

## **PRESSING PAUSE: How IVF access encourages young women to marry later and pursue careers**

Increased access to IVF means that women are more likely to marry later, to complete their university education and to pursue postgraduate qualifications. That is the central finding of research by **Naomi Gershoni** and **Corinne Low**, to be presented at the annual congress of the European Economic Association in Mannheim in August 2015.

The study looks at Israel, where IVF was made free to all citizens in 1994. This resulted in 4% of all babies in the country being born via IVF, considerably more than the proportion of around 1% in the United States. By giving people a form of insurance against later life infertility, women who wanted to pursue a career were able to do so without having to worry as much about whether this would prevent them from having a family. The researchers find that as a result:

- Women are more likely to marry later by a third of a year.
- Women are 3% more likely to complete college education.
- These women are then 4% more likely to finish graduate school.
- Men and women both became more likely to marry at an older age (over 30).

The authors comment:

‘Our findings show that the beneficiaries of IVF and other assisted reproduction technologies extend to young women who have been otherwise discouraged from making significant career investments. This is especially relevant as companies consider funding for employees to freeze their eggs as well as other fertility-extending measures, and policy-makers consider the need for public funding of infertility treatments.’

### **More...**

The advent of the birth control pill allowed women easily to avoid pregnancy during their early twenties and delay family formation to make critical career investments. Research by Claudia Goldin and Larry Katz has shown that during the 1970s, the spread of this new technology to young women was responsible for women delaying marriage and increasing their engagement in careers that require extensive, upfront education – such as law, medicine and business administration.

But as women continued to climb the career ladder, the required career investments have become more demanding, causing women to postpone childbearing late into their thirties. The ‘power of the pill’ thus came into conflict with another biological reality: women’s sharply declining fertility with age. The question then is whether this second force continues to limit women’s willingness to make career investments, holding them back from achieving full labour market equality.

This study uses a unique policy change that drastically expanded access to infertility treatment to test whether extending later life fertility can influence *young* women’s career investments. It finds dramatic evidence that increased access to *in vitro fertilisation* (IVF) and other assisted reproduction technologies has encouraged young women to marry later and pursue increased levels of education.

In 1994, Israel made IVF and other infertility treatments completely free to all citizens, the most generous IVF coverage anywhere in the world. Following the change, Israel became the world leader in IVF technology, with 4% of all babies in Israel being born via IVF, compared with around 1% in the United States.

This policy change essentially provided a form of insurance against later life infertility for people, especially women, who were considering starting childbearing late due to time-consuming career investments. Through direct knowledge of the policy as well as extensive media coverage of older women having children successfully, young women may have changed their beliefs about the probability of successful pregnancies later in life, and thus the cost of time-consuming career investments, such as going to graduate school.

Therefore, the policy serves as a natural experiment to test the impact of women's declining fertility on career investments and other outcomes – if women's reproductive time horizons are extended later in life, do they use this 'borrowed time' to get more education and further invest in their careers?

Using Israeli census data, the study finds that following the policy change, women are more likely to marry later, complete college education and achieve post-college education. The extended later life fertility offered by this policy was responsible for a third of a year increase in first marriage age, a 3% increase in college completion and an almost 4% increase in graduate school completion for college graduates.

The authors further hypothesise that these changes affected marriage outcomes for 'older' brides, as men may have similarly updated their beliefs about these women's potential to become mothers.

Correspondingly, they find a large relative increase in marriage outcomes for women marrying later (over 30) compared with those who marry younger. The 'penalty' for delaying marriage in terms of spousal quality appears to disappear. This suggests that both men and women's decisions were affected by their updated perception of women's fertility prospects.

These findings indicate that the asymmetry in later life fertility between men and women could be an important force in explaining women's educational, career and marriage outcomes. Thus, policies that protect against later life infertility can have far-reaching impacts, beyond merely increasing actual usage of assisted reproductive technologies.

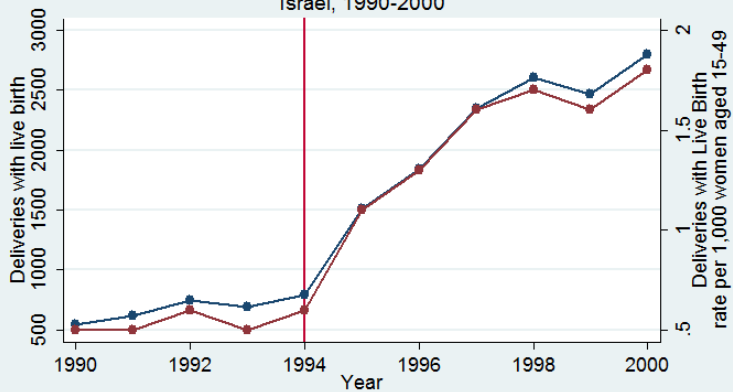
The beneficiary population extends to young women who have been otherwise discouraged from making significant career investment. This is especially relevant as companies consider funding for employees to freeze their eggs as well as other fertility-extending measures, and policy-makers consider the need for public funding of infertility treatments.

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# IVF Deliveries with Live Birth

Israel, 1990-2000



Deliveries with live birth  
Deliveries with live birth (Rate)

