

TRENDS IN FEMALE AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE IN RWANDA

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ABSTRACT

Justification of the study : Rwanda like most tropical African countries is characterized by high fertility. There are many possible explanations for high incidence of fertility, but most researcher agree that at least, it reflects that reproduction starts at young ages, age at first marriage is early, and contraceptives are not being used in a widespread manner.

Methodology: This study attempts a survival analysis to calculate the cumulative probability of age at first marriage in Rwanda for married women aged 15 to 45 years old according to their education level and their place of residence. The analyses are based on nationally representative data from the 10,421 women aged 15-49 interviewed in the 2000 Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey.

Results : The mean for age at first marriage in Rwanda is 19.91 (16.47, 23.34), while the median survival time before first marriage for women of age 15-49 during the survey is 24.27 years. However, the duration varies according to education and place of residence. The median of the duration before the first marriage seems to increase with the education level. 50% of women with no education have their first marriage earlier at the age of 21.69, while half of those who studied beyond secondary school reach the age of 31.35 before their first marriage. In Rural areas, women get married also earlier compared to cities. By the age 25-30, 76.5% of them will be married while only 55% are expected to be married in urban areas.

Conclusion : Young girls who get married before the age of 20 face considerable health risks during pregnancy and childbirth. The timing of the first birth has also important demographic implications. Under natural fertility regime, the early onset of childbearing tends to boost the number of children a woman will have. Age at marriage is therefore an important factor associated with the age at which a woman first gives birth. As a policy measure, the reproductive health program in Rwanda should focus on youth, whether in schools or elsewhere by providing information and services in ways that persuade the young generation to delay the age at first marriage. It is also suggested that priority be given to providing young women with more education or employment opportunities as an alternative to early marriage.

Key-words: ???

RESUME

Justification de l'étude : Le Rwanda comme la plupart des pays tropicaux africains est caractérisé par une fertilité élevée. Il existe plusieurs explications possibles de cette incidence élevée de la fertilité mais beaucoup de chercheurs s'accordent à dire qu'elle est au moins le reflet d'une reproduction qui débute à un jeune âge, l'âge précoce au premier mariage, et les méthodes contraceptives qui ne sont pas utilisées d'une manière diffuse.

Méthodologie : Cette étude est une tentative d'utiliser l'analyse de survie pour calculer la probabilité cumulée de l'âge au premier mariage au Rwanda pour les femmes âgées de 15 à 45 ans, selon leur niveau d'éducation et leur lieu de résidence. Les analyses sont basées sur des données nationales représentatives provenant de 10.421 femmes âgées de 15-49 ans interviewées lors de l'enquête démographique et de santé 2000 du Rwanda.

Résultats : L'âge moyen au premier mariage au Rwanda est de 19,91 ans (16,47, 23,34) alors que la médiane du temps de survie avant le premier mariage pour les femmes âgées de 15-49 ans durant l'enquête est de 24,27 ans. Cependant, la durée varie selon l'éducation et le lieu de résidence. La médiane de la durée avant le premier mariage semble augmenter avec le niveau d'éducation. 50% des femmes sans éducation ont leur premier mariage plus tôt à l'âge de 21,69 ans alors que celles qui ont étudié au-delà de l'école secondaire atteignent l'âge de 31,35 ans avant leur premier mariage. En milieu rural, les femmes se marient plus tôt comparées aux villes. Vers l'âge de 25-30 ans, 76,5% d'entre elles seront mariées alors que seulement 55% le seront en milieu urbain.

Conclusion : Les jeunes femmes qui se marient avant l'âge de 20 ans font face à des risques de santé considérables durant leur grossesse et à l'accouchement. Le moment de la première naissance a également d'importantes implications démographiques. Sous un régime de fertilité naturelle, l'âge précoce de la première grossesse tend à accroître le nombre d'enfants qu'une femme aura dans sa vie. L'âge au premier mariage est dès lors un facteur important associé à l'âge auquel une femme donne naissance pour la première fois. Comme mesure politique, le programme de santé de la reproduction au Rwanda devrait se focaliser sur les jeunes, qu'ils soient à l'école ou ailleurs, en fournissant l'information et les services adaptés et qui sont orientés dans un sens qui puisse persuader la jeune génération à retarder l'âge au premier mariage. Il serait également souhaitable qu'une priorité soit accordée aux jeunes femmes en leur accordant plus d'opportunités d'éducation et d'emploi qui pourraient servir comme alternatives au mariage précoce.

Mots clés : ???

INTRODUCTION

Rwanda like most tropical African countries is characterized by high fertility. In 2000, the Government of Rwanda published a population policy paper with the specific objective of reducing fertility and maternal mortality (Politique Nationale de Santé, 2000). However, despite the formal adoption of a population policy and national family program, the impact on high fertility levels to date

is minimal. Available literature shows that the relatively high levels of fertility still observed in Sub-Saharan Africa is related to various factors that determine the attitudes and behavior of people towards procreation. The high incidence of fertility at least reflects that reproduction starts at young ages, age at first marriage is early, and contraceptives are not being used in a widespread and effective manner.

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their education level and their place of residence. This study is based on data collected during the 2000 Rwanda DHS.

BACKGROUND

The United Nations' analysis of World Fertility Survey data indicated that in the late 1970's and early 1980's women with 7 or more years of schooling married nearly 4 years later, on average, than women with no education, reducing potentially their lifetime fertility. There has been a trend towards later marriage in most countries. Worldwide, the mean age at first marriage has increased 1.6 years among women and 1.2 years among men over the past decade. The growing emphasis on education has played a significant role in this trend. In developing countries, as formal education has become more available in developing countries, it has become a factor in delayed marriage. Women who complete at least primary education tend to marry later. For example, in every sub-Saharan country, among women ages 20 to 24, the percentage who completed primary school is much higher among those who married after age 20 than among those who married earlier. In Latin America women in Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, and Paraguay who delayed marriage until after age 20 were two to three times more likely to have completed seven years of school than those who married earlier. The association is also strong in Asia and the Near East. However, education remains out of reach for many, particularly for young women, because many developing countries do not provide schooling for all young people, particularly in rural areas and at the secondary level. Among both sexes urban adolescents are much more likely than rural adolescents to obtain more than six years of education

DATA, MEASURES AND METHODS

Data from the 10,421 women aged 15-49 interviewed in the Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey 2000 were used to examine if the woman has ever been married, to determine her current age and her age at first marriage. Differences between urban and rural areas and by education of the women were analyzed.

Using SPSS 13.0, the duration of life as single was compute as equivalent to "age at first marriage" for married women while that duration was equal to "current age" for women never married. The survival analysis was then performed separately for four level of education (no education, primary, secondary and higher) and for the place of residence (urban or rural).

RESULTS

The mean for age at first marriage in Rwanda is 19.91 (16.47, 23.34). 46.8% of married women during the

DHS-2000 survey were married between the ages 15-19, 40.8% between the ages 20-24. Only 3.0% were married before 15 years old. At the age of 20, 50% of the total was married.

The median survival time before first marriage for women of age 15-49 during the survey is 24.27 years. However, the duration varies according to education and place of residence. The median of the duration before the first marriage seems to increase with the education level. In fact, 50% of women with no education have their first marriage earlier at the age of 21.69, while half of those who studied beyond secondary school reach the age of 31.35 before their first marriage. In Rural areas, women get married also earlier compared to cities (Table 1).

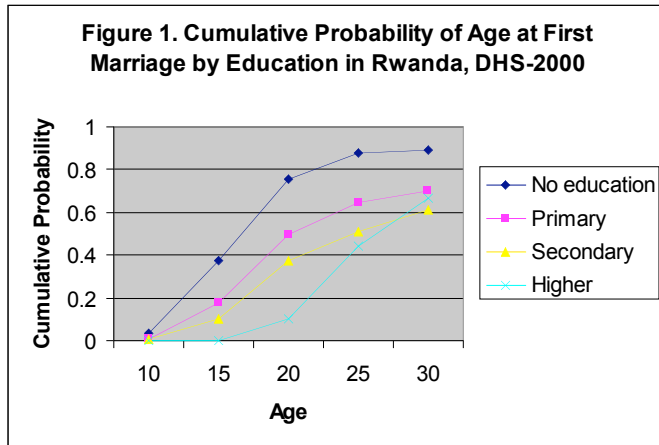
| Covariate | Median Survival Time (Years) |
|--------------------|------------------------------|
| Education | |
| No education | 21.69 |
| Primary | 5.10 |
| Secondary | 29.67 |
| Higher | 31.35 |
| Place of Residence | |
| Urban | 28.26 |
| Rural | 23.56 |

The cumulative probability of first marriage is higher for women with no education at every age and it decreases with the level of education (Figure 1). Before the age of 10, the probability of first marriage is 3.7% for non educated women while the likelihood of being married is almost none for those who went to school, even only at the primary school. By the age of 30-35, 89.33 % of women with no education will be married compared to 69.9% for those who achieved the primary school, 60.9% the secondary school and 66.3% at the university level. 49.67% of women who went to primary school will be likely married between ages 20-25 while 50.91% of those who achieved secondary school will probably be married lately by the age 25-30. For women who reached the university level, none of them will be probably married before the age 20-25 (Table 2).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

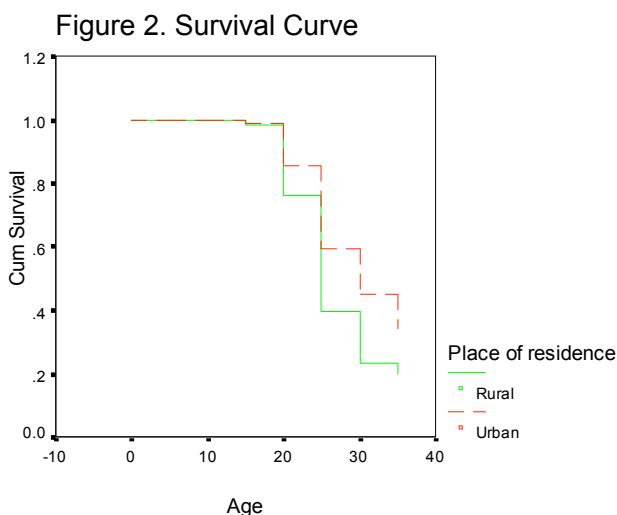
Education and age at first marriage are strongly associated. In Rwanda, the majority of the women had their first marriage around the age 24, but women with secondary education had a significantly higher age at first marriage than those with little or no education. Women from urban areas had also a significantly higher age at first marriage

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| Covariate | 10 | 15 | 20 | 25 | 30 |
|---------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Education | | | | | |
| No education | .0372 | .3709 | .7524 | .8767 | .8933 |
| Primary | .0079 | .1743 | .4967 | .6451 | .6990 |
| Secondary | .0092 | .1007 | .3714 | .5091 | .6098 |
| Higher | .0000 | .0000 | .1034 | .4397 | .6638 |
| Place of Residence | | | | | |
| Urban | .0113 | .1453 | .4050 | .5508 | .6586 |
| Rural | .0158 | .2377 | .6058 | .7656 | .7899 |

Women living in rural areas have also a higher probability of getting married earlier as compared to those of the cities (Figure 2). By the age 25-30, 76.5% of them will be married while only 55% are expected to be married in urban areas.



than rural women. These results are consistent with findings from other developing countries.

The education level is of direct importance for the family development and the individual attitudes and behavior pattern. It can influence directly the option and the decision-making process for the issue of a partnership or own children. We can expect that with the education expansion in the last decades in Rwanda the school attendance times became longer, the desired and the achieved level of education higher. Young people are marrying at older ages than their parents did, and today substantially smaller percentages of women marry before age 20 than in previous generations. Thus median age at marriage is slowly rising in Rwanda.

This phenomenon is also observed in many countries around the world. In developed countries, the Near East, East Asia, and a few Latin American countries, women tend to marry in their early to mid-20s. Two-thirds or more of young women in these regions do not marry until after age 20. In contrast, as many as two-thirds of young women in some countries of sub-Saharan Africa marry before age 20. In several of these countries high proportions of women marry at even younger ages. In almost all developing countries women in rural areas are more likely to marry before age 20 than women in cities.

In the Rwanda DHS-2000, 21% of the women were likely to be married before the age of 20. These young girls face considerable health risks during pregnancy and childbirth. In fact, girls aged 15-19 are twice as likely to die from childbirth as women in their twenties; those under age 15 are five times as likely to die (United Nations Dept. of International Economic and Social Affairs, 1991). The timing of the first birth has also important demographic implications. Both the timing of subsequent births and completed family size are related to age at first birth. Under natural fertility regime, the early onset of childbearing tends to boost the number of children a woman will have. Age at marriage is therefore an important factor associated with the age at which a woman first gives birth.

The reproductive health program in Rwanda is increasingly aware of young adults' needs, but most efforts so far have been small and isolated. The family planning program continues essentially with a focus on married women, a large group with an obvious need for reproductive health care. In contrast, efforts to meet young people's needs are still struggling to find approaches that are both effective and politically acceptable. Reproductive health services for youth, whether in schools or elsewhere, remain small, because they are difficult to establish and fund. Thus the challenge for programs is to provide information and services in ways that persuade the young generation to delay the age at first marriage.

The government should also focus on the integration of population variables in national development plans, supporting late age at first marriage and the implementation of family planning programs. As a policy measure, it is suggested that priority be given to providing young women

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with more education or employment opportunities as an alternative to early marriage.

In conclusion, this paper was an attempt using the survival analysis to calculate the cumulative probability of age at first marriage in Rwanda for married women aged 15 to 45 years old by their education level and their place of residence. This study is based on data collected during the 2000 Rwanda DHS. The results of this paper allow us to identify high and low-risk groups of women for first marriage for various age. Women with lower education and residing in rural areas are more likely to marry early than women with urban residence, secondary education or higher.

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