

INTERGENERATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS AND THE FERTILITY TRANSITION

Tom S. Vogl

University of California San Diego

Abstract

Evolutionary theorists have long noted that intergenerational transmission in fertility may counteract aggregate fertility decline through a process of natural selection. I study this evolutionary process by estimating how intergenerational associations in fertility vary over the fertility transition and feed back into the level of average fertility. Microdata from 40 developing countries indicate that intergenerational persistence breaks down at the onset of the fertility transition but then strengthens as the transition progresses. These changes are attributable to a reversal of fertility differences by skill, as predicted by economic models of long-run demographic change. As fertility approaches the replacement level, rising intergenerational associations reweight the population to raise aggregate fertility rates, pushing back against aggregate fertility decline. (JEL: J13, O15)

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E-mail: tvogl@ucsd.edu