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Do Women Working in the Public Sector Have it Easier to Become Mothers in Spain?

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Abstract

Previous studies claim that there are differences in fertility rates among working women that probably indicate varying career-arrangements due to differences in women's opportunity costs of a career break at childbirth by employment sector. Drawing on the Spanish Survey on Fertility and Values (2006), this study analyzes whether and to what extent public employment affects women's reproductive behavior (transition to first birth) in the Spanish context. Findings show that employed women experience higher opportunity costs of entering into motherhood but working women in environments which offer more long-term stability and favor the combination of work and family responsibilities, like public sector jobs, become mothers earlier than self-employed and private sector employees.

Keywords

Fertility, public sector employment, first births, delayed transition to motherhood, Spain, Southern Europe

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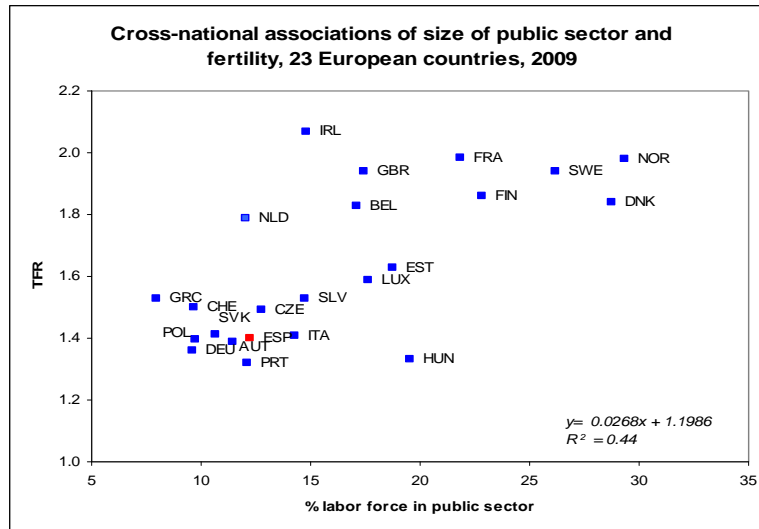
The issue

Over several decades, the increase in women's labour force participation in Western societies went hand in hand with a steady decline in fertility. Empirical macro-level studies have shown that the cross-country correlation between the female labour market participation rate and the total fertility rate was negative before the 1980s. Since the mid-1980s, however, the cross-country correlation has changed sign and become positive (Ahn and Mira 2002). Nowadays, the European countries with higher women's labour force participation rates are also those where fertility is highest. In 2010, for instance, the total fertility rate was 1.38 in Spain and 1.41 in Italy while it reached 1.98 in Sweden, 1.94 in Norway and 2.02 in France. In Nordic countries, childbearing is increasingly delayed, but women –including the highly educated– are able to recuperate postponed fertility later in their thirties, so cohort fertility remains fairly stable. Concurrently, fertility differentials by education attainment have narrowed across cohorts (Rønsen and Skrede 2010). Previous studies also find a positive and strong association between public investment in family policies and women's –especially mothers'– labour force attachment. Family-friendly policies, and particularly the provision of affordable and high quality daycare facilities, are persistently shown to be essential in enhancing the compatibility between work and family responsibilities (Gornik and Meyers 2003).

At the individual level, however, the association between female labour force participation and fertility is usually negative, although there are important variations across cohorts and again across countries (Matysiak and Vignoli 2008). For instance, this relationship tends to be positive in Northern Europe (Andersson 2000), but negative in Southern European countries (Baizán 2005). Some authors argue that the negative effect of women's employment on childbearing is typical in countries with a traditional gender-specific division of labour and weak institutional support for working women (Fagnani 2007). The contemporary fertility *puzzle* –very low fertility in countries with strongly familialistic and Catholic cultures, and relatively low female employment levels– constitutes one of the major challenges for socio-demographic research (Esping-Andersen 2007), and raises important issues concerning the different national models of harmonizing work and family by gender across the life course. Spain and Italy are often portrayed as countries in which women are compelled to choose between a family and a career under a welfare, social and kinship model that heavily relies on women's responsibility for unpaid care work (Cooke 2008).

Research also underlines that in those countries where female employment is high, public sector employment is often an important contributor (Emerek et al. 2001; Mandel and Semyonov 2006) and that fertility tends to be higher in countries with larger public sectors. As shown in Figure 1, in Norway and Sweden both public sector size and fertility levels are among the largest and highest in Europe. By contrast, in Southern Europe very low fertility (1.4 or below) goes together with a comparatively low presence of women in the labour market, especially of mothers of young children, and a relatively small size of the public sector.

Figure 1



Sources: EUROSTAT and OECD (2011), *Government at a Glance 2011*.

On these grounds, prior research suggests that public employment (for its security, stable income prospects, working-hours flexibility and guaranteed maternity-leave conditions) plays an important role in childbearing decisions. One body of work posits that women employed in the public sector tend to have strong preferences for family and children. In other words, some women choose a job in the public sector because they consider it fits their desired life style and life-course orientation better, which comprises both a professional career and having children (Hoem et al. 2006). On the other hand, fertility differentials among women employed in the public and private sector might be attributable to employment conditions in the workplace. Both explanations are better viewed as complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

Most studies on this issue have focused on Nordic countries, so the extent to which employment sector impacts on women’s reproductive behaviour in other contexts is still poorly explored. In this paper, we provide further insight on the social, economic, and institutional determinants of fertility by analyzing the relationship between women’s sector of employment and the transition to first birth in Spain. The second section reviews the theoretical perspectives that focus on the compatibility vs. conflict between work and family responsibilities to understand cross-country and individual differences in fertility behaviour. It also lays out the hypothesis of how public employment may improve women’s chances of combining a professional career with childbearing. The third section provides a brief overview of the demographic and labour market contexts in Spain, and it describes the relative size of the public sector and the profile of its workers. The fourth section describes the data and method used in the analysis. In the fifth section, we present the results of the analysis and provide an answer to the question posed in the title of the chapter: Whether women working in the public sector have it easier to become mothers in Spain. The paper ends with some concluding remarks.

Related literature

Compatibility vs. conflict between work and family responsibilities

Female participation rates in the labour market have increased extraordinarily since the 1970s in all European countries. Also, after centuries of lagging behind, women have not only matched

but surpassed men in higher education. In Spain, the majority of new entrants, students and graduates at the University level are now women (INE 2012). Widespread access to effective contraception, secularization, and changes in values that emphasize individual preferences and female autonomy have been considered key explanatory factors of family change during the last decades (Van de Kaa 1987). However, preferences *per se* cannot explain the observed variation in fertility rates across more developed countries. Postponement of motherhood, a common strategy to balance work and family aspirations, particularly among highly educated women, partly explains the recent decline in fertility across Europe. But the degree of postponement is not uniform across countries, neither is its impact on completed fertility. In Spain, for instance, the percentage of women who have been mothers by age 30 has dramatically decreased across generations –from 70% in the 1957-1960 birth cohort to 49% in the 1965-1968 cohort¹ (Adsera 2005).

Family policies and labour market institutional arrangements vary widely across Europe and they partly explain cross-country differences in postponement patterns and fertility levels (Gustafsson 2001). In fact, differences in how the State and market institutions help to manage the often-competing demands of family and work have become crucial in explaining childbearing decisions, especially in recent decades, when many countries have faced a rapid increase in youth unemployment and economic uncertainty (Blossfeld et al. 2005). High unemployment has been an endemic problem in Southern Europe. In Spain, the unemployment rate averaged 17 percent in the 1980s and 19 percent in the 1990s, it went down to 10 percent during 2000-2007 and it has risen sharply in recent years (18 percent in 2008-2011, reaching 24 percent in 2012), due to the financial and economic crisis (Addabbo et al. 2012). Unemployment has been systematically more acute among women and young people, affecting them at a time in life when they are more inclined to form a family. For instance, 41.8 percent of Spanish women and 41.1 percent of men under age 30 were unemployed in 2010.² Risk of unemployment lowers with education attainment, but even so more than one out of four women with a University degree (28.2 percent) were unemployed in 2010. Almost one-fourth of all women had been unemployed for 12-24 months (23.4 percent) and 19.5 percent for more than two years (INE 2011). Previous studies have shown that labour market insecurity of one or both members of a couple has a particularly strong effect in reducing birth rates in Southern European countries (Baizán 2005).

In Southern Europe, a pronounced *insider-outsider* divide in the labour market has increasingly become the rule, with older workers holding permanent jobs with high dismissal protection and young workers having access only to unstable and poorly protected positions (Häusermann and Schwander 2011). Since the mid-1980s, a series of flexibility-driven labour market reforms have deepened the process of dualization of the Spanish working population. The first labour market reform was implemented in 1984, introducing a series of new temporary contractual modalities in order to stimulate new employment.³ With the help of fiscal incentives, temporary contracts proliferated beyond all government expectations. They somewhat reduced unemployment –but not as much as expected– and they affected mostly women and young people (Adsera 2005; Gutiérrez-Domènech 2008). Subsequent reforms reinforced the increase

¹ Corresponding figures for Italy are as follows: 69% and 45% (based on data from the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) 1994-2000).

² Italy also has exceptionally high unemployment rates among the young: 32.9 percent of Italian women and 27.7 percent of Italian men aged 15-25 were unemployed in 2010 (Istat 2012)

³ Italy pursued the flexibilization of the labour market later in the 1990s.

in temporary workers and the intensification of their temporality (with increasingly shorter-term contracts). As a result, the Spanish labour market has stood out since the early 1990s for having the highest rates of temporary employment of all the OECD countries (Polavieja 2006).

A number of researchers argue that the massive introduction of fixed-term contracts are part of the explanation of the marked fertility postponement observed from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s, particularly among well-educated women with high career prospects (De la Rica and Iza 2005). Income and job insecurity clearly discourage family formation, both in Spain and Italy (Vignoli et al. 2012), in line with the idea that a certain minimum level of stability is required to set up an independent household and that a secure economic basis is an important condition for having children (González and Jurado-Guerrero 2006). This issue is particularly relevant in Spain due to the characteristics of the housing market. Owner-occupied housing is the norm for couples and families, and young couples are expected to have children only after they have managed to settle down in their own homes (Mulder 2006). However, this goal has become hard to achieve because of skyrocketing housing prices and because mortgages are seldom given to those who do not have a good and stable income. The onset of the economic recession in 2007 has exacerbated even further the role of economic uncertainty, job instability and difficult access to mortgages in fertility and family dynamics (Sobotka et al. 2011; Kreyenfeld et al. 2012).

In this scenario, public sector jobs constitute a unique source of tenured jobs in Europe that guarantee stable job prospects after childbirth (Adsera 2005). Generally speaking, the public sector facilitates the compatibility of motherhood and employment with provisions such as granting extended parental leave or reduced working hours while guaranteeing return to full-time work after the end of the early childrearing period (Hoem et al. 2006). Norway and Sweden have long offered a large supply of care and service jobs, confined mostly to women, as part of a policy strategy to benefit two-earner families with children, i.e., to encourage both female participation in the labour market and fertility (Rønsen and Skrede 2010). A wide range of research empirically demonstrates that social welfare policies in Nordic countries have indeed had a positive effect on fertility.

In Southern Europe, welfare policies are relatively underdeveloped, and the family still plays a major role in the provision of welfare (Reher 1998). The large presence of traditional family solidarity and dependency is a characteristic feature of both Spain and Italy's welfare set-ups. "Famialistic" welfare states presume that the family –mainly women as carers– is primarily responsible for the well-being of its members and hence reconciliation policies tend to be in short supply (Esping-Andersen 1999). Some authors have argued that public sector jobs may be particularly attractive in these contexts where proper reconciliation policies are scarce, because of the stability and flexibility they provide (Solera and Bettio in this special issue). We presume that in the Spanish context of very low fertility, insufficient family-friendly policies, high prevalence of temporary employment and limited access to part-time jobs, the issue of protection and reconciliation associated to public employment becomes all the more relevant.

The role of working conditions

The links between women's employment and fertility have generally been examined by focusing on women's labour market status, the impact of part-time versus full-time employment and type of contract (Fahlén and Oláh 2010). However, an increasing number of studies underline that it is not merely paid employment versus non-employment or the number of hours

worked that influence reproductive intentions and behaviour (Begall and Mills 2011). Work schedule and time flexibility, job characteristics such as autonomy, and workplace organizational culture are increasingly considered important factors regarding work-family reconciliation (Drobnič and Guillén Rodríguez 2011). Prior studies have shown that workplace practices in terms of unsocial working hours, overtime shiftwork and flexibility influence workers' work-family compatibility in terms of role conflict (Mills and Täht 2010). The extent to which actual working conditions and workplace organizational cultures may influence childbearing behaviour and birth timing is less studied (Matysiak and Vignoli 2008). A recent study documents that there are significant differences in women's fertility according to their occupation choice and shows that health and teaching professionals have an advantage in harmonizing work and motherhood in Spain (Martín-García 2010). This finding suggests that fertility differentials across occupation categories are linked not only to women's particular attitudes towards motherhood and career but also to working conditions and environment. Furthermore, working conditions and schedule might be particularly important in an institutional context with scarce family policies oriented towards supporting the successful balancing of childrearing and paid work, as is the case of Spain or Italy.

Previous research on the effect of public employment on fertility in Southern Europe

To our knowledge, the impact of working in the public sector on fertility has not been the main focus of any specific research in Southern Europe, but there are several studies that have included employment sector as one of the various labour market variables influencing fertility dynamics. For instance, Esping-Andersen et al. (2002) find that being employed in the public sector raises fertility. Adsera (2005) also shows a connection between public sector employment and faster transitions to births at the aggregate and individual level across 13 European countries. She argues that it is precisely in contexts of high unemployment, such as Spain or Italy since 1985, where public employment accounts for a larger variation in fertility. Delgado et al. (2009) also find that, among working women, a job in the public sector reduces the delay of the first child. However, Baizán (2005), considering both partners' labour force characteristics rather than only those of women, finds that working in the public sector increases the probability of transition to second and third births in Denmark, Italy, the UK and Spain, but the effect is not statistically significant in the last two countries. Cooke (2008) also finds that, in both Italy and Spain, being employed in the public sector does not significantly increase the likelihood of having a second birth.

In the Italian context, Solera and Bettio (2013) document that fertility tends to be higher among well-educated women working in the public sector. However, Bratti et al. (2005) show that Italian women working in different activity sectors do not have significantly different first birth rates, whereas activity sector does influence women's labour participation decisions after childbirth. They find that new mothers who worked in the public sector have a higher probability of being in the labour force after childbearing in comparison to those without a contract or in a large private firm. Solera and Bettio also find that working mothers in the public sector, particularly those better educated, have a lower probability of exiting the labour force because work can be more easily reconciled with motherhood. Gutiérrez-Domènech (2008) also finds positive effects of working in the public sector on the probability of Spanish women's employment after their first birth.

In sum, prior research suggests that organizational culture, regulations, and security provisions vary by employment sector, creating different sets of (dis)incentives for childbearing for working women and different (dis)incentives for mothers to remain in the labour market, and consequently have a bearing on fertility and lifetime employment patterns. However, empirical research on the links between employment sector and the onset of childbearing has led to inconsistent results. Our aim in this article is to test empirically whether and to what extent employment in the public sector facilitates women’s transition to motherhood in Spain.

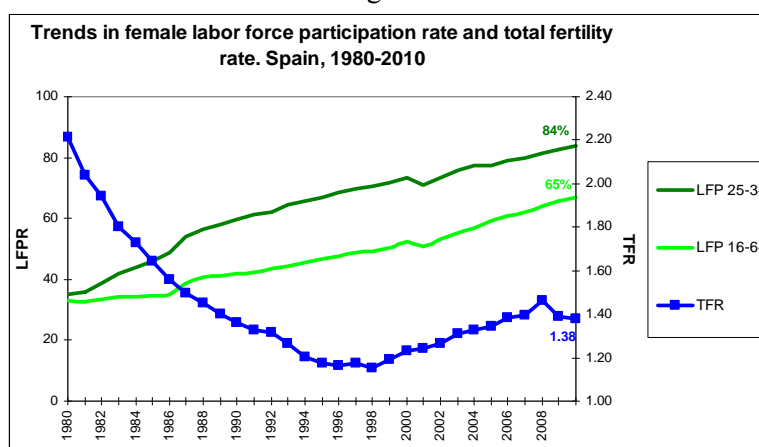
On one hand, public sector employment is expected to improve women’s chances of combining a career with childbearing because of the job stability it provides and lower anticipated costs of childbearing, entailing higher transition rates to first birth. On the other hand, entry into the public sector requires high education credentials and often a long period of preparation before getting a position, resulting in higher ages at entry into employment, which can lead to a later timing of motherhood. Nevertheless, we expect that the favorable environment will weigh more than the late entry into employment and we anticipate *higher transition rates to first birth among women working in the public sector compared to those in the private sector, after controlling for education attainment.*

The Spanish context

The Spanish socio-demographic context

Over the past decades, Spain has witnessed a dramatic increase in women’s labour force participation. From 1980 to 2011, the female labour force participation rate rose from 33 to 68 percent, and among women aged 25-34 the labour force participation rates rose from 35 to 84 percent –above the EU-27 average (77 percent) for this age group–. Spanish younger cohorts of women do not perceive employment as a barrier, but rather as a precondition to childbearing and they tend to postpone childbearing until they achieve a stable position in the labour market. In parallel, there has been a remarkable decline in fertility, from 2.8 in 1975 to 1.15 in 1998 and a moderate increase afterwards –partly due to immigration (Roig and Castro-Martín 2007)–, with the total fertility rate reaching 1.38 in 2010 (Figure 2). Women’s age at first birth has increased from 25 in 1980 to 29.8 in 2010, situating Spain –together with Italy–, among the countries with latest-late age at motherhood.

Figure 2



Source: ILO (International Labor Organization). The Key Indicators of the Labor Market (KILM) <http://kilim.ilo.org/KILMnetBeta/default2.asp> and INE at www.ine.es

Nuptiality patterns have also changed considerably in Spain over the past decades. A steady trend towards fewer and later marriages has been manifest since the early 1980s and in 2010 the mean age at first marriage reached 31 for women and 33.2 for men. Although cohabitation has increased markedly during the last two decades, the age pattern of entry into cohabitation is only slightly younger than that of entry into marriage (Domínguez-Folgueras and Castro-Martín 2008). Consequently, the percentage of women aged 20-34 who have not yet entered their first union is among the highest in Europe: 62.2% according to the 2001 Census (Castro-Martín et al. 2008). Although non-marital fertility is no longer marginal (Castro-Martín 2010) and the proportion of non-marital births has increased from 9.6% in 1990 to 35.5% in 2010, the late pattern of union formation is closely linked to the late pattern of childbearing and the very low fertility levels mentioned above. Despite the extraordinary increase in female education –38% of women aged 25-34 had University studies in 2011,⁴ according to the labour force survey—and the massive entry of women into the labour market, there is a low participation of men in unpaid family work. In fact, the degree of inequality in the gender division of domestic work is one of the highest in Europe (Gauthier et al. 2004).

The Spanish labour market context

As noted before, the Spanish labour market has become increasingly polarized since the mid-1980s, amplifying the gap between *insiders* and *outsiders*. The former are typically male, older workers, with indefinite contracts and solid guarantees in case of unemployment; the latter are typically young, or women, with short-term contracts, low wages, poor prospects of career advancement and very limited safety nets for periods of unemployment (Ferrera 2005). In fact, Spain displays one of the highest prevalence of temporary contracts among young adults in Europe: 34.5 percent among workers below age 40 (vs. 21.2% in the EU-27) in 2011. In contrast, although the share of part-time contracts has increased in the past decade and reached 14 percent of all workers in 2011, it still remains below the EU-27 average (18.8 percent). Part-time work involves mostly women in the service sector with low incomes and poor working conditions. In contrast with the Netherlands or the Nordic countries, part-time employment in Spain is mainly driven by the demand of service industries rather than the desire of women for shorter working hours to accommodate their family roles. In fact, part-timers are often forced to accept non-standard hours of work that make it even more difficult to reconcile work with family and social life.⁵

The generation and gender dimension of the *insider-outsider* cleavage in Southern Europe affects gender equity as well as the willingness and ability to form new families (Cooke 2008). Moreover, the high unemployment rates (above 24% in 2012) make it difficult to reenter the labour market when a woman has temporarily withdrawn after childbirth. In addition, formal

⁴ The corresponding proportion of men aged 25-34 with college education was significantly lower: 29.5 percent.

⁵ In an analysis of Spain, the UK, Ireland and the Netherlands, using data from the European Community Household Panel (ECHP), De la Rica et al. (2002) show that part-time employment has a positive effect on fertility only in those countries where it is widely diffused and voluntarily chosen. With data from the Family and Fertility Survey 1995, Gutiérrez-Domènech (2008) also found that the probability of having a child was similar for part-time and full-time workers in Spain. Spanish women seldom work part-time and if they do, they are affected by the precariousness of this type of employment.

childcare until age 3 is scarce and expensive –only 19 percent of all children aged 0-2 years are cared for in formal arrangements (European Commission 2009).

Given the specific characteristics of the Spanish labour market, which entail substantial constraints for the younger working population in times of increased economic insecurity, the next question that arises is whether public sector employees enjoy more protected positions and better conciliation conditions in comparison with self-employed workers and those in the private sector (Luechinger et al. 2010). Obviously, maternity leave provisions (16 weeks)⁶ are applicable regardless of sector and type of contract in Spain, but many pregnant women in temporary contracts do not have their contracts renewed nor are they offered an indefinite contract in the private sector (De la Rica and Iza 2005). Having a child may be interpreted by the employer as a weakening of commitment to work and lead to a penalty, e.g. not renewing a temporary contract (Baizán 2005). Cooke (2008) found that although take-up of maternity leave in the public sector as of the late 1990s was universal, it was lower among women working in the private sector or with temporary contracts. Each parent also has the legal right to unpaid extended parental leave until three years after childbirth and to reduced working hours, but both women and men are discouraged from taking either, particularly in the private sector, where exposure to the “career break job penalty” is even greater than in the public sector.

The public sector implies a series of advantages that are expected to encourage both fertility and female labour market participation. First, the hiring process is based on education credentials and open, competitive examinations that are gender-blind and not influenced by an individual’s family status or number of children. Second, there is greater employment stability: the proportion of fixed-term contracts in the public sector is lower than in the private sector in spite of the high incidence of temporary employment in Spain –26% in the public vs. 36% in the private in 2010. Third, there is a more adequate enforcement of labour laws such as maternity leave benefits, a guaranteed return to previous employment after unpaid parental leave and the possibility of taking temporary unpaid childcare leaves or career breaks. Four, although part-time jobs are scarce in Spain, many public sector jobs have more convenient work schedules (from 8 am to 3 pm) and the working environment is more understanding of family responsibilities and shows greater tolerance for flexible schedules or non-attendance for taking care of sick children.

In spite of these features that make it easier to combine family and work, the public sector in Spain, as in most advanced societies, also has some disadvantages that must also be taken into account. Apart from the late age at entry that may influence fertility behavior because it interferes with the prime fertility period for females, the public sector generally offers lower salaries than the private sector for highly educated workers and a relatively flat earnings profile, as well as limited opportunities for career advancement. In the remainder of this section, we briefly present some features regarding the size of the public sector and the socio-demographic profile of public sector employees in Spain.

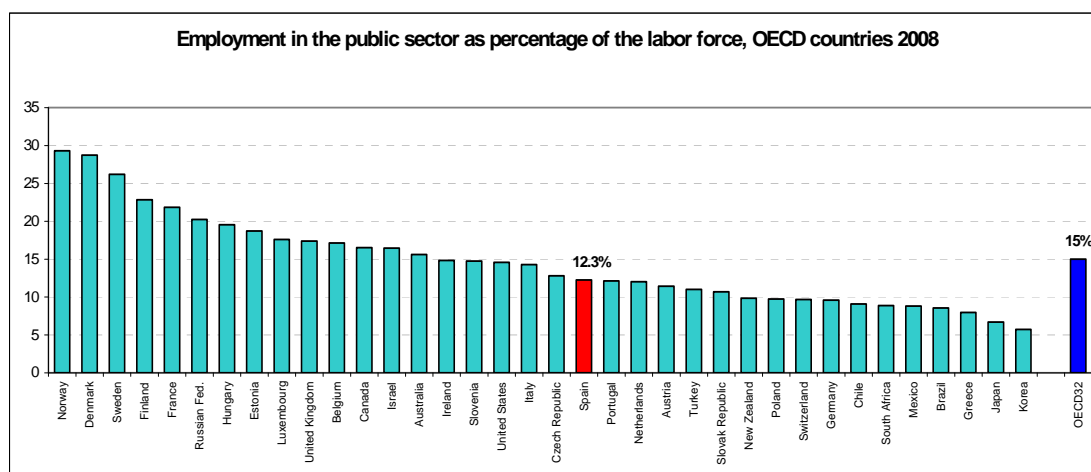
Size of the Spanish public sector: Below OECD average

Public sector employment accounted for about 12.3 percent of total employment in Spain and for 14.3 percent in Italy in 2008 (Figure 3). The share of employment in the public sector in

⁶ For a complete view on maternity/parental leaves in Spain, see Lapuerta 2012.

both countries is slightly below the OECD average (15 percent), but at great distance from that of Norway, Denmark or Sweden (all above 25 percent) or neighbouring France (22 percent). Employment opportunities in the public sector are, hence, in shorter supply in Southern Europe than in Northern Europe.

Figure 3



Note: Public employment includes employment in general government and public corporations.

Source: OECD (2011). Government at a Glance 2011. Available at http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/government-at-a-glance-2011_gov_glance-2011-en

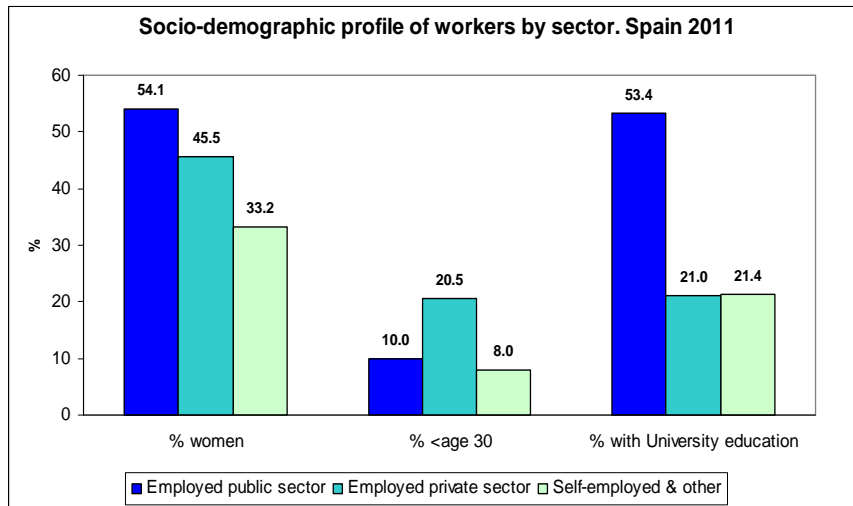
Socio-demographic profile of public sector workers

In Spain, women are also more heavily represented in the public sector than in the economy as a whole, but the level of feminization of the public sector is considerably lower than in other EU countries –54.1 percent of Spanish public sector employees are females compared to 45.5 percent of private sector employees.⁷ Previous research has also shown that employment rates in the so-called women-friendly and female-dominated occupations are lower in Spain than in other societies (Esping-Andersen et al. 2002)⁸. Several authors argue that employment sectors with a high proportion of female employees provide a working environment more conducive to motherhood, higher job flexibility, and more exit and re-entry options (Hoem et al. 2006).

⁷ A recent study documents that in Norway, for instance, women make up about 70 percent of employees in the public sector while men account for 65 percent of employees in the private sector (Rosen and Skrede 2010).

⁸ Research shows that the net odds for women (relative to men) to be employed in female-dominated occupations is lower in Spain than in countries such as Denmark, the UK, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Germany, France or the Netherlands (Mandel and Semyonov 2006).

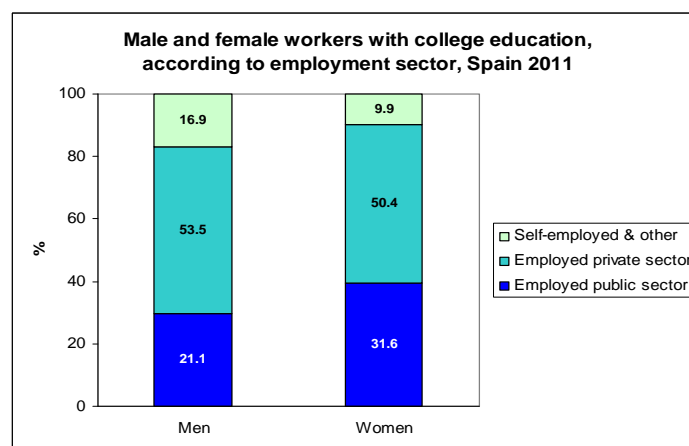
Figure 4



Source: Labor Force Survey 2011 T2

According to the socio-demographic profile of workers by sector in 2011, individuals working in the public sector differ in observable sociodemographic characteristics from individuals working in the private sector (Figure 4). They are, on average, older: only 10 percent of public workers are below age 30 compared to 20.5 percent of private sector employees. They are also better educated: more than half of public workers (53.4 percent) hold a University degree compared to 21 percent of workers in the private sector. Moreover, college-educated women are more likely to opt for a public-sector job than college-educated men: 31.6 percent of all employed women with University studies are in the public sector compared to 21.1 percent of all college educated men (Figure 5). Since both age and education level are important factors influencing women’s reproductive decisions and behaviour, we control for them in the empirical analysis.

Figure 5



Source: Labor Force Survey 2011 T2

The attraction of the public sector to highly-educated women and of the private sector to highly-educated men is a common pattern that has been documented in many countries (Narcy et al.

2008). Most studies point out as explanations the lower wage discrimination in the public sector, a stronger attraction among women for the social objectives pursued by the public sector –and nonprofit sector–, and an organization of working time that allows for greater reconciliation between family and professional life. Yet these elements of voluntary sector selection by women must be weighed against explanations based on the effects of involuntary occupation segregation. Some of the most “female-dominated” occupations, such as teachers, health workers or low-level administrative employees, are more frequent in the public sector, and research has consistently shown that, on average, female-dominated occupations pay less than jobs with a higher proportion of men, even when factors such as education and skill level are taken into account (Mandel and Semyonov 2006; England 2010).

Nonetheless, even if women’s earnings and promotion prospects in the public sector are often lower than in the private sector (Lucifora and Meurs 2006), public sector jobs usually entail other nonpecuniary benefits, such as high employment protection, shorter working hours, flexibility in the workplace or entitlements to “care-days”. The public sector has a long tradition of focusing on working conditions rather than wages, and it is often argued that one of the reasons behind women’s preferences (relative to men) for public sector jobs is to better reconcile the demands of family and professional life. This is particularly so in countries like Spain, where the *long hours culture* and unplanned overtime hours pervade the private sector (Brindusa et al. 2011).

Data, variables and method

The data used are taken from the *Spanish Survey on Fertility, Family and Values*, a retrospective survey conducted in 2006 by the Center for Sociological Research (Delgado 2006). This survey uses a monthly time scale and provides individual-level data on complete reproductive and work histories. Our analytical sample includes only women born after 1950 in order to minimize recall errors and homogenize women’s employment trajectories. The final analytical sample covers a total of 5,271 women aged 18 to 56, regardless of union status. The dependent variable is defined as the time of first birth minus nine months to measure as closely as possible the moment when the decision to have a child was taken and to avoid reverse causation.

The main independent variable in this study is women’s employment status. This time-varying covariate is first categorized into two groups: employed vs. not employed (reference category). In a second step, we distinguish non-working women, those employed in the public sector, those employed in the private sector (ref.), and those self-employed. The category ‘employment’ encompasses full-time and part-time jobs lasting three months or more. The category ‘not employed’ encompasses episodes of unemployment and inactivity.⁹ The great advantage of this employment variable is that it is available on a monthly basis. A disadvantage, however, is that ‘complete’ dated work histories are subject to recall error and bias.

The models applied include age as the baseline. In addition, we include four birth cohorts: 1950-1959 (ref.), 1960-1969, 1970-1979 and 1980-1991, education level, nationality and number of

⁹ The questionnaire distinguishes between ‘unemployment’ and ‘unpaid domestic work’, but since we consider that there is a high degree of ambiguity about the circumstances under which a person calls herself ‘unemployed’ and chooses the category ‘unpaid domestic work’, we decided to pool the two categories together.

siblings. Models also control for women’s partnership status, a time-varying covariate that indicates whether the woman is married or cohabiting vs. not in a coresidential union (ref.). Since most parents-to-be negotiate their fertility and employment decisions at the couple level, we acknowledge the importance of taking into consideration data on women’s partners and their occupations (Matysiak and Vignoli 2008). However, we did not incorporate partners’ covariates into the models because we wanted to include all women, regardless of partnership status.

We model women’s work status as a time-varying process over the life course. The propensity of becoming a mother is modelled as affected by employment status and employment sector, controlling for other relevant variables. We use a piecewise constant hazard model that can be mathematically expressed as follows:

$$\ln h(t) = y(t) + \sum_j a_j x_j + \sum_i \alpha_i w_i(t)$$

where $\ln h$ represents the log-hazard of pregnancy that leads to a live birth; $y(t)$ denotes a piecewise linear spline that captures the duration effect on intensity; $\{x_j\}$ denotes fixed time-invariant covariates; and $\{w_i(t)\}$ are a set of time-varying covariates whose values change at discrete times in the spell and are constant over the time span between those changes (Baizán 2005). Observation begins at age 15 and ends with the conception of the first child or, for right-censored cases, with the date of the interview.

Results

First, we examine the impact of a woman’s education level and employment status on the risk of having a first birth in Model 1. Second, we investigate whether the effect of women’s employment status differs according to employment sector (Model 2). In Model 3, we incorporate partnership status. Results are expressed in *relative risks*, which are the exponentiated values of the coefficients. Relative risks less than 1.00 indicate a reduced risk of transition to first birth whereas relative risks greater than 1.00 indicate an increased risk (Table 1).

(i) Women’s education and employment status

The empirical results corroborate the ‘new home economics’ predictions, i.e., the higher a woman’s education, the higher her opportunities in the labour market and, consequently, the higher the opportunity costs of childbearing. Consistent with previous empirical evidence (Ariza and Ugidos 2002; De la Rica and Iza 2005; Gutiérrez-Domènech 2008; Delgado et al. 2009), we also find a strong negative effect of education on first birth rates. Tempo and incidence cannot be easily disentangled in this model but, generally speaking, the higher the level of education attainment the later the transition to motherhood. The negative effect of education on first birth rates remains strong in Spain, but it is no longer observable in other societies. Recent research shows that in Italy, for instance, better-educated women have a lower probability of having a first birth but this effect is barely significant (Bratti et al. 2005).¹⁰

¹⁰ Women’s labour market participation is rather more important (Bratti et al. 2005).

Model 1 also shows that being employed reduces the probability of having a first birth (0.82***) relative to women who are out of the workforce. This result is consistent with the hypothesized prediction that, in a context of insufficient childcare services, high unemployment rates and unstable work conditions, Spanish women aim at consolidating their work careers before even thinking of forming a family. Previous research has also found that women's employment reduces the likelihood of transition to motherhood in Spain (Gutiérrez-Domènech 2008).

(ii) Women's employment sector

Model 1, which focuses exclusively on women's participation in the labour market, does not fully capture women's working conditions in terms of stability, advancement prospects, or flexibility to combine family and work. In Model 2, non-working women still have higher transition rates to motherhood than salaried women, but the inclusion of employment sector qualifies our previous results. The conflict between family and work roles is not experienced with equal intensity among all employed women. According to Model 2, the decision to have the first child is positively affected by working in the public sector (1.19**) relative to working in the private sector (ref.). Self-employed women have lower transition rates to first birth than women working in the private sector (0.92), but differences are not statistically significant. On these grounds, we can infer that birth postponement –which may lead to forgone fertility– is a common strategy for working women in the private sector and those self-employed to establish a solid foothold in their career track.

Thus, despite the general pattern of delayed childbearing in Spain, a woman working in the public sector has a relative risk 19 percent higher of entering motherhood than a woman working in the private sector. As noted earlier, there is a late age of entry into the public sector, because recruitment is through competitive examinations (*oposiciones*) that often require long preparation. However, women working in the public sector postpone less their transition to first birth than other working women, and they may also be more likely to have a second or third child thanks to more flexible work schedules and better opportunities to combine family and work. This issue will be left for future research, though.

Our findings on the timing of motherhood are consistent with prior research on the links between public sector employment and faster transitions to first births (Adsera 2005). They also support our hypothesis that the non-pecuniary benefits of a public job are particularly relevant to ameliorate the trade-off between family formation and work in a *family-unfriendly* context with high unemployment, low workplace flexibility and scarce childcare services. Public employment probably also has a positive impact on reproductive decisions because of secure income prospects for the present and, perhaps more importantly and decisively, because of a greater feeling of security about the future. In fact, as discussed earlier, the public and private sectors provide dissimilar opportunities to resume work after childbirth.

Finally, two additional issues are observed. First, the variable “partnership status” is included in Model 3. When including the woman's civil status, the above-mentioned positive effect of public employment vanishes. This result poses the question whether women's union status could underestimate the impact of the public sector in the Spanish context where partnership has

such a strong impact on motherhood, because married women or those in a cohabiting couple may bear their first child precisely when they enter public employment.

Second, Solera and Bettio (2013) argue that, more than wages or continuous employment, higher fertility is the differential benefit accruing to better-educated women who work in the public sector in Italy. By contrast, other studies defend that family-friendly working conditions may be especially relevant for low-educated and low-income women's transition to motherhood (Fahlén and Oláh 2010). Highly educated women often hold specialized jobs in which it is more difficult to replace the individual holding the position and have therefore more bargaining power. They also dispose of higher income to externalize childcare. However, no significant effects were found in the particular case of Spain when an education/sector interaction term was included in the analysis.¹¹ The effect of the public sector *per se* on the timing of first birth seems not to vary according to the woman's education attainment. A plausible explanation may be that this effect could turn out to be particularly distinct and significant for the different educated groups in higher birth-orders, not for first birth. In other words, it might better predict the number of births (as alleged for the Italian case) than the timing of entry into motherhood. A late onset of childbearing is characteristic for all women in Spain, including the lesser educated.

(iii) Other covariates

We also include a number of control variables that help to correctly interpret the results: birth cohort, number of siblings, nationality, and partnership status. The effect of these covariates is in the expected direction and in line with previous research. Motherhood represents more of a challenge for the younger generations than for cohorts born in the mid-1950s and 1960s. The younger the birth cohort, the lower the probability of entering into motherhood, indicating women's increasing age at first birth. Growing up in a family with a large number of siblings (3+) influences a woman's decision to start her own family earlier. As documented in the literature, foreign-born women transit faster to motherhood (Roig and Castro-Martín 2007). Lastly, becoming a mother is usually preceded by the decision to form a long-term relationship. In Model 3, we can see that there is certainly a strong interrelationship between the two processes. In fact, 'partnership status' is the most important predictor of the timing of first birth. According to the relative risks shown, most children still occur within a marriage, but marriage is no longer the only appropriate context for procreation, and a considerable number of children are born to cohabiting couples.

Conclusions

With the massive entry of women into the labour force during the 1980s and the 1990s, the difficulty of balancing paid work and family has become a prominent focus in fertility research and public policy debates (Gregory and Milner 2009). However, women's labour force participation does not necessarily lead to lower fertility. The relationship between female employment and fertility is largely conditioned by institutional arrangements, welfare policies, the gender system, the structure of the labour market and the social organization of work. The tensions between family and professional life have received considerable attention also at the European Union level. The European Commission maintains that this tension is partly due to

¹¹ Results not shown here (available upon request).

insufficient flexible working conditions and a lack of childcare services, which contribute to childbirth postponement and low fertility (European Commission 2008).

In a context like Spain, characterized by high unemployment and pervasive temporary contracts among young adults, and where institutional support for working women has traditionally been modest, part-time work rare, and public childcare provision scarce, job stability and workplace flexibility are crucial for reproductive decisions. The impact of women's employment in the public sector on fertility dynamics has been a common object of study in Nordic countries. However, Southern European countries have only recently begun to receive attention in this regard. This study has examined how education and labour market participation affect Spanish women's choices to have a first child. Is being employed a constraint on having children? Can this constraint be reduced if women work in the public sector? Our results are congruent with the hypothesis that work environments that offer long-term stability and favour the conciliation of work and family responsibilities are more conducive to childbearing in Spain. Being employed in the public sector lessens the negative relationship traditionally found between female employment and fertility at the individual level.

That said, we are aware of an important limitation of the analysis, that of potential selection effects. It is possible that a woman's employment career is endogenous with her fertility decisions and ultimate fertility outcomes (Matysiak and Vignoli 2008). It is also plausible that women who expect to have large families, those who are more risk averse, those with a stronger attraction to the social objectives pursued by the public sector, and those who assign higher value to work-family balance than to remuneration or career advancement deliberately choose public sector jobs to collect the benefits of family-friendly working conditions and to avoid the penalty of the private sector (Perry and Hondeghe 2008; Groeneveld et al. 2009).

Nevertheless, a recent study on fertility intentions of Italian women employed in the public and private sectors by Laura Cavalli (2011) provides a counter argument to the self-selection of family-oriented women into the public sector. She finds that, once the selection effect is taken into account and the choice of working sector and the desired fertility are modelled together, the correlation among unobservable women's characteristics affecting the two choices is negative; that is, women who desire more children are less likely to self-select into the public sector. The author argues that this finding could be the result of more productive women's working strategies, i.e., those who are more work oriented (and less family-oriented) tend to enter into the public sector because it is a less gender discriminated sector, with a lower wage gap than the private one (Lassibille 1998; Lucifora and Meurs 2006). Yet once controlling for self-selection, the public sector has a positive effect on the desire for children. This evidence might be the result of a dynamic effect: after entering the public sector and experiencing a family-friendly environment, women can 'update' their fertility preferences, increasing their demand for children. It would be desirable to attempt to tackle these issues in the future using longitudinal data for Spain, which are not available at the time of the present analysis.

Also, all the elements of voluntary selection of employment sector by women according to their preferences must be weighed against explanations based on the effects of ability –public job entry requires high scores in open competitive examinations– and involuntary occupation segregation –there are higher proportions of highly-feminized occupation categories in the public sector than in the private sector (Narcy et al. 2008). In sum, the model of free choice of employment sector is limited by constraints, and family or fertility preferences are not time-invariant.

Some remaining tasks to be explored in future research are as follows: first, it would be desirable to control better for work conditions, taking into account fixed vs. indefinite contracts in the public and in the private sector to ascertain whether the stability dimension or the flexibility dimension are more relevant in the transition to first birth. Second, it remains to be seen to what extent the positive effect of public employment on first birth rates that we found can be extended to second and third births. Since job security and flexibility are important factors for decisions to have a larger family, it seems reasonable to expect an even stronger effect of public employment on the probability of having a second or higher order birth.¹²

We can conclude by emphasizing that working conditions matter for fertility decisions. Despite the dramatic increase in female labour force participation over the past decades, institutional support for working women has remained insufficient, and this now appears to be counter-productive for fertility and female labour supply. The gains in first birth rates that public employment enhances are too limited to increase significantly overall fertility levels in Spain. We cannot discard, though, that the budget cuts currently faced by public organizations and the political plans to downsize the public sector and to curtail public employment opportunities would not produce a further reduction in Spanish women's fertility.¹³

The findings of this study make us also reflect on the polarization of working mothers in Spain. Working conditions in the public sector that entail lower childbearing and childrearing costs due to (a) job protection after childbirth and long-term employment security, and (b) working arrangements and schedules that make it easier (and less costly) to reconcile work and family responsibilities, do imply inequitable opportunities for female public workers vs. self-employed and private employees. Comprehensive and universal reconciliation measures should be guaranteed to all women to facilitate childbearing and encourage life-time employment, especially for the lesser educated. This research underlines the challenge of family policies and labour arrangements to not only support working women if they decide to become mothers but also to protect all mothers' jobs irrespective of employment sector.

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¹² Baizán (2005) does not find a significant effect of the public sector on the transition to the second and third births in Spain.

¹³ Because of the financial and economic crisis, there is currently a freezing of new recruitment in the public sector both in Italy and Spain.

Table 1: Relative risks of having the first birth (conception) according to the woman's labour force status and employment sector

	MODEL 1	MODEL 2	MODEL 3
Parameters	R.R	R.R	R.R
Baseline constant ^a	-4.01***	-4.19***	-4.48***
Age 15–20 (slope)	0.41***	0.41***	0.28***
Age 21–24 (slope)	0.13***	0.13***	-0.06***
Age 25–27 (slope)	0.11***	0.11***	-0.01
Age 28–32 (slope)	0.03**	0.03*	0.01
Age 32+ (slope)	-0.23***	-0.23***	-0.21***
BIRTH COHORTS			
1950 – 1959 [ref.]			
1960 – 1969	0.83***	0.83***	0.85***
1970 – 1979	0.56***	0.56***	0.65***
1980 – 1991	0.34***	0.34***	0.41***
NUMBER OF SIBLINGS			
No siblings	1.01	0.96	1.10
1 – 2 [ref.]			
3 +	1.10***	1.09***	1.09***
NATIONALITY			
Spanish	0.58***	0.58***	0.68***
Foreigner [Ref.]			
EDUCATIONAL LEVEL			
Primary	1.29***	1.30***	1.21***
Lower Secondary [ref.]			
Upper Secondary	0.75***	0.74***	0.76***
University	0.42***	0.41***	0.54***
EMPLOYMENT STATUS			
Employed	0.82***		
Not employed [ref.]			
EMPLOYMENT SECTOR STATUS			
Not employed		1.20***	1.25***
Employed in the Public Sector		1.19**	1.08
Employed in the Private Sector [ref.]			
Self-employed and others		0.92	0.96
PARTNERSHIP STATUS			
Not in union [ref.]			
Cohabiting			7.56***
Married			16.77***
Log Likelihood	-18032.35	-18028.11	-16035.48

Significance levels: ***=p<0.01, **=p<0.05, *=p<0.10.

Time periods from age 15 to 20; from 21 to 24; from 25 to 27; from 28 to 32; and then at open intervals.

^a Estimates.

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