

A Macro-level Exploration of the Links between Fertility Decline and Gender Equality

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the hypothesis that fertility decline fosters changes in gender equality by investigating macro-level patterns of fertility decline relative to changes in the labor and education sectors using national-level time-series data from approximately 30 low- and middle-income countries. We examine the temporal ordering of changes in women's labor force participation and fertility, overall and for women ages 25-34, as well as the relative labor force dynamics of men and women to determine if fertility decline preceded changes in these domains and whether the dynamics of the gender gap suggest changing opportunity structures for women. We then examine trends in women's and men's educational attainment relative to aggregate fertility decline, focusing on secondary and tertiary education to reflect shifts in the level of schooling most likely to empower women and representing significant parental and societal investments in women and girls. We find that gaps between men's and women's labor force participation and post-primary education narrowed following declines in aggregate fertility, and sometimes concurrently. Thus the analysis lends qualified support for the hypothesis that fertility decline fosters shifts in the gender dynamics of two key domains.