THE INFLUENCE OF EDUCATION ON THE FERTILITY TRANSITION IN SRI LANKA

by

Dissanayake Mudiyanseelage Sri Shanthi
Lakshman DISSANAYAKE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS ............................................ i
LIST OF TABLES ............................................. vi
LIST OF FIGURES ........................................... xiii
ABSTRACT ...................................................... xvii
DECLARATION .................................................. xviii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ......................................... xix

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ................................. 1

1.1. Introduction ............................................ 1
1.2. Study Objectives .................................... 2
1.3. Studies of the Relationship between
     Education and Fertility Transition
     in Sri Lanka ........................................... 4
1.4. The Country Setting .................................. 9
   1.4.1. Geography ...................................... 9
   1.4.2. History ......................................... 12
   1.4.3. Demography .................................... 15
   1.4.4. Economy ....................................... 18
   1.4.5. Sri Lanka in Comparative Perspective ...... 20
1.5. Organization of the Thesis ......................... 22
1.6. Conclusion ............................................ 25

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ............... 26

2.1. Introduction ............................................ 26
2.2. Theoretical Approaches to Explaining the
     Fertility Transition ................................... 27
   2.2.1. Classical Demographic Transition
          Theory ............................................ 27
   2.2.2. Threshold Hypothesis .......................... 34
   2.2.3. Micro-economic Theories of Fertility
          Becker's Model .................................. 37
          Michael's Study .................................. 38
          Leibenstein's Model ............................. 39
          Easterlin's Model ................................ 42
          The Easterlin and Crimmins Synthesis
          Framework ......................................... 43
   2.2.4. The View of the European Fertility
          Project on the Fertility Transition ............ 47

PAGE
i
vi
xiii
xvii
xviii
xix
1
2
4
9
12
15
18
20
22
25
26
27
34
37
38
39
42
43
44
47
2.2.5. The Value of Children Approach
2.2.6. Cultural Explanations of Fertility Change
2.2.7. Caldwell's Thesis of "Mass Education and the Onset of the Fertility Transition

2.3. Theoretical Framework
2.4. Conclusion

CHAPTER THREE: SOURCES AND METHODS: Integration of Different Approaches

3.1. Introduction
3.2. Sources of Data
   3.2.1. Census and Vital Registration Data
   3.2.2. Sample Surveys
      3.2.2.1. Sri Lanka Fertility Survey
      3.2.2.2. Sri Lanka Demographic and Health Survey
      3.2.2.3. Sri Lanka Demographic Change Project
   3.3. Methods
   3.4. Conclusion

CHAPTER FOUR: THE EXACT TIMING OF THE ONSET OF MASS EDUCATION

4.1. Introduction
4.2. Defining the Onset of Mass Education
4.3. Why Governments Provided Schools?
   4.3.1. Education prior to 1832
   4.3.2. Education During the 1832-1900 Period
   4.3.2. Education During the 1900-1948 Period
   4.3.3. Education During the 1948-1960 Period
4.4. Why Parents Wanted to Educate More Children?
4.5. Conclusion

CHAPTER FIVE: THE EXACT TIMING OF THE ONSET OF THE FERTILITY TRANSITION

5.1. Introduction
5.2. Decline in Overall Fertility
5.3. Changes in Nuptiality
   5.3.1. Trends in Age at Marriage
   5.3.2. Trends in Proportion Married
   5.3.2. Contribution of Nuptiality Change to the Change in Overall Fertility
5.4. Marital Fertility Transition
   5.4.1. Initiation of the Marital Fertility Decline
   5.4.2. Contribution of Marital Fertility Change
to the Change in Overall Fertility
5.5. Conclusion

CHAPTER SIX: THE INFLUENCE OF THE ONSET OF MASS
EDUCATION ON FERTILITY OF THE LAST GENERATION
OF PARENTS WITHOUT MASS SCHOOLING

6.1. Introduction
6.2. Nature and Structure of the Society
    at the Onset of Mass Education
6.3. The Onset of Fertility Control
    6.3.1. Spatial Distribution of Fertility Control
    6.3.2. Ethnic Differentials in Fertility Control
    6.3.3. Religious Differentials in Fertility Control
    6.3.4. Urban-rural Differentials in Fertility Control
    6.3.5. Educational Differentials in Fertility Control
6.4. Major Events During the Period between the
    Onset of Mass Education and the Onset of
    the Fertility Transition
    6.4.1. Mortality Decline
    6.4.2. National Language Issue
    6.4.3. Limited Land
    6.4.4. Drought
    6.4.5. Modern Demonstration Effect
6.5. The Impact of the Schooling on the Family
    6.5.1. Reduction of the Child's
            Potential for Work Inside and
            Outside the Home
    6.5.2. Increased Cost of Children
    6.5.3. Creation of Dependency both
            Within the Family and Within the
            Society
6.6. Means of Fertility Control
6.7. Conclusion

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE IMPACT OF EDUCATION ON
FERTILITY OF THE FIRST GENERATION WITH
MASS SCHOOLING

7.1. Introduction
7.2. Starting Behaviour of Fertility
    7.2.1. Age at First Marriage
    7.2.2. Age at First Birth
(a). Pre-marital Conceptions
(b). Long Interval before First Birth
7.3. Birth Spacing Behaviour
7.4. Stopping Fertility Behaviour
7.5. Relative Impact of 'Starting, Spacing, and Stopping Fertility Behaviour'
7.6. Why Did the First Generation With Mass Schooling Act Differently?
7.6.1. Schooling Sped Up Cultural Change and Created a New Culture
7.6.2. Schools Served as a Major Instrument for Propagating Western Middle Class Values
7.6.3. Improvement in Female Education
7.6.4. Employment Expectation and Increased Unemployment
7.6.5. Delayed Marriage
7.6.6. Early First Birth
7.6.7. Fertility Decision Making
7.6.8. Influence of the Government
7.7. Conclusion

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE IMPACT OF EDUCATION ON FERTILITY OF THE SECOND GENERATION WITH MASS SCHOOLING

8.1. Introduction
8.2. Starting Pattern of Fertility
8.2.1. Age at First Marriage
8.2.1.1. Why the Second Generation With Mass Schooling Did Not Postpone Their Marriage Further
(a). The availability of Mates
(b). Increased Employment Opportunities after 1977
(c). Changes in Nature of Marriage
(1). Type of Marriage
(2). Decline in Dowry Giving
8.2.2. Age at First Birth
8.2.2.1. Sources of Error
8.2.2.2. Trends in Age at First Births Across Subgroups of the Population
8.2.2.3. Different Timings of Marriage and Fecundability
8.2.2.4. Incidence of Pre-marital Conceptions
8.2.2.5. The Influence of the Family Planning Programme after 1979
8.3. Birth Spacing
  8.3.1. Effect of Child Mortality
  8.3.2. Effect of Breastfeeding

8.4. Limiting Childbearing

8.5. Societal Change and Fertility Decline
  in the Second Generation with Mass Schooling
  8.5.1. The Perceived Rise in the Cost
  of Living and Childrearing
  8.5.2. Market Penetration and Consumer Aspirations
  8.5.3. Increased Educational Costs and Aspirations
  8.5.4. Reproductive Decision Making

8.6. The Influence of Organised Family Planning Efforts

8.7. Conclusion

CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION; Toward an Understanding of
the Influence of Education on the Fertility
Transition in Sri Lanka

9.1. Introduction

9.2. Achievement of the Study Objectives

9.3. Theoretical Implications

9.4. Methodological Implications

9.5. Policy Implications

9.6. Future Research Directions

9.7. Conclusion

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: Cohort Parity Analysis: Statistical
Estimates of Fertility Control

APPENDIX II: The McDonald Equation

APPENDIX III: Mean, Median and Modal Values of
Age at Marriage and Age at First
Birth for the Women who Married
Before Truncated Ages(27 to 31
Years) According to Educational
Level and Generation

BIBLIOGRAPHY
ABSTRACT

The main objective of the present study is to explore the influence of education on the onset of the fertility transition in Sri Lanka and its relationship with subsequent fertility change. This study used Caldwell's 'mass education-fertility transition thesis' as its theoretical framework since it explicitly links education with the onset of the fertility transition. Caldwell's thesis seems relevant to Sri Lanka since it was a British colony for about 150 years and was heavily influenced by the existence of long history of the English-model formal education system. Unlike previous studies of fertility in Sri Lanka which were largely concentrated on post-transitional fertility differentials, this study has attempted to explain the onset of the fertility transition by examining the nature of the pre-transition fertility regime and conditions leading to a destabilisation of this regime. Three generations who contributed to the onset of the fertility transition and its continuance were identified and defined in terms of the onset of mass education: the last generation of parents without mass schooling, the first generation with mass schooling and the second generation with mass schooling. An investigation was made to understand the starting, spacing and stopping behaviour of fertility in these generations. This analysis also differs from earlier studies of Sri Lankan fertility because it has not only used existing fertility theory to explain the education-fertility transition relationship but also systematically tested that theory and suggested some amplification and modification to the theory on the basis of Sri Lankan experience. The analysis involved integrating nationally representative sample survey data with micro-level information gathered in small area sample surveys, as well as other sources including historical and contemporary literature and official statistics. The analysis carried out in the study contributed to the existing theory of fertility transition and methods of fertility analysis in several ways. It has a number of important policy implications which will be useful not only in Sri Lanka but also to policy makers and planners in other developing countries. Therefore, the present study has wide applicability for other developing countries attempting to develop appropriate population policies and to understand the process of fertility transition.