Exploring Cohort- and Country-Variation in the Link Between Social Background and Marital Attitudes: A Study Using ESS Data

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Introduction: Theoretical background

• People from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds differ in their family formation behaviours from people from high SES backgrounds
• Little is known about the possible influence of parental SES on marital attitudes
• In modern contexts, parents may matter less
Introduction: This study

(1) examines the influence of parental SES on marital attitudes,
(2) explores variation across cohorts and across countries and
(3) tests whether this variation can be explained by modernisation theory
Data and method: Variables

Round 3 (2006) of the European Social Survey:

- Marital attitudes (mean score three items, $\alpha = 0.82$)
- Parental SES (standardised mean four items, $\alpha = 0.85$)

Additional variables:

- individual level: age, sex, residential context, own SES, religious denomination, marital status, parenthood, interviewercode, dummy missing, interaction parental SES and age, interaction own SES and age
- national level: HDI 2006, service sector (%)
- cross-level: interaction parental SES and HDI 2006, interaction parental SES and service sector (%)
Data and method: Analytical approach

- Two-level linear regression models
- Meta-analysis and meta-regression
Results: Parental SES and marital attitudes

- Higher parental SES is related to less traditional marital attitudes \((b = 0.054^{***} (0.004))\)
- Part of this effect is mediated by people’s own SES \((b = 0.015^{**} (0.005); b = 0.097^{***}(0.004))\)
Results: Cohort-variation

• Within countries the effect of parental SES on marital attitudes is stronger among older cohorts than among younger cohorts
• The effect of one’s own SES on marital attitudes is weaker among older cohorts than among younger cohorts
Results: Country-variation

- The effect of parental SES differs strongly across countries
- Variation cannot be explained by indicators of countries’ socioeconomic development
Conclusions and discussion

• Parental SES has a significant effect on marital attitudes, partially mediated by people’s own SES
• Substantial variation across cohorts and across countries is found
• Cohort variation is in line with modernisation theory, country variation is not in line

Alternative explanations for country variation:
- Individualisation? No
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