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Final Abstract

Highly educated women and reasons to become a mother at different phases of life

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Research issue to be addressed: It is well known that in Finland and other Western countries women with higher education usually postpone their childbearing to higher ages than women with lower education (Nikander 1992, Hobcraft and Kiernan 1995). In previous studies done in Finland we have found out that it is very common that young women want to finish studies before having a baby (Virtala & Virjo 2004, Paajanen 2002). But this is not always so. Some women interrupt their studies and have their baby before they finish their education.

What kinds of reasons for timing of their first time motherhood express mothers who already have obtained a degree in higher education and those who are still studying in tertiary education? Do they for example express reasons related to acquiring a suitable housing or/and a job? Or did they simply had a bad "baby fever" or want to have a baby at young age?

Data and methods to be used: The data comes from Family survey 2005. The mail survey was conducted in February - March 2005. A simple random sample of women (1000 in two different age groups 20-25 years old and 30-35 years old) living in Finland (excluding the Swedish-speaking Province of Åland) was drawn from the population register by the Population Register Center. Women were restricted to those living in a union and having had their first child not more than three years before. With three repeated rounds, the response rate achieved was 70 percent. For this study the sample was restricted only to women studying or having finished tertiary education (820 women) by the time of their first birth. 146 women had been studying and 571 were in the labour force just before the birth of their first child. Logistic regression analysis is the main analytical tool used in this study.

Main results: Those who were still studying reasons like wanting to have a child at young age and the suitable time in their studies were more important. For those who were at labour force more important reasons were having finished studies before a baby and thought that they had spent enough free youth. Those women who had their first child while studying were younger, lived more often in rented flat, were studying in university than in polytechnics, had lower income and their partner was more often also studying than in labour force compared to those women who were in the labour force before the first birth.