHPS) are provided by the National Child Development Study and the 1970 British Cohort Study, followed by the National Child Development Study and Millennium Cohort Study. The studies are run by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies UK. The Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) is the UK's latest longitudinal birth cohort study and follows the lives of a sample of babies born 2000 to 2002. The studies collect information on education and employment, family and parenting, physical and mental health, and social attitudes of large numbers of respondents of selected birth cohorts (Ferri et al. 2003; Dex and Joshi 2005).

4. Future Developments: Data Provision and Data Access

4.1 Requirements in Regard to Data

Even though considerable theoretical and methodological progress has been made, there seems to be a deadlock in regard to the productiveness in some parts of family research which has to be broken. This is primarily a matter of data not of theory. Data are needed not only to describe family change in an adequate way but also to measure the structural and – and this is of particular importance - non-structural determinants and ‘outcomes’ in regard to couples’

and family dynamics and family relationships over time – both retrospectively and prospectively. The consequences in regard to data requirements are obvious:

1. Data on all levels of analysis are needed. Macro-level data mainly provide information about demographic trends of changing living arrangements, family development and their changing social structure. However, they are also indispensable to perform multi-level analyses of family processes. We need information about societal conditions of family life (macro-economic, political and cultural conditions). On the meso-level information on regional circumstances (opportunities and restrictions) of parenting, family life and intergenerational support (support systems and institutions for various needs of couples and families at all stages of their development, labour market conditions, information about companies' support of families and of combining childcare and work etc.) as well as data dealing with the social context, kinship structure, and social networks are essential. On the individual level data are required to be able to model individual decision processes over time. Moreover, it is increasingly important to be able to combine data from different sources and of different levels analyses.
2. Not only (socio-)structural information (demographic variables; the indicators of the "standard demography" as provided by the ALLBUS) is needed – on the macro- and micro-level. The impact of cultural factors on family development has been mentioned. Its measurement has to be improved by developing instruments to record national or regional cultural patterns like images of the family or religiosity. To model multi-level decision processes over time, to test bridge hypotheses, and to include the developmental dimension attitudes and socio-psychological dispositions of individual actors have to be considered.
3. Longitudinal data are needed when explanatory analyses will be conducted and dynamic theories shall be tested. Cross-sectional data only serve for descriptive purposes and displaying just correlations. Retrospective data are not sufficient though. They only serve for fairly valid structural information like life histories. Usually panel data are needed. One even has to think about implementing event based sampling strategies. Only prospective methods of data collection deliver valid information on social-psychological indicators.
4. Because we deal with very close intimate social relationships decisions, behaviour of individuals (partners, parents and children, grandparents and parents, siblings, etc.) have a strong impact on each other. Therefore, multi-actor designs have to be realized more

often. In particular, it is virtually not possible to get valid proxy information on socio-psychological attributes (for example attitudes) of a person reported by someone else, whether he/she is a friend, another member of the social network, a partner, or a parent.

To summarize: We need prospective longitudinal data from all levels of analysis. As to the micro-level not only structural information is needed and multi-actor designs have to be realized more often. Additionally we need high quality data for a differentiated description of family dynamics and changing living arrangements in Germany.

4.2 Official Statistics

Many aspects of improvements with respect to data from official statistics could be mentioned as far as the purpose an informative descriptive report system in the field of family research is concerned (see expertise by Kreyenfeld and Scholz). The quality of the Vital Statistics of the Federal Republic of Germany related to family issues actually has been improved since 2008 (opportunity to study fertility more adequately given international standards). The same is the case for the Micro-Census because at least female respondents will be asked about the complete number of children have gotten. This is only a very little improvement, though.

One should put more effort on the task to make more use of other micro-data sets which are relevant for family research like the „Statistik der Jugendhilfe“ and the like.

4.3 Surveys

The empirical basis for descriptive purposes and for the analysis of analytical models in different fields of family research has to be strengthened. This is why surveys like the Family Survey of the German Youth Institute have to be continued. They serve for proper basis of both as the experiences from the past show. They contribute to a report system on family issues which can not only be built up by data from official statistics in a sufficient way (Engstler and Menning 2003)

The other longitudinal research and survey programmes which have been mentioned have to be continued. A major contribution in regard to this is made by the newly stated Panel Study of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics PAIRFAM with yearly data collection schedule. Members of three age cohorts (being 15-17, 25-27 and 35-37 years old in the first wave) will be followed up over the next years. The study will provide longitudinal data on the basis of a multi-actor design. Additionally, to the anchor persons their partners, parents, and children are interviewed. The questionnaires include structural and non-structural information in greater detail. Particular emphasis is placed on psychological and sociological instruments

to get prospective information on determinants of establishing intimate relationships and their stability over time; the timing, spacing, and stopping of fertility; intergenerational relationships and parenting; and social networks. It is important to run this panel programme on long term basis.

Internationally the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study in the Netherlands will be continued and it is intended to have at least a third wave of the Generation and Gender Survey in different European countries.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

First of all there is good reason to demand that the various issues of family research should be given more attention by the RatSWD in its efforts to improve the data infra-structure for the Social Sciences. One should not only look primarily at it from the demographic perspective – as important as this perspective is. Major aims of such an effort should be:

1. Continuing initiatives to improve the family related report system of the official statistics allowing a refined description and analysis of family structure and changing living arrangements in Germany as it is possible in other European countries. The probability of success of such an effort would increase if scholars of different disciplines of family science in Germany started a co-ordinated initiative in this regard, maybe under the auspices of the RatSWD.
2. Providing opportunities to combine data from different data sources also for family research to allow more refined models of multi-level analysis. For example, one could think of combining individual-level information of different origin (register data of different kinds) with data on the local family related infrastructure (day care provision) and data informing about companies engagement in respect to supporting family needs (regime of working hours).
3. Continuing and optimizing prospective, longitudinal studies collecting structural and non-structural information on the dynamics of individuals' living arrangements over time. Because of the special importance of longitudinal research for social research in general major panel studies in Germany including the family research related PAIRFAM should be integrated in a panel-infrastructure covering different fields of social research. Family research would profit from this considerably.
4. Developing new instruments and methods of data collection going beyond the strict panel design with equidistant waves and testing methods of event based sampling

(comp. expertise by Riedinger).

5. Improving conditions of and supporting comparative longitudinal studies by pursuing closer international co-operation.

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