Correspondence Between Intention to Avoid Childbearing and Subsequent Fertility

Table 4. Coefficients of logistic regression analysis and odds ratios predicting births between 1988 and 1990 to respondents who in 1988 wanted to avoid all future childbearing (N=898)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Model 1 Coefficient</th>
<th>Odds ratio</th>
<th>Model 2 Coefficient</th>
<th>Odds ratio</th>
<th>Model 3 Coefficient</th>
<th>Odds ratio</th>
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<td>Race</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (ref)</td>
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<td>1.11</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>1.11</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<td>−0.62</td>
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<td>Age</td>
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<tr>
<td>15–19</td>
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<td>1.13</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>na</td>
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<td>30–34</td>
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<td>−0.43</td>
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<tr>
<td>≥35</td>
<td>−0.82***</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>−0.94***</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>−1.10***</td>
<td>0.33</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;100%</td>
<td>1.09**</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>1.07**</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>1.09**</td>
<td>2.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1.03</td>
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<td>0.63</td>
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<tr>
<td>&lt;high school</td>
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<td>1.12</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>1.07</td>
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<td>&gt;high school</td>
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<td>1.22</td>
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<td>Working full-time</td>
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<td>0.28</td>
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<td>Working part-time</td>
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<td>0.91</td>
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<td>0.55</td>
<td>1.73</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<td>Never-married</td>
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<td>−0.45</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>−0.45</td>
<td>0.64</td>
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<td>Cohabiting</td>
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<td>0.78</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>2.17</td>
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<td>0.46</td>
<td>−0.80</td>
<td>0.45</td>
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<td>0.45</td>
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<td>Got married</td>
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<td>0.78</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>na</td>
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<td>Union dissolved</td>
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<td>0.55</td>
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<tr>
<td>Certainty of intention</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Very sure (ref)</td>
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<td>na</td>
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<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using less-effective method</td>
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<td>na</td>
<td>0.68*</td>
<td>1.97</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not using, at risk</td>
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<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>1.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not using, at risk</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>1.19**</td>
<td>3.28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
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<td>−2.60***</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>−2.85***</td>
<td>na</td>
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<tr>
<td>X2 (df)</td>
<td>47.5*** (17)</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>43.8*** (14)</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>58.2*** (19)</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p <.05. **p <.01. ***p <.001. Notes: ref=reference category. na=not applicable.

ried women might be relatively more likely than never-married women to underreport births as mistimed. If only the second condition were true, we could conclude that those same groups of women were particularly likely to experience a situational change that made childbearing more desirable in the interval than it had been at the time of the first interview (and that they were able to become pregnant within the short time frame between the two surveys).

The literature we reviewed suggests that a comparison between stated intentions and subsequent fertility behavior should focus on the social and demographic characteristics of the respondents, as well as on changing circumstances in their lives and the certainty of their intentions to avoid a birth. Past research implies that consistency between intention and behavior would be greatest when the intention was one of some certainty and when major changes had not occurred in the person’s life to bring about a change in attitude.

We were able to analyze data that begin to assess both of these factors, although our measures clearly do not capture all of the necessary information about the context in which fertility decisions are made (or not made). The failure of attitude certainty to contribute more to our analysis may suggest that it is more subject to change upon reflection or under evolving circumstances than has been thought. An assessment of fertility at progressively longer durations, in addition to the two-year interval, might also improve the test of the importance of certainty of intentions.

As we have noted, we also had hoped to examine a number of changes in the respondents’ life circumstances that might have altered their attitudes toward near-term childbearing (such as household income, marital status, labor force participation and schooling). If respondents experienced a change in circumstances that made childbearing in the time frame desirable or at least acceptable, we expected that some women’s attitudes toward pregnancy avoidance might genuinely have changed during the interval. Unfortunately, with the exception of marital status, the NSFG data lack the level of detail that would establish temporal ordering of births and such status changes in the interval. We were therefore limited to looking at changes in marital status, obviously a potentially important determinant for fertility phenomena. Surprisingly, we found no effect of certainty of intentions or change in marital status on the odds of experiencing an unpredicted birth.

Despite the limitations of the data, this analysis updates our knowledge of the linkages between intentions to avoid childbearing and subsequent fertility behavior in the near term in the United States. In so doing, it should contribute to ongoing attempts at improving data quality. Future prospective studies that allow for analysis of larger samples of unpredicted births with more detailed information about sequences of events, and perhaps with data allowing multi-item constructs on attitudes, will help answer some of the questions raised here.

References