



Womens' Religion, Education and Fertility in Contemporary South Australia

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This paper uses multi-method research to revisit the 'old' issue of religion and fertility and examine it in relation to women's level of education in contemporary South Australia. In-depth interviews exploring influences on family size for Adelaide parents in 2003-04 suggested that more frequent attendance at religious services in childhood, and affiliation with New Protestant and Catholic denominations, were related to both higher preferred and higher achieved family size, even for women with a university education. In this case, religion appeared to play some part in countering the traditional relationship between higher education and lower fertility. The paper also explores quantitative data on religion, education level, and average number of children from the 1996 Census for women aged 40-44 in South Australia. These show both that women with 'No Religion' had lower fertility than women 'With a Religion', while university-educated women in New Protestant groups had higher fertility than those in other denominations. The paper concludes by suggesting how the findings provide an understanding of social conditions which support higher fertility, and that future research and policy in low fertility settings should include religious affiliation at disaggregated levels as a variable of inquiry.