

Fertility and Family Policies in Nordic Countries, 1960-2000

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This paper examines the relationship between fertility change and family policies in four Nordic countries during 1960-2000, paying attention to changes in the proximate determinants and socioeconomic factors that are thought to be associated with fertility and family-policy changes. Rapid decline of fertility to below-replacement levels from the mid-1960s to early 1980s in the four countries was due mainly to the delay of childbearing among women under age 25, which was caused in part by women's retreat from marriage, and also by the increasing availability of modern contraceptives and legalization of induced abortion. Socioeconomic factors responsible for the delay of childbearing were dramatic increases in employment among women at peak childbearing ages, which, together with increasing educational attainment, increased women's opportunity costs related to family formation, whereas paid parental leave programs and childcare services were not well developed at that time.

The recovery of fertility to replacement or sub-replacement levels after the mid-1980s was brought about mainly by the catch-up of childbearing among women aged 30-39. Meanwhile, employment of Nordic women at peak reproductive ages continued to increase in the late 1980s and remained high in the 1990s. The compatibility between the fertility recovery and increasing female employment was made possible primarily by the rapid expansion of parental leave schemes with general benefits, together with increasing availability of childcare services. Also contributing to the compatibility was the changing nature of Nordic partnership and family relations as characterized by increasing separation of procreation from marriage and increases in men's participation in household tasks and child care.