New sub-module on Uncertainties and resilience in the Swedish GGS2020

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Acknowledgements

1. Background and theoretical model

The role of uncertainty in shaping young peoples' lives has been the subject of much literature. For example, Mills and Blossfeld and Mills (2003) have called attention to the role of globalisation, and the related uncertainty, in influencing young people's choices and life trajectories. More recently, Brauner-Otto and Geist (2018) have explored the role of economic uncertainty in influencing fertility intentions. During the last decade, political uncertainties at both national and global levels have becoming increasingly pertinent. In 2020, new global uncertainties in the wake of the Corona pandemic emerged.

A general model is outlined below. It posits that uncertainty can influence fertility negatively (arrow A) for example through concerns about losing one's job, which in turn would make it more difficult to support having a child. (In this context, fertility is used in a broad way to indicate either fertility intention or fertility behaviour.) In turn, the pathway between uncertainty and fertility can be modified by one's resources and personality (arrow B). For instance, the association between the prospect of losing one's job and fertility may be stronger or weaker depending if one is optimistic or not about the future. These same personal characteristics can also influence the perceived uncertainty itself (arrow C).

Figure 1: Uncertainty – fertility model
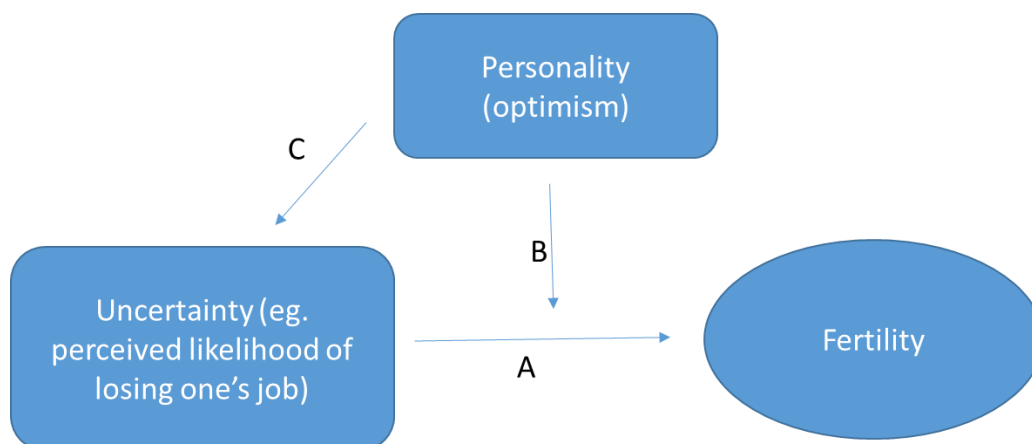
In what follows, we further discuss each of these components and suggest how to measure them in the framework of the GGS2020, including the allocation of new survey items in different modules of the GGS questionnaire.

2. Uncertainty

The literature often distinguishes between the roles of economic and global uncertainties in family-related decision-making and behavior, and between objective (e.g., short-term work contract), and subjective uncertainties (e.g., perceived likelihood of losing one's job).

2.1. Global uncertainty

The last round of GGS had no such measure. A fruitful option is to consider the WEL14SWE risk items listed below. These are interesting since already in the Population Acceptance Survey, a link between such risks and fertility was highlighted (Fokkema and Esveldt 2006).

WEL14SWE: "Thinking about the future, how much does the following worry you?":

- A: Terrorism

- B: Climate change

- C: Overpopulation / population pressure

- D: Economic crisis

- E: Increased number of refugees

- F: High unemployment

- G: Organised crime

- H: Military conflicts

- I: Global epidemics

- J: Weakened democracy

- K: Increased social inequality

- L: Political extremism

- M: Prospects of coming generations

Response options: "Very worrying", "Somewhat worrying"; "Not particularly worrying", "Not at all worrying" (SOM-Institute 2018).

Comment: The SOM institute asked about "Looking at today's situation". However, in relation to fertility intentions, it is preferable to pose the question as more future-oriented, thus the: "Thinking about the future, how much does the following worry you?" (cf. Vignoli et al. 2020).

2.2. Objective economic uncertainty

The GGS currently includes a question about the type of work contract for respondent and partner. It can be argued that having a temporary contract is a form of uncertainty.

There is also a question (INC02) on how much debt one has. This is not uncertainty per se, but having a large debt (for example a student debt) can severely restrict future options.

2.3. Subjective economic uncertainty

The GGS currently includes one question about the perceived likelihood of losing one's job, also for the partner: WRK16a and WRK42a, "*How likely is that you will lose your job in the next 12 months?*"

A question that addresses the resilience towards such uncertainties would cover additional crucial aspects of how such uncertainties matter in relation to family-related behavior (Vignoli et al. 2020). We would thus add a question WRK16b/42b which asks: *If you / your partner would lose your (his/her) job, how likely do you think it is that you (he/she) would find a new job that is at least as good as your (his/her) current one within twelve months?*

The GGS also includes one question about the perception of one's future income (INC12): "*Do you think that your financial situation will get better or worse or will be about the same in three years from now*".

3. Own resources

A general argument is that one's own resources or one's own sense of optimism or trust in institutions can moderate the relationship between uncertainty and fertility. We already have in the survey various questions on income, so here we propose instead a few questions that tap into personal resources in terms of resilience (see also section above) and the ability to cope with uncertainty.

3.1. Personality traits and optimism

One possibility would be to add a series of questions on personality (the Big 5 personality traits). This was in fact something that had been recommended by the GGP Design Study (2009-2012). Theoretically, it is also part of earlier work by Miller on fertility intention (Miller 1992). However, when tested in a three-country pilot in 2018, the GGP team got a very high number of missing values. Moreover, the inclusion of the 15 items obviously adds to the length of the survey. Another alternative would be to use a shorter version of the personality scale that has been suggested by Gosling, Rentfrow and Swann (2003).

A more parsimonious approach would instead be to include one single item on optimism and another single item on risk aversion. This is not part of the Big 5 of personality traits, but the first of them has been shown to strongly correlate with most of them (Sharpe et al. 2011).

> WEL13aSWE: "Optimists are people who look to the future with confidence and who mostly expect good things to happen. How would you describe yourself? How opti-mistic are you in general?"
>
> Response scale: 1 (not at all optimistic) to 5 (very optimistic) (Kemper et al. 2011).
>
> WEL13bSWE: "Would you describe yourself as someone who tries to avoid risk (risk averse) or someone who likes to take chances (a risk taker)?
>
> Response scale: 1 (risk averse) to 5 (risk taker). (Note: Response scale on this question in the GSOEP was from 0 to 10.)

It should be noted that the GGS also includes questions on life satisfaction and on loneliness, which are not personality traits, but may be interpreted as one's perceived outlook on one's own situation, thus which is also bound to be related to perceived uncertainty.

3.2.   Trust in institutions

A further key item to consider is that of trust in institutions. This is not one's own resource per se, but if one believes strongly that the government can help to mitigate situations (such as losing one's job), it can moderate the impact of different aspects of uncertainty on fertility.

We propose an ATT13SWE(a-f): "How much confidence do you have in the way the following institutions and groups do their job?"

- A: The government

- B: The police

- C: Medical services

- D: The civil service

- E: News media

- F: EU

Response options: "Very high trust", "Quite high trust", "Neither high nor low trust", "Quite low trust", "Very low trust" (SOM-Institute 2018).

A further related item is covered in two questions that measure different aspects of generalized trust: The ATT01 is already included in the GGS, ATT01b adds analytical depth and another dimension of trust:

- ATT01: "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?" Response options as in the WVS: Most people can be trusted OR Need to be very careful.
- ATT01b: "Do you think that most people would try to take advantage of you if they get a chance or would they try to be honest or fair?". Response options: Would take advantage OR Would try to be honest and fair.

The questions on trust needs to be balanced by a question on social-media use, similar to the DEM15 on computer use, but with focus on social media and its information channels, i.e., one key dimension on how trust and insecurities increasingly are channeled and maintained.

- DEM15b: "On a typical day, about how many hours do you spend using the internet on social media? With social media we mean, for example, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Youtube or Tinder." (Same response categories as current DEM15: None; 1 hour or less; 1-2 hours; 2-4 hours; More than 4 hours.)

4. Social norms

Although not part of the general model outlined earlier, one can argue that the posited association between uncertainty and fertility is also conditioned by prevailing social norms, i.e., what the society believes are the conditions that should be in place prior to having a child (e.g. a stable job, a house), and what the society believes are good parents (e.g. investing lots of time and money into one's child). The GGS has currently a lot of items on values and attitudes, and it would be difficult to add more.

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