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# Watch Out: Mr. Robot is Here

Not content with just taking jobs away, robots are also giving a drubbing to the marriage prospects of male workers more exposed to robot job penetration, as new CESifo research shows. Robots are also changing fertility patterns.



Just as you were eyeing the girl down the block and gathering the nerve to ask her out, a new player pops up that pushes you to the sidelines. A heartthrob? A Hollywood hunk?

No: a *robot*.

We have been forever fretting that robots will take away our jobs. Rightly, as it often turns out. But that they would diminish our marriage prospects? Seriously?

Well, yes, according to new CESifo research. The study [→](#), conducted by CESifo Network members Massimo Anelli [→](#) (Bocconi University) and Luca Stella [→](#) (Freie Universität Berlin) with their colleague Osea Giuntella (U. of Pittsburgh), shows that the adoption of robots and automation systems permanently affects the economic prospects of individuals, in particular blue-collar male workers. And that, in turn, decreases their appeal in the marriage market.

The authors focused on the US, using information on marriage, cohabitation, divorce, and marital and non-marital fertility. They then combined these data with regional exposure to robots in the US, checking it against robotic trends in Europe in order to mitigate the concern about possible exogenous influences.

Their analysis found that one standard deviation in robot exposure penalized to a larger extent employment and earnings of men: their income fell at a substantially higher rate than female income, while their labor force participation remained stagnant whereas female participation increased significantly. There was a silver lining to this, though: the gender gap in income decreased by 4.2% and the gap in labor market participation by 2.1%, which suggests greater bargaining power for women—albeit at the cost of a reduction in both the relative as well as the absolute value of men.

When it comes to the marriage front, the results showed that a one standard deviation in robot penetration was associated with a 1% decrease in the marriage rate, which is statistically not-that-significant, but also with a statistically significant 9% increase in divorces and a 10% increase in cohabitation.

This did not noticeably affect the overall fertility rate, but looking more closely, it did reduce the marital fertility rate by 12% and increased the non-marital one by 15%. The robot effect on marital fertility appears to be mainly driven by older individuals (30-50 years old), while the effect on non-marital fertility is larger among younger cohorts (below the age of 30).

So, all in all, the findings suggest that robots have worsened the absolute economic stature of men as measured by their earning opportunities, lowering the position of men in the marriage market. This, in turn, appears to have contributed to reducing women's willingness to enter into long-term commitments, such as tying the knot, while increasing the value of non-marital fertility options for women as well as the share of children born to single-parent households.

Scary stuff. I just kicked the lawn-mowing robot thingy to the darkest corner of the shed. Just in case.

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## **Robots, Marriageable Men, Family, and Fertility →**

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