

Empowerment in an Unequal World: Fertility Decline and Women's Economic Empowerment among African South Africans

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Fertility decline from a TFR of 6.8 to 3.0 among African South Africans occurred largely under an oppressive political regime. Family sizes were declining as women "postponed" their childbearing through unstable political conditions. Nonetheless, the resulting declines may have held important implications for women's lives. We ask: have increasingly lower levels of fertility provided African women an opportunity to improve their human and economic capital? We also account for the socio-economic conditions and rising economic inequality among African South Africans which has resulted in pockets of geographically and socially excluded households and communities.

We first provide a contextually situated description of African fertility, women's economic empowerment, and economic inequality over time. We then draw on the 1996 South African Census and the 2007 Community Survey to examine whether lagged community-level fertility predicts a woman's economic empowerment, including her schooling attainment, labor force participation, and skilled work over time. We explore whether and to what extent household and community wealth modify these associations. We expect that the association between community-level fertility and a woman's economic empowerment will strengthen over time and that poverty, operating through social exclusion, will limit the benefits of fertility decline to poorer women.