

# Family planning: Federal program reduced births to poor women by nearly 30 percent

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Federal family planning programs reduced childbearing among poor women by as much as 29 percent, according to a new University of Michigan study.

The work by U-M economist Martha Bailey is the first known study to assess the short- and long-term effects on U.S. [fertility rates](#) of early federal [family planning](#) programs that started in 1964 as part of the War on Poverty. The programs continue today under Title X of the Public Health Service Act.

"For almost 50 years, the federal government has invested in domestic family planning programs with mixed evidence of their short-run effectiveness and no credible evidence that these programs reduced U.S. childbearing in the longer term," said Bailey, who is affiliated with the U-M Department of Economics, the National Poverty Center, and the U-M Institute for Social Research (ISR).

The study was published online this month as a National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) working paper.

The impact of these programs was contentious in the 1960s, and it remains contentious today, with Title X federal family planning funding for [Planned Parenthood](#) and similar groups challenged earlier this year in debates about spending cuts needed to balance the [federal budget](#).

Analyzing newly collected data on the expansion of federal family

planning funding from 1964 to 1973, Bailey found that access to these programs was associated with a significant and sustained reduction in childbearing.

"This reduction was partially driven by a decline in births to teens and women in their early 20s, and partly by a reduction in second births," Bailey said.

Because federally funded family planning programs served mostly lower-income women and operated in only a fifth of all U.S. counties, the program accounted for a small portion of the decline in the fertility rate after 1960. But the program had a profound effect on the women it served, reducing childbearing among poor women by 21 to 29 percent within 10 years, she said

"The estimates imply that U.S. family planning programs prevented roughly 1.8 million births in the first ten years they existed," Bailey said.

"In the future, my work will consider how family planning programs affected a host of longer-term outcomes, including the age-structure of poverty and children's resources and life chances."

Bailey's study was originally published as a working paper by the ISR Population Studies Center, and is forthcoming in the *American Economics Journal-Applied Economics*.

**More information:** [www.nber.org/papers/w17343](http://www.nber.org/papers/w17343)

Provided by University of Michigan

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