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No. 4, 2007

Amin, Sajeda, John B. Casterline, and Laura Spess. "Poverty and fertility: Evidence and agenda," *Poverty, Gender, and Youth Working Paper* no. 4. New York: Population Council. ([PDF](#))

ABSTRACT

This paper explores how poverty affects childbearing patterns in the contemporary developing world. In considering the association between poverty and fertility, we explore one measure of economic status, household asset holdings, in Demographic and Health Surveys conducted in 51 countries since 1990. The results show that the association between poverty and fertility differs according to the measure of fertility considered. We conclude there is much to be gained from distinguishing between the impact of poverty on fertility aspirations and the implementation of those aspirations. Differentials in fertility aspirations are less common and smaller in magnitude than differentials in the implementation of aspirations. Fertility aspirations reflect strategizing about fertility that is embedded in broader strategizing about the future well-being of individuals and households. For multiple reasons, this strategizing need not result in a sharp and monotonic association between fertility aspirations and household economic status. In exploring the literature on poverty, we find a growing interest in the role of social capital and how it contributes to the maintenance or attenuation of poverty. The poverty literature could benefit from the considerable body of work on fertility that has articulated a central role of social capital. Moreover, our understanding of the association between poverty and fertility would be strengthened by more attention to the role of social capital.



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