Comments on Mette Gerster’s dissertation

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Questions:
- Is there a positive relationship between education and second-birth rates in DK (as in other countries), when we compare at a given age at first birth?
  – If yes, are these two explanations relevant: better-educated partners, time-squeeze (as suggested in a German study 2002)

Why do we need to address this once again? Different society? Better data/methods?
Paper 1: Education-fertility

• It is controlled for age (at birth). Assume e.g. 30 years old, first child 2 years earlier. Why should the better-educated be in more of a time-squeeze? (If age at first birth not given: the better-educated would have less time to have a second child)
Paper 1: Education-fertility

- Woman high education -> husband high education - > fertility
- How and why does husband’s education affect fertility? (not obvious)
- Woman high education -> chance of being (and remaining) married.
Possible channels that education (and any other factor) may operate through:

- Having a partner, being fecund
- Wanting a child <- purchasing power, costs of childbearing, preferences
- Norms
- Knowledge of (access to) acceptability of contraception, abortion
- (selection effect)
Paper 3: Work-fertility

• The question: How does employment after first birth affect the chance of having a second birth (and similarly for third births)?

• Let us think about: What are the reasons why we may see such an effect, or at least a relationship?
**Paper 3: Work-fertility**

- Work (W=1) signals factors affecting childbearing costs.
- P = Possible to work after birth (access to child care)
  
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<td>M = Motivation for work</td>
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  Would otherwise work, but impossible after birth

* And assume possible to work if not child
Paper 3: Work-fertility

- Work (W=1) signals factors affecting childbearing costs.
- P=Possible to work after birth (access to child care)

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M=Motivation for work

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\end{array}

Would other-wise work, but impossible after birth

* And assume possible to work if not child
So: There is a relationship between work after first birth and subsequent fertility because work signals how having another child may affect later work, and thus the opportunity costs of childbearing.

Kind of circle: effect of X on Y reflects how Y is supposed to affect X.
General values

\[ V \rightarrow \text{Emotional rewards of having children} \]
\[ \rightarrow M \]

\[ F \rightarrow \]
\[ M \rightarrow \]
\[ F \rightarrow \]

- Whether she has a first child
- Work experience
- Whether she has a second child
- Perception of work possibilities
- Actual work possibilities
- Perception of work possibilities

For example, availability of day care centres (A)

The idea behind the simultaneous equation modelling is to pick up factors that are individual-specific and constant and affecting both fertility and work, such as F, M, A (constant?).

What does the effect of W on fertility reflect when these factors are controlled for?
- Access to child care above and beyond the average?
- Effect of additional work experience on the woman’s assessment of her chance of being able to work after having another child?

Why do we want to estimate an effect such a diffuse factor? Is it a factor that politicians can influence?
Conclusion – from a demographer’s perspective

- Papers 1 and 3 could benefit from some further theoretical development.

- But:
  - That is the case also for many papers written by established demographers.
  - The papers are based on quite advanced statistical methods.
  - Very clearly written.
• Mette is obviously a very promising demographer with extremely well developed analytical skills and a strong background in something that is becoming more and more important in demography: statistics.

• NORDIC DEMOGRAPHY NEEDS YOU!