EXPLAINING HIGH FERTILITY IN THE NORTH EASTERN REGION OF KENYA

Tue, 01/05/2016 - 12:27 | annmaria
Student Names: SUSAN WANJIKU MUNGAI
Student Registration Number: REG NO: Q50/68968/2013
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The objective of this study was to explain the persistently high fertility in North Eastern region of Kenya. Total fertility rate (TFR) in this region has been on the rise as fertility falls in the rest of the country. For example, TFR was 5.9 and 6.4 births per woman during the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS) of 2008/09 and 2013/14 respectively against the national TFR of 4.6 and 3.4 during the KDHS of 2008/09 and 2013/14 respectively. The government target of 2.6 children per woman by 2030 cannot be realized if fertility continues to increase in this region. This study thus was carried out inorder to establish the effects of some of the selected social-economic, social-cultural, demographic and proximate determinants of fertility in the region.

The study utilized secondary data from the KDHS 2008/09 with a study population of 606 women of reproductive age (15-49) in the North Eastern region. Poisson regression model was the main method of analysis. The dependent variable was CEB while the independent variables that were considered for analysis were classified into social-economic, social-cultural and proximate factors. Social-economic factors included wealth index, level of education and type of residence. Religion and marital status were the only social cultural and demographic factors respectively that were included. Proximate factors included marital status, ever use of contraceptives, infant mortality and desired fertility.

Descriptive statistics indicate that majority of the women live in the rural areas, had no formal education, were poor and only 3 percent have ever used a form of modern contraception. The results from multi-variate analysis demonstrate that fertility is significantly associated with education, marital status, child mortality and desire for more children.

From the findings, education seems to be the most significant factor that is causing high fertility in North Eastern Kenya. It is therefore recommended that programmes and policies to improve school enrolment and keeping girls in school be implemented more robustly. Some of these could be having more schools considering the vastness of the region or establishing boarding schools considering the nomadic lifestyles of the population there.

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Academic Year: 2014/2015
Project Year: 2015
Project Status: completed

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