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# **The historical fertility transition at the micro level: Southern Sweden 1815-1939**

By [Tommy Bengtsson](#), [Martin Dribe](#)

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## Abstract

**Background:** We know a great deal about the historical fertility transition at the macro level. The dominating focus on the macro level in previous research on the fertility transition means, however, that to a large extent we lack knowledge about details of the decline and empirical tests of the leading explanatory frameworks.

**Objective:** Our aim is to explore socioeconomic fertility differentials in an industrializing community, to gain insight about the details and discuss possible mechanisms. The study starts well before industrialization and finishes at the end of the transition.

**Methods:** We use longitudinal individual-level data from the Scanian Economic-Demographic Database, which contains demographic as well as socioeconomic information, including occupation, landholding, and income. In the analysis we use hazard regressions with shared frailty at the family level.

**Results:** The transition involved not only parity-specific stopping but also spacing. While the upper social strata had higher fertility prior to the transition, they started to control their fertility earlier, by the 1880s, and also more consistently. Farmers, the middle class, and skilled workers followed in the decades after, and unskilled workers with some additional delay.

**Conclusions:** These findings are partly inconsistent with several of the major explanations in the literature, such as mortality decline, increased female labor force participation, and a quantity-quality trade-off, but consistent with an innovation process where new ideas and attitudes about family limitation spread from the elite to other social groups.

**Comments:** Further studies are required to empirically test the innovation-diffusion theory.

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