

# **Infertility and the shortfall between ideal and actual family size**

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## **Abstract**

Research indicates that people often conclude their childbearing years having had fewer children than they intended in young adulthood. However, understanding of the factors that contribute to this discrepancy remains limited. Using data from the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS), this study examines the correspondence between ideal and actual family size among men and women at the end of their reproductive life across 10 low-fertility countries, as well as the role of biological and socio-economic factors in influencing whether they had all the children that they considered as ideal for them. The findings reveal that, in most countries, about half of both men and women report having fewer children than their personal ideal by the end of their reproductive years, with the gap being larger among those who experienced infertility. Both social and biological factors matter, with partnership trajectories and difficulty conceiving standing out as key predictors of the discrepancy between ideal and actual number of children.