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The Baby Decision Amid Turmoil: Understanding the Fertility Decline in Russia of the 1990s

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Abstract

From 1989 and 1999 the total fertility rate in Russia declined from 2.01 to 1.16, one of the lowest fertility rates in the world and substantially below the level of population replacement of 2.1 children per woman. Was this decline in fertility caused by the economic collapse that accompanied Russia's transition from communism in this period? Is the decline only temporary, with women simply delaying births, or does it represent a shift to a permanently lower level of fertility? This paper explores these and related questions using data across Russia's regions for this period and using individual-level data that record births and abortions. The results indicate that the fertility decline in Russia is related to the large decrease in income experienced by much of the population in this period, as well as to declining marriage rates and (in some specifications) rising unemployment. Measures of macroeconomic instability and uncertainty about the future show surprisingly little correlation with fertility rates and the probability of having a birth, but women with positive expectations about the future were much less likely to have an abortion than were women with negative expectations about the future.