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Title of presentation: The quality of the partner relationship and fertility

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Abstract:

Partnership, marriage and reproduction are not inextricably bound up with each other anymore. The aim of this paper is to contribute to the explanation of fertility behaviour by examining to which extent the influence of the perceived quality and stability of the partner relationship adds to known explanations of fertility behaviour, such as religious adherence and educational attainment. Besides the demographic dimensions of the relationship, such as relationship duration and relationship status (cohabitation, marriage), we include interactive dimension such as separation tendency, emotional support, communication style and agreement on important issues. Two contradictory hypotheses on the influence of partner relationship quality on fertility can be formulated. On the one hand a positive effect can be expected. As parents face much higher costs of ending their marriage or relationship than childless couples do, people may prefer to have children in stable relationships only. This hypothesis is supported by Lillard and Waite's (1993) finding that the risk of marital disruption faced by a married woman has a negative effect on the likelihood of childbearing. However, Lillard and Waite did not use a direct measure of the perceived risk of marital disruption. On the other hand, Friedman et al's (1994) theory of the value of children assumes that spouses pursue enhancement of their marital solidarity, to counteract uncertainty regarding their marriage, by having children. This implies that the risk of divorce increases

the likelihood of having children. An additional question is whether the quality of the relationship influences fertility behaviour by influencing fertility preferences or by influencing the realization of these preferences. We answer our questions by conducting hazard analyses using data from the Panel Study of Social Integration in the Netherlands, which includes 5 waves and spans 13 years.

References:

- Friedman, D., M. Hechter & S. Kanazawa (1994). A theory of the value of children.
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- Lillard, L.A. & J. Waite (1993). A joint model of marital childbearing and marital disruption.
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