

Can We Expect a COVID Baby Blip?

As countries the world over struggle with record low fertility, some hope that the global lockdown might result in a baby boom. Since couples are forced to spend more time together and life slows down, perhaps it will indeed provide ample opportunity and time to conceive a baby.

Many say they also have [a renewed focus](#) on the important things in life, and surely family is a very important thing. I am really grateful for my three children at the moment. I am grateful that I have a “bubble” at all given my thoughts are often with the lonely people who don’t. I am grateful that we are somewhat self-sufficient because my children have great playmates right here at home; my thoughts are with only children who don’t have that ready-made play structure at the moment.

Malaysia, with its below replacement fertility rate (approximately [1.8 births per woman](#)), is one country [hoping for a baby boom](#) because the country’s Movement Control Order (MCO) enacted on March 18 has caused the majority of married couples to stay at home.

Dr. Hamizah Mohd Hassan, the National Population and Family Development Board (LPPKN) Health Unit head in Malaysia, referred to past events in the United States where births increased following a lockdown due to bad snowstorms:

“The two states had to be on lockdown and residents were confined in the house for a long period of time. Nine months later, the baby boom happened in those two states. A similar situation might happen in Malaysia as the people have to stay at home throughout the MCO period.”

However, while snowstorms might be, history tells us that an

economic recession is generally not good for fertility rates. Despite this, a piece in [The Washington Post](#) by the director of the [Open Source Economics Laboratory](#) concludes that we might still see a baby “blip”:

“On the whole, it’s unlikely that America will see a coronavirus baby boom – but we could see a baby blip. Nationwide, that 2 percent increase would mean roughly 6,000 extra births per month this winter, depending on how long the shutdown endures.”

While this would be lovely, I am still skeptical.

According to a [Pew Research Centre study](#) conducted back in 2011, more than one-in-five young people aged 18 to 34 in the United States said that the reason they had postponed having a baby was because of the bad state the economy was in back then. About the same proportion (20 percent) say that they postponed getting married because of it (as an aside, it is a shame that marriage has come to be perceived as such a big expense when really all it needs to be is the commitment of two people). Back then, the gap in employment between the young and all working-age adults – roughly 15 percentage points – was the widest in recorded history.

Many, many people have been hit hard by COVID-19 lockdowns and [economic uncertainty](#). Those in their child-bearing years could well be hit hardest again. Couples considering babies may have little job security at the moment, if they have a job at all. Many, many people have taken pay cuts. On top of that there is the stress of envisaging the quality of maternal care during a COVID-19 pandemic. It is very uncertain how the next couple of years will play out. I imagine many in these positions may well take a “wait and see” approach to having a baby.

So, while I would be delighted with a baby boom (or even a blip!), I’m not holding out too much hope.

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