

Abstract prepared for European Population Conference 2022

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***“What's best for children? The norm of intensive parenting, its socio-economic determinants and possible consequences for childbearing aspirations”***

Extended abstract:

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**Introduction**

In culture where it is quite common to say that “children are our future”, it is no wonder that family life is increasingly centred around a child. The parents are convinced that their children’s future can be secured with parental investments and sacrifices (Kiełb-Grabarczyk, 2013; Honore, 2011). Additionally, the parents’ social standing can be dependent on their child’s intelligence and achievements, which indicates that a child reflects the effort that the parents put into its upbringing (Wall, 2010; Lejten et al., 2018; Eisenberg et al., 2005; Stormshak et al., 2000; Waller et al., 2014).

This increasing pressure to invest more and more in children is described under the term of “intensive mothering”, first coined by Sharon Hays (1996) and currently re-labelled into “intensive parenting” due to rising involvement of fathers in childcare (Thompson, R., Lee, C., & Adams, 2013; Thompson & Lee, 2011). It refers to growing expectations related to parenting and unrealistic parenting standards. It is in accordance with this norm that parents who want the best for their child have to face a serious financial burden, in terms of direct costs as well as indirectly, due to an increasing conflict between intensive parenting and labour market activities (Lister, 2006; Grönlund & Öun, 2020). Consequently, the rising standards in parenting may have a limiting effect on fertility.

Regardless of the growing interests in the concept, knowledge on determinants and consequences of intensive parenting is still limited. So far, the most research into intensive parenting in the literature has been done in Anglo-Saxon countries and has placed intensive parenting as a norm typical for middle class. In a recent study Gauthier et al. (2021) showed that intensive parenting is not limited to this context. The Authors measured different aspects of intensive parenting in Estonia, UK and Slovenia and showed that respondents with low education show higher support for a child-centred approach than their better educated counterparts. These findings constitute the starting point for our study.

**In our study, we want to examine how socio-economic characteristics are related to the norm of intensive parenting and what consequence the norm has for people’s childbearing aspirations?**

**Data**

We will make use of the CRONOS data (same dataset as used by Gauthier et al., 2021). CRONOS is an on-line panel, carried out as a part of European Social Survey in 2017, in three European countries: Estonia, Great Britain and Slovenia. The survey covered over 1500 male and female respondents, aged 18 and more.

## Analytic approach

We will concentrate on one, central dimension of intensive parenting, as identified by Gauthier et al. (2021): a child-centred approach. This dimension was identified in other studies, too (Liss, Schiffrin, Mackintosh, Miles-McLean, & Erchull, 2013; Loyal, Sutter Dallah, & Rasclé, 2017). In CRONOS, it is measured with six items:

1. Children's needs are more important than parents'
2. Children should be priority for parents
3. \*Parents have a right to their own life
4. \*It is ok if parents aren't always there for their children
5. Parents should always be there for their children
6. Parents should make sure their children's basic needs are met, even at the cost for themselves

The scale covers items that depict children as a centre of parents' attention, but also items that describe parenting as demanding and exhausting (these aspects were considered as a separate dimension in Loyal et al. (2017) and Liss et al. (2013)). Overall, the scale taps into the most central elements of intensive parenting.

First, we will apply regression models to examine how support for the child-centred approach varies by socio-economic status (education and material status). To measure respondents' material situation, a subjective measure will be used ("Is your household able to make ends meet, that is pay your usual expenses?"). In the next step, we will investigate whether the ideal number of children that a person would like to have depends on respondent's support for the child-centred approach, and whether this effect varies by respondent's socio-economic status (moderation effect). In the models, we will control for sex, age, and parity. The analyses will be carried out for the pooled sample, but also for each country separately, to better depict any cross-country differences.

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