



Aspects of the family economy and fertility decline among British cotton workers between 1833 and 1895

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The theme of our paper is the links between changes in the family economy and the onset of fertility decline in 19th century Britain. Modern developments in the demand theory of fertility theory and household economics continue to emphasise these links, but the continuing inability of demographers to establish them empirically continues to haunt both the theory and causal explanations of how and why the fertility transition began, as in Britain's case, in the last quarter of the 19th century. It is not surprising, therefore, that demographers continue to be highly sceptical of the explanatory value of the demand theory of fertility describing it, effectively, as an empty economic box. The aim of our paper is to use new evidence on age- and sex-specific earnings and spending, and family simulation processes, to build a picture of the family economy of a significant sector of the British working class that is detailed enough to identify accurately changes in the cost of the individual child and other factors in the household economy that might have motivated families to reduce their fertility in a sustained way. We also argue that the factors we identify may be generalised to other occupation groups and explain why families in some occupations failed to reduce their fertility until much later in the century.