

Will the coronavirus lockdown lead to a baby boom

As people around the world distance themselves from one another to slow the spread of Covid-19, many couples under lockdown find themselves closer than ever.

The notion that the world may witness a coronavirus "baby boom" in nine months time is not as far-fetched as it may seem. Such predictions are common after disasters, particularly those in which citizens are ordered to shelter in place. Extreme weather events are a prime example: spikes in births were anticipated after snowstorms in New York state (2015) and hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria (2017).

But after other catastrophes — such as *famines*, earthquakes and *tsunamis* — birth rates tend to fall at the nine-month mark, and then bounce back soon afterwards. Data compiled by Lyman Stone, a researcher at the Institute for Family Studies, a conservative think-tank, suggest that epidemics produce a similar pattern. The SARS outbreak in 2002-03 led to a drop in births in Hong Kong nine months on, followed by a sharp rise in the subsequent two years. The Ebola epidemic in 2016 also saw an increase in fertility among West Africans around 18 months after it struck.

famine 饥荒; 饥饿

tsunami 海啸

Birth rates after Covid-19 will probably be influenced by a range of factors, many of which are hard to predict. A higher number of infections and deaths would be expected to produce a deeper decline in birth rates nine months into the pandemic; if fewer people get sick, the decline will be shallower. But there are other variables at play. The enforced *proximity* brought by quarantine measures, for example, might push birth rates up in the next year. But an economic slowdown will simultaneously discourage couples from procreating.

proximity 亲近