

Could contraceptive use reduce the gender pay gap? It depends on the country's culture

Submitted by: BlueSky Education

Wednesday, 26 June 2024

Daily hormonal contraceptives reduce the gender pay gap in assertive cultures but may widen it in competitive ones, while long-acting contraceptives show the reverse effect, according to new research by Vlerick Business School.

In success-driven countries, family planning methods can slightly increase the pay gap, whereas in cultures prioritising well-being and relationships, they tend to decrease it.

Professors Aleksandra Klein, Walter Van Dyck, researcher Torben Swoboda (Vlerick Business School), and Professor Lode Lauwaert (KU Leuven) analysed OECD gender pay gap data, GLOBE cultural dimensions, and IQVIA contraceptive sales.

Their study explores how cultural values and family planning methods impact the gender pay gap in 12 countries, including Australia, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Spain, Türkiye, the UK, and the USA.

The results imply that in future-oriented cultures like Thailand, daily hormonal contraceptives tend to reduce the gender pay gap, while long-acting contraceptives may increase it. Conversely, present-focused cultures like the Czech Republic benefit more from long-acting contraceptives.

Furthermore, cultures that place higher values on fairness, kindness, and community, such as Nigeria, generally see a reduction in the pay gap with daily hormonal contraceptives.

“To reduce the gender, pay gap, the research shows us that we need to destigmatise contraceptive use among young people and teach about the different options,” says Van Dyck.

“This can be through public campaigns, education in schools, and accessible resources. Ensuring that the right and complete information is communicated is essential to making contraceptives successful and reducing the gender pay gap”

“Our research indicates that various forms of contraceptives have differing effects on gender pay gaps in different countries, but overall, it reinforces that the use of contraceptives has proven effective in reducing these differences in pay,” says Klein.

The results of the study were discussed with healthcare, and policy experts, including those from The European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights, The European Institute of Women's Health and Organon as well as one of the major global voices of authority on women health and authority matters Professor Marleen Temmerman, Aga Khan University UNESCO Chair on Youth Leadership in Science, Health, Gender, and Education.

As Temmerman summarized it, “Key here is that the impact is dependent on the cultural context. Cultural norms shape the adoption of medicine and science and dictate their societal outcomes too. To enhance accessibility, it is essential to offer a broad range of contraceptives to everyone, particularly to

marginalised groups, and increase awareness about effective methods such as long-acting reversible contraceptives.”

The research also recommends that improved counselling services to help empower decision-making can also have an impact on ensuring the right form of contraceptive is chosen. Parental consent is also underlined as a barrier that can often prevent access to contraceptives.

Published as part of the Vlerick Policy Paper Series by the Vlerick Healthcare Management Centre, the study underscores the importance of understanding cultural contexts in implementing effective family planning policies. By aligning cultural values with policy initiatives, governments can foster gender equality and economic equity.

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To speak with the professors, or for a copy of their research, please contact Alexandre Lopez at BlueSky Education at alex@bluesky-pr.com or call +44 (0)1582 797959.