

Fertility in England and Wales at lowest recorded level for women in all education groups

June 8 2023



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Fertility in England and Wales fell to its lowest recorded level between 2010-20—for women across all educational groups—according to a new study today in *Population Studies*, from John Ermisch Emeritus Professor from Oxford's Leverhulme Centre for Demographic Science.

The total fertility rate fell from 1.94 in 2010 to 1.55 in 2021, according to data from the Office of National Statistics birth registration statistics. This trend is common in European countries.

But Professor Ermisch also takes account of data from UK Household Longitudinal Study Understanding Society. The study states, "The substantial recent decline in period fertility was experienced irrespective of education group."

Professor Ermisch says, "Previous research has shown education is an important indication of a woman's fertility. While other studies have investigated differences by a woman's education, this study is the first to combine both parents' education and a woman's own education. This helps differentiate fertility further than either generation's education in isolation."

According to the study, all [women](#) had fewer [children](#) and did so later in life than in previous decades, "The analysis finds a substantial decline in each education group, defined either by women's parents' education alone or by a woman's own education relative to her parents' education."

Professor Ermisch says, "This study goes beyond country trends to better understand the recent decline in fertility and offers researchers a method for checking the representativeness of survey data on fertility. It also opens possibilities for replicating the study in countries with intergenerational register data such as the Nordic region."

According to the study, "Upwardly mobile women in educational terms delay their childbearing much more than downwardly mobile ones."

But, although less educated women, whose parents also had low education, had their children younger, than those with more educated parents, the study shows women are having children later across all

educational groups.

The total fertility rate of women for whom both they and their parents had low education (not beyond [secondary school](#) for parents and below tertiary education for children) dropped the most—from over two children per woman between 2010-12 to under two between 2017-20. Women who had high education levels alongside their parents also dropped from 1.8 to 1.4 children per woman over the same period.

The paper concludes, "The substantial recent decline in period fertility was experienced irrespective of education group, defined either by education of the woman's parents alone or by a woman's own education relative to her parents' [education](#)."

More information: John Ermisch, The recent decline in period fertility in England and Wales: Differences associated with family background and intergenerational educational mobility, *Population Studies* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/00324728.2023.2215224](https://doi.org/10.1080/00324728.2023.2215224)

Provided by University of Oxford

Citation: Fertility in England and Wales at lowest recorded level for women in all education groups (2023, June 8) retrieved 23 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-06-fertility-england-wales-lowest-women.html>

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