

Do Advances in Development Reverse Fertility Declines? Updated Analyses of the Fertility Reversal by Age, Gender Equality, and Components of Development

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Abstract

A recent paper “Advances in Development Reverse Fertility Declines” argued that a fundamental change in the fertility—development relationship has occurred so that while development continues to promote fertility declines at low and medium levels of development, at advanced development levels further development can reverse the declining trend in fertility. We expand and update the analyses to most recent data. In particular, we analyze which components of development are driving the reversal; consider the age pattern of the reversal; study the role of gender equality in the reversal; and discuss conceptual and methodological concerns raised by some commentators. The expanded analyses show that the reversal is fully driven by increasing fertility at ages above 30, and that the key components of development – economic, political, knowledge, and health – are all contributing to the reversal. Our results, however, suggest that the impact of development on fertility is not universally positive, but is conditional on gender equality: countries which rank high in health, wealth, and education but low in gender equality continue to experience fertility declines. These results add and enrich the evidence that increases in development are an important driving factor of fertility reversals in developed countries.

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