

Family Size and Subjective Wellbeing in Europe: Do More Children Make Us (Un)Happy?

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Abstract

We use the 2013 wave of the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions to identify the relationship between family size and parental subjective wellbeing. We find significant cross-country and between genders differences. Using multiple births as the source of exogenous variation in the number of children we show that fathers' wellbeing is negatively affected by the unexpected increase in family size all across Europe. This effect prevails till children's teens in Eastern Europe, while it disappears or turns into a positive effect as children get older in other European regions. For mothers we observe relatively stable results over children ages with large variation across Europe – increase in family size decreases mothers' wellbeing in Eastern and Southern Europe, while it increases mothers' wellbeing in Central and Northern Europe. Using sibling sex composition as the source of exogenous variation in the number of children we find less precise but qualitatively similar results. The negative relationship between family size and parental wellbeing is mainly observed in countries with low fertility.