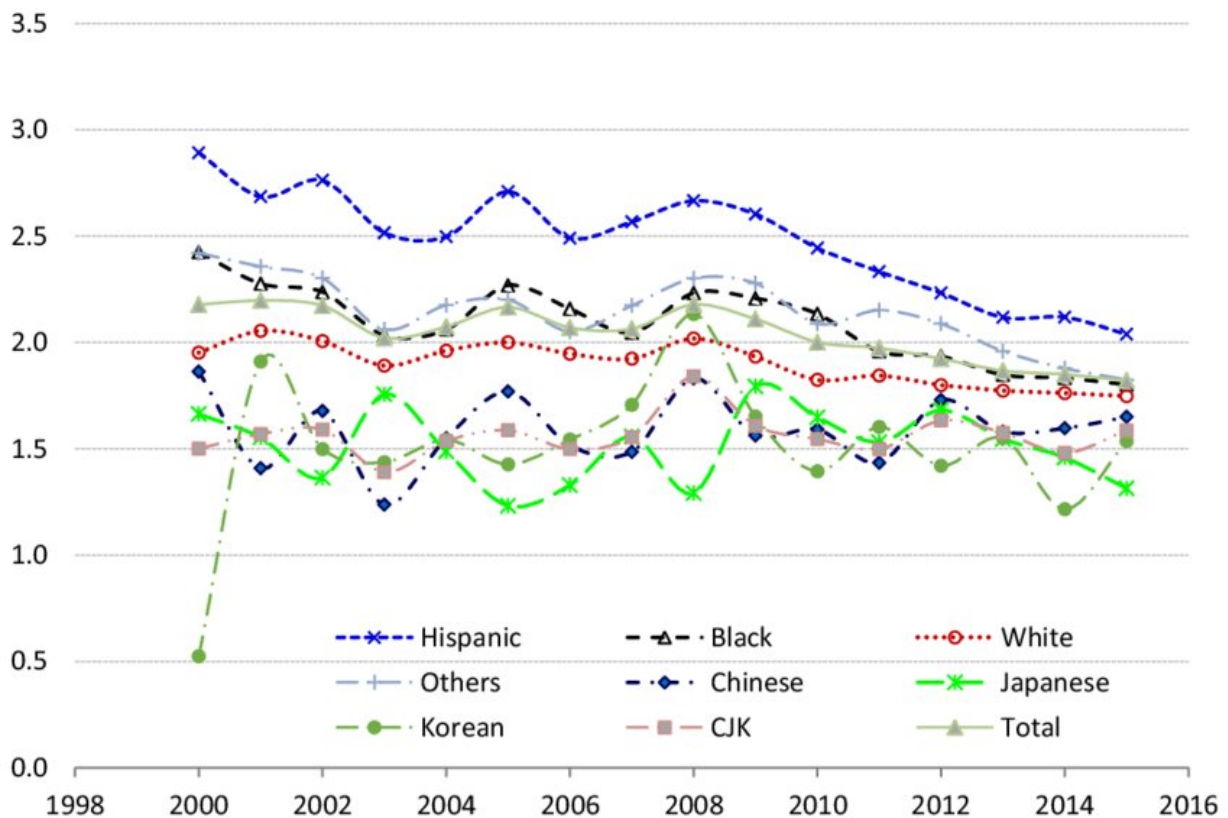


# Study reveals disparities in childbearing by race and education level

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Total fertility rate by race/ethnicity and year, United States 2000-15. Source: authors' calculations using American Community Survey (2010-2015). Credit: *China Population and Development Studies* (2019). DOI: 10.1007/s42379-019-00024-7

College-educated Black women in the United States give birth to fewer

children than their white and Hispanic counterparts, according to a new study coauthored by Yale sociologist Emma Zang.

The study, published in the journal *Population Studies*, examines the interplay of race, ethnicity, and education in shaping the fertility levels of U.S. women born between 1960 and 1980. It also showed that Black and Hispanic women without college degrees or less than a high-school education have more births than similarly educated [white women](#). Among the college-educated, Hispanic women had the highest fertility compared to Black and white women with college degrees.

"Conventional wisdom holds that racial or [ethnic disparities](#) in fertility will fade once women in [minority groups](#) attain similar education levels and socioeconomic status as white women, but we find that gaps occur at all education levels," said Zang, assistant professor of sociology in Yale's Faculty of Arts and Sciences and the study's lead author. "In general, highly educated women have fewer children than less educated women, but this doesn't explain the disparities we found among women with college degrees.

"Our results highlight the need to study differences in childbearing among socioeconomically advantaged women as well as those with fewer financial resources."

Unlike previous research on race and fertility in the United States, which has typically focused exclusively on Black and white women, this new study included Hispanic women, who represent an ethnic group that accounts for at least 19% of the U.S. population, according to the Census Bureau.

For the research, Zang and coauthors Chloe Sariego, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Sociology, and Anirudh Krishnan of the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab analyzed four waves of longitudinal

survey data from the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) from 2006 to 2017 involving a nationally representative sample of 11,117 women.

They calculated the average number of children women from each racial/ethnic group and educational level would have over the course of their reproductive years. Additionally, they analyzed the proportion of women from each group who give birth to one, two, or three children.

Overall, they found that college-educated women across racial and ethnic groups have fewer children than those who did not graduate college. The difference in fertility between college-educated Black and white women is driven mainly by the smaller proportion of Black mothers giving birth to a second child, the study found.

A high proportion of both groups have one child, but the proportion of college-educated Black mothers who had a second child was more than 10 percentage points lower than that of white mothers, the study showed. About 80% of white women with college degrees had a second child, while less than 70% of similarly educated Black women did.

A possible explanation for the lower fertility in college-educated Black women is that they postponed having their first child for so long that they lacked the time to have additional children during their reproductive years. However, the study found little evidence that the timing of when women decide to have children causes disparities between racial/ethnic groups across educational levels.

Previous studies have posited possible reasons why Black and Hispanic women without college degrees have higher fertility than their white counterparts, Zang said. For example, religious beliefs and a lack of access to [health insurance](#) might influence how less-educated Black and Hispanic women use contraception. Due to structural racism, Black and

Hispanic women without college degrees are also more likely to experience relationship and economic instability than their white counterparts, she explained.

The new study raises several questions concerning the racial disparities in fertility among college-educated women that require further investigation, Zang said.

"Are the differences in fertility the product of highly educated Black and Hispanic women being more aware of the higher risk of pregnancy-related complications among their racial groups, such as miscarriage, infant mortality, and maternal mortality?" she said.

"Are they the result of college-educated Black and Hispanic women more often needing to navigate spaces, including workplaces, dominated by white people compared to less-educated Black and Hispanic women, making them wary of confirming the stereotype that they are highly fertile? Do they exist because Black and Hispanic women with [college degrees](#) who wanted a second child were prevented from having one due to health issues caused by long-term chronic stress related to racism?"

The study's findings indicate that, compared to white children, a greater proportion of Black and, to a lesser extent, Hispanic children are born with less-educated mothers and a smaller proportion are born with college-educated mothers, Zang said.

"Highly educated mothers tend to have more resources to support their children's development and chances for success in life," she said. "That is to say that Black and Hispanic children, when compared to white children, are disproportionately born into families with fewer resources, which could exacerbate income and health inequality into the next generation."

**More information:** Emma Zang et al, The interplay of race/ethnicity and education in fertility patterns, *Population Studies* (2022). [DOI: 10.1080/00324728.2022.2130965](https://doi.org/10.1080/00324728.2022.2130965)

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