

Slowdown in African fertility rate linked to disruption of girls' education

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A team of researchers with the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis has found a connection between fertility rates in many African countries and access to education for girls living in those

countries. In their paper published *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, the group describes their analysis of population and economic data in multiple African countries and what they found.

Earth can only support a certain number of people—nobody knows what that number is, but most would agree that steps are required today to prevent the population from exceeding that tipping point. Population growth tends to be highest in undeveloped countries, and nowhere is that more evident than in African countries. Scientists studying [population growth](#) and ways to curb it have been working with governments in many African nations to keep tabs on population and [fertility rates](#) as part of programs aimed at slowing population growth. Data from such studies has shown that progress in development of African countries has led to declines in fertility rates. In this new effort, the researchers have found a similar association between [young girls](#) attending school and family size later on in life.

The researchers began their research by noting that fertility rates ceased declining in several African countries in the early 2000s. To find out why, they obtained data from surveys conducted every few years in the countries under study. More specifically, they looked at data covering the years 1950 to 1995. The data included family size and also information regarding access to education for the children in each household.

The researchers found that 20 years prior, during the 1980s, [educational opportunities](#) for children were reduced due to a variety of factors. Young girls, they found, who were denied access to education wound up having more children as adults than did girls in other countries who continued to go to school. They further suggest that had the girls been given the opportunity to attend school, the areas under study would have seen 13 million fewer births.

The researchers claim their findings highlight the need for funding of educational resources in underdeveloped regions as a means for slowing population growth.

More information: Endale Kebede et al. Stalls in Africa's fertility decline partly result from disruptions in female education, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2019). [DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1717288116](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1717288116)

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