

**Women's Childbearing Intentions and the Future of U.S. Fertility Rates**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The period TFR in the U.S. has declined steadily since the Great Recession, to 1.76 children in 2017, the lowest level since the 1970s. This pattern could mean that current childbearing cohorts will end up with fewer children than previous cohorts, or it could result from simple postponement (meaning the current childbearing cohorts will “make up” the births later). We use data on current parity and future intended births from the 2006-2017 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) to evaluate a “changing expectations” hypothesis versus a “postponement” hypothesis among U.S. women during the recession and post-recession period. We find evidence that total expected parity has declined in the U.S. since 2006 – for women as a whole and for several subgroups (adolescent women, Latina women, low-SES women, and women who do not attend religious services). These changes seem to be concentrated at the low end of the parity distribution: among the full group of women there was an increase in the expectation of having no children (and no decline in the expectation of having four or more children). However, average expected parity remains quite high, and based on the observed experiences of prior cohorts, we anticipate that women currently in their twenties will end up with cohort completed fertility near replacement level.