

Egypt's birth rate dramatically rises

October 27 2014, by Merrit Kennedy



In this Tuesday, Oct. 15, 2013 file photo, an Egyptian woman prays while holding her daughter in a street on the first day of Eid al-Ahda in Cairo, Egypt. Egypt's fertility rate, which has been falling since at least 1980, has risen dramatically in the last six years, said survey results released to The Associated Press, Monday, Oct. 27, 2014. The survey, conducted jointly with Egypt's Ministry of Health and Population and a U.S. Agency for International Development-funded organization, said the number of births per woman has increased from 3 to 3.5 since 2008. The news raises serious economic concerns for the Arab world's most populous country, whose economy has been staggering since its 2011 revolt. (AP Photo/Manu Brabo, File)

Egypt's fertility rate, which has been falling since at least 1980, has risen dramatically in the last six years, according to the results of a new survey released Monday to The Associated Press.

The news raises serious economic concerns for the Arab world's most populous country, whose economy has been staggering since its 2011 revolt.

The survey, conducted jointly with Egypt's Ministry of Health and Population and a U.S. Agency for International Development-funded organization, said the number of births per woman has increased from 3 to 3.5 since 2008. Egypt's fertility rate had been steadily decreasing since at least 1980, when the survey began.

"It's a stunning result," said John Casterline, a professor at the Ohio State University who focuses on [fertility rates](#). Casterline said it is extremely unusual for a country's fertility rate to suddenly increase after decreasing for years.

Researchers say the reasons behind the striking uptick are largely unclear.

"It's probably related to female education and labor participation," said Samer Atallah, an economics professor at the American University in Cairo. He said that there has not been a substantial increase in female labor participation during this past period.

The survey also showed a small, 2 percent decrease in the use of contraceptives, including both modern and traditional methods. The [survey](#) said 3 percent fewer women obtain contraceptives from public health facilities compared to 2008.

The primary effect, Casterline said, is that "this keeps the Egyptian

population young." The challenge will be putting young people through school and eventually creating jobs in an already-stretched labor market with high unemployment, he said.

"The births today, they have consequences for decades," he added.

Atallah agreed.

"Given that we do not invest substantially in education, given that we do not invest substantially in health care systems or facilities, it's going to be a very difficult task to turn this fertility rate around to something positive," Atallah said.

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Citation: Egypt's birth rate dramatically rises (2014, October 27) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-10-apnewsbreak-egypt-birth.html>

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