

Educational Gradient in the Occurrence of Repeat Abortion in Finland in 1975-2010

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INTRODUCTION

- The proportion of repeat induced abortions among all abortions has increased in the last three decades from approximately 30% to 40% in Finland.
- This study examines whether this increase was evenly distributed across educational groups and whether time since last abortion, family size, or age were associated with the likelihood of repeat abortion.
- Such information may help create interventions aimed at avoiding repeat unintended pregnancy.
- Cross-sectional studies have identified a positive association between low education and repeat abortion in the US, UK and Sweden, but not in Denmark.
- Longitudinal studies using Finnish register data following women up to eight years, associated low socioeconomic position with increased likelihood of repeat abortion.
- This study uses a more reliable dataset than most studies and follows women over a longer period of time than any other study.

FINNISH CONTEXT

- Finland provides access to family planning services in all municipalities, and financial and other help to families.
- Women have to pay for contraceptives.
- Liberal abortion legislation (since 1970) and attitudes in Finland.
- Abortion rate is lower than in most European countries and the US.

RESULTS (1)

Table 1

Probability of having at least one, two or three abortions within the study period and abortion progression ratios by cohort and education, %.

		Education (%)		
		Low	Middle	High
Cohort 1955-59	Ever had an abortion	32	28	15
	Ever had two	8	6	2
	Ever had three	2	1	0.3
	Progression to 2nd abortion	24	21	15
	Progression to 3rd abortion	27	23	15
Cohort 1965-69	Ever had an abortion	45	30	14
	Ever had two	17	7	2
	Ever had three	7	2	0.4
	Progression to 2nd abortion	38	24	12
	Progression to 3rd abortion	40	29	19
Cohort 1975-79	Ever had an abortion	31	23	9
	Ever had two	12	5	1
	Ever had three	5	2	0.2
	Progression to 2nd abortion	38	25	15
	Progression to 3rd abortion	39	27	19

- Overall 22, 23 and 15 percent of all women ever had an abortion in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s cohorts respectively.
- Overall 5, 6 and 4 percent of all women ever had at least two abortions in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s cohorts respectively.

DATA AND METHODS

- Unique nationally representative data on female birth cohorts (1955-1959, 1965-1969 and 1975-1979) from administrative registers (N=274,908).
- Here women were followed ages 20-45 or until 2010.
- Analysed using descriptive statistics, and discrete-time event-history models illustrated with fitted probabilities.

RESULTS (2)

Figure 1

Fitted probability of repeat abortion since previous abortion by low, middle and high education with 95% CIs.

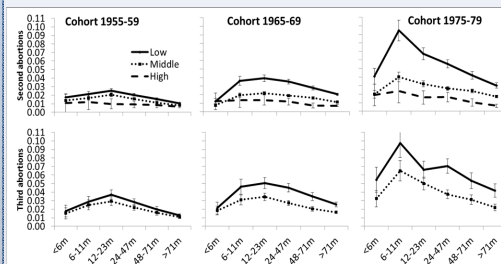


Figure 2

Fitted probability of repeat abortion and parity by low, middle and high education with 95% CIs.

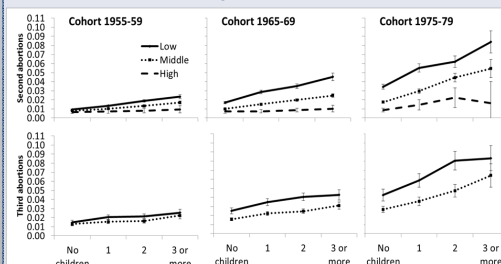
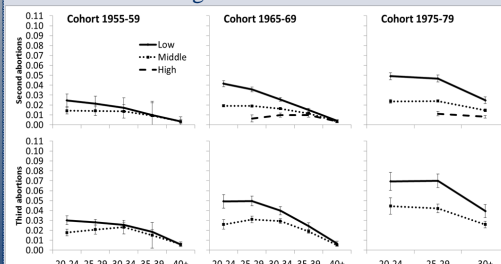


Figure 3

Fitted probability of repeat abortion by age by low, middle and high education with 95% CIs.



Notes for all figures: High education combined with middle education for third abortions in all Figures and in cohort 1955-59 in Figure 3 due to a small number of women with high education having abortions. The underlying model included time since previous abortion, education, parity, age and place of residence, immigration status and union status.

DISCUSSION

- Likelihood of repeat abortion was negatively associated with educational level and these differences increased for later cohorts.
- Probability of having a subsequent abortion did not vary much between second and third abortions.
- Women with low education had a high risk of repeat abortion, in particular soon after previous abortion, if they had high parity or were young.
- Highly educated women had few repeat abortions regardless of their socio-demographic characteristics.
- Low educated women may lack knowledge of, or suffer from unequal access to family planning services, but new studies should confirm the mechanism.
- Distributing contraceptives for free may reduce these educational differences.
- Equal access to family planning services should be ensured for all women despite their socioeconomic position.
- Since women in the 1970s cohort were only in their early 30s at the end of the study, cohort comparisons should be interpreted carefully.

CONTACT

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