

Fertility Decline and Marital Gender Relations in Egypt

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This paper investigates how declines in fertility during the past several decades have influenced changes in spousal gaps in age and education in Egypt. We also explore the implications of these shifts for marital gender relations. Because fertility decline is typically associated with increasing parental investments in children and increasing companionate marriage, declines in fertility may have fostered shifts in the mate selection process, making spouses more likely to be of comparable age and education. As spousal gaps in age and schooling are important predictors of spousal relations and women's empowerment in many contexts, such shifts may change the nature of the relationship between husbands and wives, and may portend broader shifts in societal gender relations.

The paper first examines associations between meso-level changes in the fertility regime and cohort changes in spousal age and education gaps using several waves of Egyptian survey data spanning 1988 to 2008. We then use supplemental analyses and anthropological evidence to understand what these shifts might mean for marital relations, and for broader shifts in gender relations at the societal level. This cohort analysis of repeated representative surveys, together with contextual data and insights from existing scholarship on Egypt, offer insights into the gender implications of demographic change.