

Women's Labour Force Participation and Fertility Preferences

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Introduction

In the olden days, it was hard for women to decide the time of the next birth, number of children and time to stop childbearing, except for women who were highly educated career women, according to the views of women who bear the burden of pregnancy and child birth (Caldwell and Caldwell, 1987). Further they concluded that the number of children a woman bore reflected the desired fertility of her husband and his relatives. However, in the modern society, women's status is gradually changing. At present, women's traditional household activities are changing due to the influence of various socioeconomic and demographic conditions. Especially with more women engaging in income generating activities, a new era has been created relating to women's status.

Preference theory is a sociological theory developed by Catherine Hakim (2000) that points out historically five socio economic conditions that have created this new scenario for women:

- First one is the contraceptive revolution that gave women control of their fertility;
- Equal opportunities increased women's access to all position and occupations;
- Expansion of white-collar occupations attracted women;
- Increased secondary earning opportunities such as part time jobs, working at home, telemarketing and annual hour's contracts;
- Changing attitudes and values in modern societies which give everyone the freedom to choose their own lifestyle.

Considering economic factors, the view of fertility behavior is discussed within neoclassical economics, in a model of fertility, originally developed by the economist - Harvey Leibenstein (1922-1994) in 1957. He assumes that parents have sole decision making power within the household and husband and wife have the same utility function. A far more influential economic model was presented by economist Gary Becker in 1960. He introduced two key elements to the theories of household behavior:

preferences and constraints. Theory of consumer behavior assumes that an individual with certain tastes or preferences for a range of goods and services tries to maximise their utility subject to income constraints and the relative prices of goods. Based on this assumption, in the fertility analysis, children are considered as a special kind of consumption good. Therefore fertility becomes a rational economic choice of family's demand for children, relative to other goods. Diane Macunovich (1996) identified women as also having an active role in the decision making process and that they also have material aspirations. In her model she measured the interrelationship between relative income and female wage. Male's relative income increases fertility, while fertility decreases with increased wages earned by women.

Several previous studies found strong associations between fertility and women's educational level, desired family size, contraceptive usage and age at marriage, while men's education has a weak association (Mahmud and Johnston, 1994; Martin, 1995; Jejeebhay, 1995; Angeles, Giulkey and Mroz, 2003). According to Oyediran and Isiugo-Abanihe (2002), spousal communication about family planning, age of husbands and wives, current level of exposure to media, have significant negative effects on future fertility preferences in Nigeria. Bankole and Singh, 1998 and Bongaarts (2003) concluded that husband's educational level, occupation and the desired number of children affect the fertility preferences of women. Further, educational attainment of women increased age at marriage and lowered fertility preferences. According to Khan and Sirvageldin (1979), income of the household and land owned by it were not significant factors for demanding children by rural women in Pakistan. United Nations (1985) and Kazi and Sathar (1993) concluded that the type of employment influences the reproductive intentions and behavior more than employment per se. FBS (1991) and NIPS (1992) found that women who lived in urban areas have lower fertility intentions in Pakistan.

Further, Mason (1987), Mahmud and Johnston (1994) and Bhuyan (1996) concluded that women's employment is an important factor in women's autonomy. Women who work outside the home do not want to risk more pregnancies. Further they like to increase the birth spacing and limit the number of children. Therefore women's employment pattern could be a potential factor in determining fertility levels. On the other hand economic factors have an effect on fertility behavior through their influence on the age at marriage. Mahmud and Johnston (1994) showed that employment increased the desire to delay marriage. Therefore women's employment and fertility preferences are important areas in the demographic field in both developed and developing countries. Further fertility and fertility preferences are important indicators of socio economic development of societies. Therefore, many researchers have tried to identify determinants of fertility preferences in both developed and developing countries. Even though there are some studies related to fertility preferences in Sri

Lanka, it is hard to find out recent studies focusing particularly on fertility preferences of women employees. Further, fertility intention considered a reflection of subsequent fertility behavior. Therefore, the findings of this study could help in formulating policies in the future.

Objectives

The prime objective of this study is to identify the impact of women's labor force participation on fertility preferences.

Methodology

This study used secondary data from the Sri Lanka Demographic and Health Survey (SLDHS) conducted in 2006/2007 by the Department of Census and Statistics. The data were collected through personal interviews based on questionnaires. 11036 currently married women aged 15-49 years were interviewed to identify their fertility behavior: of these 4767 wanted another child while the balance (6269) wanted no more children.

Descriptive statistics including frequencies and cross tabulations and methods of data presentation like graphs and diagrams were used for the preliminary analysis. Binary logistic regression was performed using the sample of females who expressed their fertility preferences. The desire for another child was used as the dependent variable in all binary logistic regressions.

Results

The regression results are summarised in Table 1 below.

The study found that women's employment is positively related with demanding another child. Women's employment could increase the economic potential and thus influence the fertility intention of women. Further their economic contribution is very important to the country.

However, in the Sri Lankan set up, women's active participation in the labor market, both in the formal and informal sectors, results in some difficulties particularly with regard to looking after their children. This is partly due to the fact that the Sri Lankan labor market does not provide enough child care facilities for employees. Therefore, the government and private sector should jointly improve child care facilities in the working environment to help women maintain their "dual career" successfully.

Table 1: Logistic Regression Results on Desire for Another Child

Explanatory variables	B	S.E.	Wald	Exp(B)
Being employed	0.200	0.056	12.753	1.221
Ethnicity			419.636	
Tamil	0.444	0.103	18.630	1.559
Muslim	2.022	0.099	416.383	7.555
Other	-0.055	0.331	0.027	0.947
Residence			10.151	
Urban	-0.224	0.071	9.870	0.799
Estate	-.146	0.136	1.145	0.864
Ever born Children	-1.900	0.039	2354.132	0.150
Wealth			30.666	
Poorest	0.496	0.099	25.116	1.641
Poorer	0.409	0.092	19.884	1.505
Middle	0.346	0.089	14.995	1.414
Richer	0.209	0.082	6.501	1.232
Age at marriage	-0.050	0.006	79.900	0.951
Husband's education			23.953	
No Schooling	-0.327	0.690	0.225	0.721
Secondary	0.365	0.086	18.187	1.440
Higher	0.345	0.096	12.853	1.412
Degree and Above	0.659	0.171	14.862	1.933
Fertility Preference of Husband			9.556	
More Children	-0.036	0.090	0.156	0.965
Fewer Children	-0.059	0.123	0.225	0.943
Don't Know	-0.341	0.111	9.463	0.711
Constant	3.225	.194	275.510	25.160

Source: Author calculations based on DHS, 2006

Residential setting has been identified as a key determinant of fertility preference. According to the above model, women in the urban and estate settings have a negative preference for another child. Family planning programmes are successfully operated

and media exposure of women is high in Sri Lanka. Therefore, women's knowledge about family planning activities and exposure to outside world may reduce their intention of having more children. Number of ever born children also negatively affects demand for more children. Women who have already achieved their desired number of children tend to have lesser fertility intentions. The study concluded that there is a downward trend in the fertility preferences as age at marriage increases. Ethnicity is also a very important factor in determining fertility intentions of women. Muslim women have a higher tendency for demanding another child than Sinhala women. The religious and cultural norms of Muslim women appear to influence their high fertility intentions.

As an economic factor, the wealth criterion is also a very important variable associated with fertility preference. According to above results, there is a positive relationship between wealth and fertility preference of women. Wealth is especially important in exposing people to new ideas and commodities. Therefore it influences their fertility intention. Contradictory findings regarding husband's education and fertility preferences could be found in previous studies. However in this study, Husband's education level is statistically significant, and husband's fertility preference also influences the decision to have another child.

Table 2: Goodness of Fit of the Binary Logistic Regression Model

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	8918.983 ^a	0.385	0.515

The Nagelkerke R^2 value is 0.515. The interpretation is that about 51.5% of the variation in fertility preferences can be explained by the above explanatory variables.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Fertility preference is an important factor in demographic studies and human development. This study used desire for future child as a measurement of fertility preferences: According to the binary logistic regression, residential sector, husband's educational level, numbers of ever born children, wealth, husband's fertility preferences, age at marriage, ethnicity and women's labor force participation, are statistically significant in determining women's fertility preferences.

According to the above model, women who are active in the labor market have high intention to have another child. The reason could be that the female labour force participation might be increasing their financial capabilities and their ability to bear child care costs. Empirical evidence however shows that working women in Sri Lanka, unlike those in developed and even in some developing countries, face difficulties, with regard to child care. The Sri Lankan labor market does not pay adequate attention to the provision of child care facilities for employees. Therefore, the government and private sector should take steps to improve child care facilities in working environments, and formal rules and regulation should be established with regard to childcare facilities. Facilities for married women during their maternity period need further improvement. Such strategies could possibly lead to increased labor market participation by women that will result in greater economic contributions to their families as well as to the country. It would also help reduce the dropout rate of women from the labor market owing to motherhood.

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