

Study shows sharp rise in teenage childbearing during Iraq War

December 12 2014

The nine-year Iraq War led to a sharp rise in teenage childbearing, according to new research published today (12 December) by the London School of Economics and Political Science.

A study by LSE's Valeria Cetoirelli, a PhD candidate in demography, shows that teenage fertility in Iraq rose by more than 30 per cent between 2003 and 2010 due to increased early marriage among less-educated girls.

The doctoral student analysed retrospective birth history data from two Iraq Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys. The findings, published in the December 2014 issue of *Population and Development Review*, represent the first detailed account of recent fertility trends in Iraq.

She found that from 1997 to 2003, teenage fertility in Iraq was stable at just below 70 births per 1,000 girls aged 15–19. However, soon after the beginning of the war, teenage fertility rose sharply, reaching over 95 births per 1,000 girls in 2010.

"During the war, women who would have married later in life instead married at much younger ages, possibly because of post-2003 insecurity," Cetoirelli said.

"The actual and perceived dangers of harassment and physical harm, combined with the resurgence of sectarian, tribal and other conservative forces, prevented many women from participating in public life or even

leaving their homes without a male escort."

Cetorelli said many girls may have been induced to marry early by a lack of alternatives and families may have considered early marriage the best way to protect their daughters and the family honour.

"This trend is worrisome because married teenagers have lower status in the home and may be at higher risk of domestic violence. Teenage childbearing is also linked to higher risk of maternal deaths and poorer health outcomes for children."

Cetorelli's study shows these negative effects may be magnified by the fact that early marriages occur mainly among girls with no education or only primary schooling. Iraqi women with secondary or higher education are far less likely to marry at a young age.

"These findings have implications for policymakers and civil society organisations. More strategies are needed to expand [girls'](#) access to secondary education and restore an overall sense of security in their daily lives," Cetorelli added.

Provided by London School of Economics

Citation: Study shows sharp rise in teenage childbearing during Iraq War (2014, December 12) retrieved 18 April 2024 from

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