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## **Differences in Fertility Behaviour among the Farm, Rural and Urban Populations in Slovenia**

### **Abstract**

Below replacement fertility in almost all European countries and lowest low fertility in a large part of the continent are significant demographic issues that concern contemporary policy makers and social scientists. Statistical data for Slovenia show that, with the exception of the farm population, all social groups have fertility levels that are below reproduction. This paper attempts to find out which factors are the most accountable for these differences and intends to contribute to broader scientific and public debates about the reasons for very low fertility in the 'industrialized world'. The results of the analysis based on the survey "Generations and Gender Relationships on Slovenian Farms" (2007) indicate that differences in fertility behaviour among the farm and other parts of the Slovenian population are more related to the structural than cultural characteristics of the people.

**Keywords:** fertility, farm/rural/urban population, structural/cultural characteristics, Slovenia

### **Introduction**

Below replacement fertility in almost all European countries and lowest low fertility in a large part of the continent are significant demographic issues that concern contemporary policy makers and social scientists. Notably, after several decades of low fertility, most developed countries are entering a new demographic regime characterized by population decline and accelerated ageing of the population. Due to a fertility rate significantly below the

reproduction level, Slovenia is one of the countries facing these challenges. In 1980 under the socialist regime, the fertility level had already dropped below replacement and the steady downward trend did not end until 2007 at the total fertility rate (TFR) of 1.38. The lowest level was reached in 2004 at 1.20 TFR. This level ranks Slovenia, among the countries with the lowest level of fertility in the world (United Nation 2008).

The reasons for low fertility in 'industrialized societies' are generally due to industrialization, urbanization, secularization and individualism combined with increased educational and employment participation, particularly of women. The majority of demographic studies include these factors in their research models to explain the grounds of low fertility persistence. However, few studies consider the impact of the every day life and profession on fertility.

Statistical data for Slovenia show that, with the exception of the farm population, all social groups have fertility levels that are below reproduction (Šircelj 2006). For the generations born in the period 1911–1945 data indicate that the difference between farm and non-farm groups is decreasing. However, in the case of cohort 1941–1945, social groups such as managers, professionals and artists still account for only 60 per cent of completed fertility of farmers. The 2002 census data provide an insight into the completed fertility of different professional groups among younger generations born in the period 1947–1966; fertility decreased in all professional groups, but the above mentioned proportion of difference in fertility among farmers and higher professional groups remained unchanged.

Apart from statistical analysis, there is no additional research on different fertility levels among farmers and other groups in Slovenia. This paper addresses this analytical gap. It attempts to find out which factors are the most accountable for the above mentioned differences and in this way it intends to contribute to broader scientific and public debates about the reasons for very low fertility in the 'industrialized world'. In recent public discussions about 'numerical smallness of the nation' in Slovenia it is stressed, especially by Catholic theologians that the main reason for low fertility lies in the destruction and absence of family norms and related values among the population like *joie de vivre*, the importance of family atmosphere and the benefit that children bring to the nation (Knežević and Hočvar 2007). Hence, the leading question followed in this paper is whether the relatively high level of fertility of the farm population compared to other parts of the Slovenian population is associated with its significantly different values pertaining to family life domain or with some other factors?

### Theoretical Framework

According to Mackensen (1982), every research and explanation on fertility behaviour, like on any other social behaviour, should proceed from the concept of specific structural and cultural characteristics of each society, and the historical processes that shaped them. In this context, the most comprehensive theory of farm population fertility behaviour is formulated by historical demographer Caldwell (1982). According to his wealth flows theory of fertility decline *fertility behaviour, in general, in societies of every type and stage of development is rational, and fertility is low or high as a result of economic benefit to individuals, couples or families. Whether high or low fertility is economically rational it is determined by social conditions: primarily by the direction of the intergenerational wealth flow. This flow has been from younger to older generations in all traditional societies: and it is apparently impossible for its reversal before the family is largely nucleated both emotionally and economically* (Caldwell 1982, p. 152). High fertility is rational when the amount of wealth flows in terms of work, money, security, love, support, pieces of advice and the like is greater from the younger to the older generation than the opposite. This wealth flow direction is a feature of societies where economic activities are mainly situated inside a family. In the context of the 'family way of production' the decision about production, consumption and reproduction is the privilege of older, mainly male family members and is a particular feature of the extended, three generational family. The monopoly of the older generation is enabled and maintained by family and social relations structured by age, gender, origin and marital status. These relationships are sustained and justified by family morality that covers a considerable part of the society's culture and is maintained by religion. Family morality stresses the importance of the home, the superiority of the family and its continuity over individual interests.

Since 1965, considerable demographic changes have been observed in many European countries (fewer marriages, more cohabitations, the delay of, or renouncing parenthood, increase in divorces and single parent households) presumably due to a shift in value orientation that indicates a strengthening of the individual's free choice principle (Van de Kaa 1987). 'Post-modern demographic behaviour' of contemporary reproductive cohorts more likely corresponds to the individualistic *lifestyle, where it is understood that sex and marriage/union are no longer closely related, and that contraception is*

*only interrupted to have a self-fulfilling conception* (Van de Kaa 1999, p.31). This new pattern of behaviour is seemingly reflected in changes of the life course of young generations; earlier entry into first sexual intercourse, but later achievement of economic and housing autonomy and creation of own families (Iedema et al., 1997; Cordon 1997; Nave-Herz 1997). For Slovenia it has been demonstrated (Černič Istenič and Kveder 2008) that the young urban generation shows an indicative post-modern demographic pattern through their behaviour. Conversely, the young generation living in rural areas with the highest share of farm population, tend to follow the more 'traditional' pattern of their previous generations.

Recently, personal networks receive increasing recognition as predictors of demographic events (Bühler and Philipov 2005). It is assumed that the perspective of social networks enable the examination of the social and economic situation of an individual or household more suitably. To date few studies support the relevance of networks on explanation of recent fertility trends. Philipov et al. (2005) report the increasing tendency of Bulgarian and Hungarian women to have a second child when they experience supportive personal relationships. Philipov and Sholnikov (2001) document similar results for Russia. According to Bühler and Fratzcek (2004), the intention of Polish couples to have a second child increases with the size of their support networks and their involvement in supportive exchange relationships.

Following the above mentioned theoretical grounds the following hypothesis is formulated:

Differences in fertility behaviour measured by actual and expected number of children among farm, rural and urban populations are associated with their different cultural and structural characteristics. These characteristics are observed through these dwellers' behaviour, status, social networks, attitudes and views.

### Data and Methods

The analysis is based on data from the survey "Generations and Gender Relations on Slovenian Farms" (2007), sponsored by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food (MAFF). The purpose of the survey was to study the social context of farm families and its impact on the process of farm succession. The latter is a problem for many Slovenian farms. According to the 2000 Census of Agriculture, only 24 per cent of farm holders of the 86,000 farms report

having a secured farm successor (Dernulc et al. 2000). In order to improve this situation, in 2004 the MAFF introduced special agricultural subsidies modelled on EU directives. To accelerate the transfer of farms from older to younger farmers, subsidies were provided to the former (over 57) to retire and to the latter (below 40) to take over the farms.

One of this survey's hypotheses was that these types of subsidies are positively associated with intergenerational relationships of farm families and consequently with the future of farms. Moreover, the aim of the survey was also to study the reproductive potential and fertility behaviour of farm families. To acquire an adequate picture of the situation in farm families, a comparison with other parts of the Slovenian population was needed. For that reason, the survey included three major sub-samples of respondents aged 18 to 83 of both genders: 275 urban dwellers, 135 people from rural areas, and 407 individuals who lived on farms. The latter group was further divided into 301 beneficiaries of subsidies for early retirement and early succession or their household members, and 106 non-recipients. The presented analysis is based on this urban-rural-farm categorization. Considering the fact that a great majority of the population in Slovenia completes its reproductive life around the age of 40 (e.g. age-specific fertility rate of women aged 40–44 and 45–49 is 4.6 and 0.2 respectively, while the general age-specific fertility rate is 38.1) (Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia 2008) the respondents were divided into two age groups: 1. aged under 40 and 2. aged 40 and over.

In analyzing the differences among the respondents' actual and expected number of children against the urban-rural-farm categorization bivariate analysis of variance is applied. When the simultaneous impact of independent structural and cultural variables on each of the dependent variables is examined, an analysis of variance is carried out with a univariate general linear model (GLM).

### **Measures of Structural Characteristics**

In order to measure the impact of factors associated with social structure characteristics of individuals besides urban/rural/farm categorization, eleven additional variables were selected:

- Household structure: six nominal categories for living alone, a couple, nuclear family, one-parent household, three-generation household and remaining forms of households;

- Marital status: five nominal categories for single people, married, cohabitation, divorced and widowed;
- Labour force status: eight nominal categories for employed, working on a farm, unemployed, student, pensioner, housewife and other;
- Respondent's education: seven ordered categories ranging from "less than primary school" to "master's or doctor's degree";
- Mother's education: the same categories as listed above;
- Way of solving household problem: six nominal categories for buying, building, extension of existing home, receiving from parents and inheritance;
- Savings: two nominal categories for "yes" and "no";
- Social ties: a covariate referring to the number of persons from whom the respondent expects assistance
- Farm size; a covariate pertaining to the size considered in ha.
- Subsidy beneficiary: two nominal categories for receivers and non-receivers;
- Secured successor: two nominal categories for "yes" and "no".

### Measures of Cultural Characteristics

On the basis of principal component factor analysis of the set of originally obtained variables with five-point scale ranging (from fully agree to fully disagree) five new ones were constructed to measure the attitudes and views relating to family life:

- Children's duty to care for parents – constructed from the following items: 'Children should adjust their work to the needs of their parents,' 'Daughters should care more for their parents than sons,' 'Parents should move in with their children when they can no longer look after themselves.' (Cronbach alpha = 0.66).
- Reconciliation of family and work – constructed from the following items: 'Family and home offer the same satisfaction as employment,' 'If a mother is employed a child suffers.' and 'If a father is employed a child suffers.' (Cronbach alpha = 0.65).
- Gender equality – constructed from the following items: 'Husband should be older than wife,' 'If a woman has a higher income than her partner this has an unfavourable impact on their relationship.' and 'Men are better politicians than women.' (Cronbach alpha = 0.57).

- Partnership relations – constructed from the following items: ‘An unmarried couple can live together’, ‘In spite of having children a couple which is not in love should divorce’ and ‘Homosexual couples should have the same rights as heterosexual ones.’ (Cronbach alpha = 0.53).
- Life fulfilment from having children – constructed from the following items: ‘A woman should have a child to fulfil her life’ and ‘A man should have a child to fulfil his life.’ (Cronbach alpha = 0.95).

Besides, in this set of variables another two categorical variables were considered:

- Religiosity: with four ordered categories ranging from “very important role in one’s life” to “very unimportant role in one’s life”;
- Attendance of religious ceremonies: with four ordered categories ranging from “never” to “frequently”.

## Results

Urban/rural/farm setting distinction in actual and expected number of children was firstly observed applying three separate bivariate analyses of variance. As table 1 shows there are substantial differences in actual number of children among the respondents aged 40 and over. As foreseen, both groups of farmers who received and who did not receive subsidies have significantly more children than their urban counterparts. As Bonferroni post-hoc mean difference tests reveal (not presented here) rural dwellers do not significantly deviate from any of the groups. Considering the under-40-year age group, the differences in actual number of children among urban/rural/farm populations are significant as well, but due to significant result of Levene test less reliable. Farmers, subsidy beneficiaries have and supposedly tend to have more children than the other three groups, particularly the urban one. A bit less significant, but reliable differences are indicated in the case of expected number of children among the respondents aged under 40. Farmers, subsidy beneficiaries show the tendency towards considerably higher fertility level in comparison with the other three groups. Concerning the results of these partial analyses it appears that the farm population still preserves its position as the group whose level of fertility is far closer to the reproduction threshold than the other population groups. At the same time the results indicate that in the younger generation of farmers – those who are more involved and interested in farming (their application for subsidies proves this) demonstrate a higher actual and expected

Table 1. Actual and expected number of children by urban-rural-farm classification and by age (means and standard deviations)

	Urban p.	Rural p.	Farm p subsidy beneficiaries	Farm p non-subsidy beneficiaries	F	Levene Statistic
> 40 years <b>Actual</b>	1.25 (0.91)	1.71 (0.91)	1.79 (0.96)	1.84 (0.93)	10.949***	0.145
< 40 years <b>Actual</b>	0.44 (0.74)	0.77 (1.02)	1.26 (1.17)	0.85 (1.18)	14.830***	24.720***
< 40 years <b>Expected</b>	2.26 (0.89)	2.24 (0.86)	2.60 (0.87)	2.46 (0.81)	2.942*	0.390

\*\*\*  $p < 0,001$  \*\*  $p < 0,050$  \*  $p < 0,100$

Source: Generations and Gender Relationships on Slovenian Farms, 2007.

number of children than farmers, non-subsidy beneficiaries. In this regard they are becoming more similar to the urban and rural population.

In the next stage of the analysis the impact of urban/rural/farm setting on variability of actual and expected number of children was examined by the inclusion of other social and cultural characteristics of the respondents into the univariate GLMs. Regarding the variability of actual number of children the respondents from all areas aged under 40 compose the first model, whereas the respondents aged 40 and over represent the second one. In the third and fourth model the distinction in actual number of children among farmers aged under 40 and aged 40 and over are analysed respectively. Variability of expected number of children is analysed in the fifth model among all respondents aged under 40 and in the sixth model among farmers aged under 40. The results shown in table 2 indicate that all six models are valid and significant and that the selected independent variables are in a relatively strong relationship with the actual and expected number of children. As far as the  $R^2$  of all models show, the independent variables explain from (82% model 3) to 39% (model 5) of the entire variability in the actual and expected number of children. But, contrary to hypothetical expectations, the interaction of urban/rural/farm setting when other structural and cultural characteristics are taken into consideration neither has a statistically significant relationship with the actual nor the expected number of children. This remark holds true for all six models.

In the case of the actual number of children, the strongest among the variables included into the models is household structure and marital status.



Those living in three generational households and married have significantly more children than the respondents belonging to other categories. Additional bivariate analyses showed (not presented here) that in this regard considerable differences exist among the respondents from different settings. Large, extended – three generational households prevail among farmers who received subsidies while the nuclear family is common for the other three groups. Significant differences exist among groups in terms of one-parent households, those living alone, and those living with a partner. Urban dwellers are relatively more numerous in all these categories. Furthermore, additional bivariate analysis also showed that the percentage of those who are married – half of all respondents – is fourteen percentage points higher among those who received subsidies and sixteen percentage points lower among urban dwellers, whereas the opposite is seen for single people. This group prevails in urban areas; its smallest share is observed among farmers who received subsidies. Additionally, the share of divorcees is considerably higher among urban and rural dwellers than among farmers. This status is quite rare among subsidy beneficiaries. The proportion of those who experienced their parents' divorce is also considerably higher among the urban than the farm population.

The sole impact of household structure and marital status on variability of actual number of children particularly holds true for the younger respondents in the first model, while other included variables do not show any significant impact. The same picture is also observed in the farm population aged under 40 with one single exception; farmers who manage to save some of their money tend to have more children than those farmers who are not able to save at all. In older generations, besides household structure and marital status, some other factors also demonstrate their power: social ties, attitudes towards gender equality and attitudes towards reconciliation of family and working life, but to a lesser extent. This demonstrates that the respondents with less broadly developed social ties, more inclined towards 'traditional' gender roles and less in favour of adjustment of family with professional life have more children than respondents with the opposite characteristics. Only among the older farm population the cultural characteristics – attitudes towards gender roles – are slightly stronger than marital and household structure. Considering the explanation of variability in expected number of children in the fifth model, only the way of solving the household problem demonstrates its impact. This reveals that particularly those who obtained their homes through inheritance expect to have more children at the end of their reproductive life than those who obtained their houses/apartments primarily by purchase. Additional

Table 2. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects with GLM on number of children (F statistics)

	Actual number of children				Expected number of children	
	1 Model	2 Model	3 Model	4 Model	5 Model	6 Model
	< 40 years	> 40 years	< 40 years farm p.	> 40 years farm p.	< 40 years	< 40 years farm p.
Corrected Model	21.034***	5.087***	10.849***	2.685***	2.183***	1.585***
Intercept	39.001***	37.224***	3.204	8.182***	5.650***	61.800***
<b>Structural characteristics</b>						
Urban/rural/farm context	1.087	0.279			0.929	
Household structure	10.349***	14.214***	4.468**	5.542***	1.024	0.612
Marital status	101.384***	6.853***	40.557***	5.286***	0.841	0.397
Labour force status	1.920	0.447	1.586	1.758	1.056	1.478
Respondent's education	2.564	0.310	1.498	1.050	0.002	0.747
Mother's education	0.875	1.370	0.828	1.384	1.036	1.387
Way of solving household problem	1.747	1.598	0.637	1.142	2.441*	1.279
Savings	3.441	2.257	4.955*	0.543	1.850	1.271
Social ties	1.169	7.809**	0.465	2.705	0.003	0.001
Farm size			3.589	2.479		0.683
Subsidy beneficiary			0.734	0.344		4.665*
Secured successor			0.510	1.102		0.178
<b>Cultural characteristics</b>						
Religiosity	0.754	0.025	0.038	0.016	0.343	0.209
Attendance at religious ceremonies	1.238	1.764	0.108	0.473	1.017	0.099
Children's duty to care for parents	0.001	0.096	1.345	0.321	0.104	0.268
Reconciliation of family and work	0.091	4.449*	0.138	0.326	0.481	0.971
Gender equality	0.085	4.065*	0.960	7.257**	0.952	1.288
Partnership relations	0.315	0.348	1.003	0.087	3.853	0.486
Life fulfilment by having children	0.022	1.325	0.005	0.008	0.099	0.399
R Squared	0.801	0.420	0.817	0.511	0.392	0.547
Levene Statistic	0.804	0.708	0.630	1.201	0.869	1.716

\*\*\*  $p < 0,001$  \*\*  $p < 0,050$  \*  $p < 0,100$

Source: Generations and Gender Relationships on Slovenian Farms, 2007.

analysis (not presented here) showed that respondents from different social settings strongly differ among themselves in terms of solving their housing problems. In urban areas, they obtain their houses/apartments primarily by purchase (67 per cent), whereas the majority of rural dwellers built their own homes. A considerable share of the rural population and farmers inherited their homes from their parents. One single factor of importance is also revealed in the farm population in the sixth model. In this case it is shown that farmers subsidy beneficiaries tend to have more children in the future than farmers, subsidy non-receivers.

Thus, the differences in actual and expected number of children among the respondents from different settings found earlier, are primarily the result of variations in their household structure and marital status and much less the result of variations in other included variables. From the point of view of these results, the hypothesis can only partly be confirmed. It is evident that structural characteristics are more important factors explaining differences in fertility behaviour than cultural ones.

### **Conclusions and Discussion**

The results corroborate previous findings based on statistical data that the farm population in Slovenia significantly differs from other populations in terms of fertility behaviour. This difference is mainly related and explained by the structural characteristics of the populations and reflected in the ways in which people live their everyday lives. As analysis has shown, the farm social setting is in many ways different from the urban or even rural. Farm family households are larger, often three-generational, and have greater marital stability than rural or urban families. These characteristics fit the explanation stressing that nowadays farm families still largely maintain the unity of work, consumption and family life (Sieder 1998). In farm families nowadays, as in the past, married couples are required to preserve the farm estate to the extent of generating a living for all household members and continuation of the farm economy. Simultaneously, married couples are expected to care for the elderly members of the household and to provide a successor for the farm (Hennon and Hildenbrand 2005). In this context, for farmers, children are viewed differently than in the case of other occupations – e.g. in different social settings the number of children proceeds from different motivations.

The present analysis revealed that these motivations are rather poorly associated with various attitudes and views relating to family relations. It is

indicated from additional results, but not presented here (Černič Istenič and Knežević Hočevar 2008) that farmers emphasize the duty of the younger generation to care for their older generation more so than other groups in the population. However, considering the attitudes towards gender roles, reconciliation of family and working life and the importance of children for the fulfilment of men's and women's lives, farmers share rather similar views with people living in urban and rural areas. Previous research on attitudes to gender roles and division of care for children among couples from the urban, rural and farm populations (Černič Istenič 2006, 2007) also corroborate these findings. It looks as if the farm population shares similar general views on family relationships with other social groups, most probably due to similar exposure to the influence of the public opinion makers (mass media, education and legislation). But, in actual life they show different life patterns, e.g. in spite of similar availability of services in their environment, farm women are considerably more engaged, in terms of amount of time they sacrifice and in taking over the sole responsibility for the care of their children and elderly family members than women in other occupations living in rural areas. Therefore, considering this evidence, the speculations about conditionality of low fertility level in Slovenia with the decline of family norms and values among its population are doubtful. Besides, in the present survey religiosity does not have an important impact on the number of children, contrary to what was expected.

Thus, it seems most probable that motivations for a higher number of children among the farm population derives from their social context, specific social relations based on the specific nature of ensuring everyday livelihoods, which of course does not exclude specific norms and values. Presumably these norms and values are closely tied to particular demands of survival and maintenance of farm strata and not to the maintenance of the nation as a whole. As a study on the possibilities of reproduction of farm strata in Slovenia revealed (Barbič 1993) farm women and particularly farm men largely select and gain their partners only from the farm population or at least from the rural population, very rarely from the urban one. This indicates rather weak marital mobility and isolation of the farm population; when considering marriage they mostly rely on the members within their own group. This phenomenon is accentuated as the major driving motivation force for high fertility in traditional agrarian societies by Heady (2007). On the basis of the theory of gift exchange (taken over from previous scholars) he claims that parents have children, partly at least, for the sake of the other people in their community – to perpetuate the

system of relationships – and not only due to concerns about their own and their potential offspring's welfare. Following the idea of exchange processes he supposes that the very low fertility in today's Eastern and Central Europe is the consequence of the weakening of the past social relationships, especially kinship ties of dependence, owing to the spread of new patterns of economic cooperation over the old community borders (which also have an impact on the widening of the marriage market) and additionally due to the still deficient consolidation of these new social patterns.

The analysis presented in this paper supports deliberations indicating that in the farm population, especially among subsidy beneficiaries, old patterns of social exchange still exist while in the rural and urban population these patterns of exchange are assuming new forms (favouring more widespread social connections and relationships, and other ways of accumulating social capital) that do not cause high numbers of children. Other studies, from different countries, considering other methodological approaches should verify these particular findings further on.

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