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## Recent fertility decline in Eritrea Is it a conflict-led transition?

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### Abstract

During a period of military conflict towards the end of the 1990s, Eritrea experienced a remarkable decline in fertility. This decline has been a concern to many Eritreans. An important issue of concern has been whether the decline is driven primarily by the recent border conflict with Ethiopia or by changes in other factors including delay in age at marriage, improvements in child survival and the socio-cultural changes that pre-dated the conflict. Using retrospective event histories from the 1995 and 2002 Eritrea Demographic and Health Surveys (EDHS), this study provides an in-depth exploration of recent fertility change in Eritrea. The findings illustrate that although marriage delay might have played a role in the decline of first births, a decline in fertility within marriage – partly due to cessation of childbearing after families reach their desired family size – is the major contributor to the overall decline. Even though we cannot conclude that the overall fertility decline primarily is the outcome of the conflict, there is evidence that it has contributed substantially to the decline, particularly for first birth fertility. The implications of these findings for theories about fertility change in times of military conflict is that crises may not be likely to initiate a sustainable overall fertility transition, but can still prompt short-term fertility changes among certain social groups or modify an ongoing decline.

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