**Do Fertility Goals Provide a Good Approximation of Fertility Patterns?**

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Fertility goals are often considered rather weak predictors of aggregate fertility trends. Since fertility projections frequently rely on birth probabilities by age and parity, it is important to assess how well fertility goals approximate age-specific first and second birth patterns. This study examines the extent to which different measures of fertility goals align with actual birth probabilities and how this alignment varies across countries. Using data from the Human Fertility Database and the Generations and Gender Surveys in several countries in Europe, we assess how fertility intentions and pregnancy attempts relate to birth probabilities by age and parity. Our findings show that the age distribution of women with strong positive short-term fertility intentions closely resembles the shape of age-specific birth probabilities for first and second children, though the size of the gap varies significantly across countries. When intentions are replaced by the more specific measure of "trying to conceive," the gap narrows, but inconsistencies emerge across age groups. We further refine our understanding of these discrepancies, on the edge between wanting and trying to have a child. Fertility goals provide valuable insights, but because they are dynamic and evolve over the life course, refining survey questions is essential to improving demographic projections and policy planning.