The Relationship Between Attending College and Women's Decision to Have Children

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Introduction

- Education shapes family timing and size. In the U.S., women with more education tend to delay marriage and parenthood, have fewer children, and plan their families differently than women with less education.
- College can reduce and delay fertility. Prior research shows that attending college often leads women to have children later and to have fewer children overall, especially for those from more disadvantaged backgrounds (Brand & Davis 2011).
- Education increases clarity about life plans. Higher levels of education are associated with women feeling more certain and deliberate about their future goals, including whether and when to have children (Klobas & Ajzen 2015).

Research Questions

- How is college attendence effecting the decision for married american women to have children?
- Does this relationship differ in rural vs urban communities?

Methods

Sample The data for this study come from the 2022 General Social Survey (GSS), a nationally representative survey of adults living in the United States. The GSS collects information about people's backgrounds, attitudes, and behaviors using a random sample of non-institutionalized adults aged 18 and older. For this study, analyses focused on married female respondents under the age of 40.

Measures

- College attendance was measured by categorizing years of education completed (1st grade and onward) over 12 years as being a college attendee.
- In the GSS, the variables abnomore and abnomoreg are used to determine if a married woman does not want more children. These variables were combined as "marnomore", because they were identical but came from different sources. The variable childs is used to report number of children the respondent has
- The variable *srcbelt* was created to categorize the geographic locations where respondents lived. This was examined as a possible mediating or confounding variable in the analysis.

Results

Bivariate

- Chi-Square analysis showed that the marnomore (desire to have more children) was significantly associated with college attendance. (p< . 0.01).
- There appeared to be a strong correlation between atteding college and not wanting more childrren.

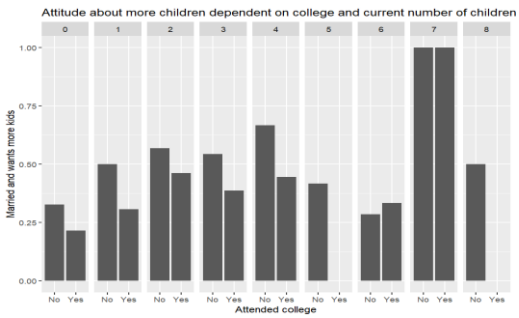


***Figure 1*: Desire to have more children by college attendence, based on current number of children**

Multivariate

- Logistic regression analyses showed that college attendance lowered the likelihood of wanting more children by 47.2 percent. (OR=0.527, P= 4.48e-05)

- Analysis also showed that the relationship was still significant for people having 1-4 children already. (ORs= 1.79, 2.91,2.21, 3.51)

- When accounting for geographic location, analysis showed that compared to in large urban centers, college attending married women living in rural areas were more likely to want more children. (OR=1.95)

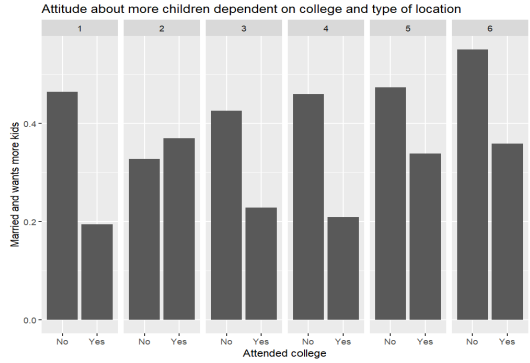


Figure 2:Desire to have more children by college attendence, based on belt code (category of region where respondent lives).

Discussion

- Among married women under 40, college attendance was associated with different fertility plans: women who had attended college were less likely to say they definitely did not want more children, even after accounting for age, number of children, and region.
- The association between college and not wanting more children varied across regions. Women in rural areas had higher odds of saying they did not want more children, suggesting that local economic and cultural contexts shape how education translates into family plans.
- Together with prior work, these results suggest that college may encourage more deliberate planning about if and when to have children, rather than simply lowering fertility in a uniform way. Because these data are cross-sectional and focus only on married women under 40, we cannot say education *causes* changes in fertility intentions. Future research could follow women over time and include unmarried women to better understand how college influences childbearing decisions.

References

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