

Bsd

## **Does Community Property Discourage Lone Motherhood?**

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Since the end of the baby-bust, family institutions in the West have undergone radical changes, including large decreases in the proportion of children born in wedlock and a switch from marriage to cohabitation. Children born out-of-wedlock include two very different categories of children: children born to unwed couples whose lives don't differ much from those of children whose parents are married, and children born out-of-couple. Even though fathers are involved in the lives of children born out-of-couple, they tend to be less involved than fathers of children born in-couple, and it is therefore a goal for public policy to encourage mothers to have children in-couple. This requires a better understanding of out-of-couple motherhood. Our goal is to contribute to such understanding by suggesting a link between out-of-couple motherhood and degree of community in laws regulating marital property.

Some view lone motherhood as the outcome of unintended, unplanned behavior, and are quick to point out that lone motherhood is more common among teenagers than among more mature women. Awareness of the irrational forces that influence preferences for two related behaviors at the core of our inquiry--intimacy and childbearing—makes it more difficult to accept that the determinants of lone motherhood can be analyzed from a rational choice perspective.

The bulk of rational choice models of fertility, including economic analyses, examine the determinants of couples' demand for children. In these models the costs and benefits of having a child are compared, these costs and benefits varying as a function of preferences and opportunities. This is part of what economic demographers have called the demand side of the fertility decision. It includes numerous predictions regarding the determinants of fertility, including predicted effects of wage and education (see Willis 1974, Hotz, Klerman and Willis, 1997; TP. Schultz,?; for a summary of predictions and findings).

We follow others in recognizing that single women's decisions that lead to pregnancy are very similar to those of couples: available technologies and the price of supply-side goods or services, such as birth control or fertility treatments, influence the number of children a woman has, regardless of whether her intimate behavior is the result of a rational calculus or is of a more irrational nature (see Akerlof and Yellen, Willis

1999). Our analysis also falls into the tradition of rational choice models analyzing single women's demand for fertility similarly to couples' demand for fertility.

It has been recognized before that in making rational decisions regarding the best nest that they can provide to their future children, single women weight the costs and benefits of two strategies: having a 'child alone' versus having a 'child-in-couple'. In line with this calculus, Randy Albeda (xx) wrote that the more women expect men to be abusive if the 'child-in-couple' strategy is followed, the less women will chose to marry or cohabit with men and the more they are likely to become lone mothers. Formal analyses of the single woman's choice between having a 'child alone' versus having a 'child-in-couple' include e.g. Grossbard-Shechtman 1996, Willis 1999, Akerlof and Yellen, Grossbard-Shechtman, Ekert and Lemennicier 2002, Grossbard-Shechtman and Mincy 2003.<sup>1</sup>

As stated in Grossbard-Shechtman, Ekert and Lemennicier (2002), we think that one factor that can possibly play a role in single women's rational choice between building a nest alone or in couple is the degree of community in marital property. The more single women perceive that the law protects mothers in couple in case the couple ultimately dissolves, the more women who consider becoming financially dependent on men after giving birth are likely to avoid lone motherhood.

We test our model using retrospective data on more than 30,000 women from 12 Western countries, drawn from the the common core of the Family Fertility Surveys (FFS), a project that was coordinated by the Population Activities Unit (PAU) of the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). We compare all divorce regimes to the case that we define as a medium community property regime found in countries where the default official marriage is a marriage involving community property of all assets acquired during the marriage. The countries in our sample that have such regime are Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain. After controlling for a large number of factors likely to influence lone motherhood, we find that women are more likely to become lone mothers where the law considers smaller proportions of a couple's assets as marital property. This is the case in the countries in our sample where common law predominates (the U.S., part of Canada, and New Zealand) and in Austria, where most marriages involve a separation of goods. In contrast, we find that in countries with a high degree of community property, where a couple's common assets typically also include assets obtained before the marriage, women are less likely to become lone mothers than in countries with medium community property. This is the case in the Scandinavian countries included in our sample: Finland, Norway, and Sweden.

Furthermore, we hypothesize that degree of community property will affect women differently depending on other macro-level factors, including timing of legislation legalizing abortions, and a period variable. We interpret the effect of abortion legalization on lone motherhood in light of a public choice argument: countries make abortions legal when popular consensus approves of single women's freedom to choose whether to engage in intimate relations and in what context. Accordingly, it is more likely that women become pregnant after a country passes legislation that legalizes abortions. This interpretation helps explain why in our international sample, women are more likely to become lone mothers after their country legalizes abortions. We find that in low

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<sup>1</sup> Also see Grossbard (1976) for a woman's supply of her willingness to have a child in couple. In that article, I called such a supply 'genetrificial services' provided to men.

community countries, primarily the U.S., the legalization of abortions is less likely to be associated with lone motherhood, possibly a reflection of the more elitist public choice process that led to the legalization (supreme court decision versus politicians' vote).

In the West, generations which came of age after the feminist revolution of the late 1960s have become more accepting of an egalitarian division of labor. Therefore, we interpret a period variable (post 1975) as capturing men's increased willingness to share household tasks with women. Based on this interpretation, we expect that after 1975 women will be more interested in giving birth in couple than prior to 1975. We find lone motherhood to be chosen less frequently if women gave birth after 1975. Such presumed effect of feminist ideology appears to be less frequent in low community countries, primarily the U.S.

We estimate logit models with time-dependent covariates. Our statistical (logit with time varying covariates) analyses control for many personal characteristics, including age, education, work status at one year previous to birth, expectation of divorce, mother's number of siblings, availability of abortion, and religiosity. We also checked for interaction effects. As expected, factors associated with more irrational behavior, such as teenage status and low education, are associated with a higher likelihood of lone motherhood. We find that the effect of a woman's religiosity depends on how prevalent religiosity is in her country: where religiosity is the norm as is the case in the U.S., a woman's religiosity appears to reflect a tendency to be less rational and more religious women are more likely to have children out of couple. In countries where religiosity is rare, as is the case in Scandinavia, a woman's religiosity appears to increase her interest in marriage, and more religious women are less likely to have children out of couple.