Introducing

Marriage and fertility have both been changing in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), but the changing relationship between the two is not established.

Research Questions

1) What have been the effects of changing marriage rates on fertility?
2) How have changing marital and nonmarital fertility rates affected overall trends?
3) How have effects differed by age?

Data and Methods

DHS data for Namibia, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Rwanda, Benin, and Nigeria.

I decompose the general fertility rate using technique by Das Gupta (1993); and Hayford (2005):

\[ GFR = \sum_{m=1}^{44} c_{m} (p_{m}, f_{m}) \times (1 - p_{m}), \]

Expanding,

\[ GFR = \sum_{i=1}^{44} c_{i} [p_{m} (p_{m}, f_{m}) + (p_{m}, f_{m}) + (p_{m}, f_{m}) + (p_{m}, f_{m})] \]

where:

- 1: age distribution
- 2: marital rate
- 3: nonmarital fertility
- 4: polygynous marital fertility
- 5: nonpolygynous marital fertility
- 6: divorce rate
- 7: divorce fertility
- 8: widowed rate
- 9: widowed fertility
- 10: cohabitation rate
- 11: cohabitation fertility
- 12: nonmarital fertility
- 13: never married fertility

\( \Delta GFR \) is a sum of contributions from changes in these factors.

Conclusions

- Changing marriage rates are important when fertility is high.
- Less marriage lowers fertility.
- Changes in rates of polygyny, divorce, and widowhood have not had much effect.
- Age distribution effects are larger in higher fertility countries, and Rwanda (genocide).
- Effects vary by age.
- Changing marriage rates are important for adolescents, but so are other factors.
- In Benin and Nigeria, small overall change in fertility was due to offsetting effects at different ages.

Policy relevance:

- Changing legal age at marriage will have an effect in higher fertility countries, not when fertility is low.
- Fertility intervention focus should depend on country, based on:
  - exposure to childbearing among married and single women;
  - fertility rates of married vs. single;
  - availability of deliberate controls of fertility;
  - level of aggregate fertility.

Limitations

- Definition of marriage in Africa is complex, and results may reflect definitional problems.
- Assumed that marital status at time of survey prevailed over the three year period prior to the survey.

Citations