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Fertility and education in Poland during state socialism

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Abstract

Background: Studies on fertility in Poland focus on the turbulent transition period and its consequences. However, during state socialism significant societal and demographic changes took place.

Objective: This article studies the macro-level relationship between education and completed fertility of Polish women born between 1930 and 1959, and tries to assess how changes in women's educational structure affected fertility.

Methods: Using data from the large-scale Fertility Survey 2002 that accompanied the Polish population census, I first look into fertility trends by education and five-year cohorts. Then, by applying Cho's and Retherford's decomposition analysis and direct standardisation, I assess the role of women's educational expansion in fertility changes.

Results: Despite profound structural changes and the ruling egalitarian ideology, the educational gradient in completed fertility remained strongly negative in all analysed cohorts. The observed decline in completed fertility from 2.51 in the 1930-34 cohort to 2.22 in the 1955-59 cohort can be explained by the expansion of female education. Had the educational structure not changed, the completed fertility of the youngest cohort would have been slightly higher than that of the oldest cohort.

Conclusions: Under state socialism in Poland, better-educated women had on average fewer children than the less educated. The expansion of female education played an important role in fertility decline.

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