

Exploring the Causes of Recent Stalling of Fertility in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Without any remarkable improvement in socio-economic and health indicators, Bangladesh has been experiencing remarkable decline in fertility that has declined from 6.3 births in 1975 to 3.3 births in 1993 and since then it has remained almost unchanged at a high level of about three births per women in recent years, despite the increased use of contraception. During the same period, the contraceptive prevalence rate has increased consistently from 8 percent in 1975 to 58 percent. The increased use of contraception and changes in other proximate determinants of fertility since 1993 shows no visible impact on fertility reduction that raise many questions about the efficacy of the family planning programme and the roles of the determinants of fertility in Bangladesh.

This paper explores possible explanations of recent stalling of fertility level in Bangladesh from different perspectives, such as analyzing regional differentials, examining role of proximate determinants, analyzing birth intervals during the recent past, examining the roles of quantum and tempo effects, using multivariate analysis of parity progression and evaluating the potential role of population momentum.

The data for the study comes from a series of nationally representative surveys over the period of 1975 to 2004. The analysis indicates that the fertility has been ceased to decline in recent years temporarily due to tempo effect of the high fertility in the past and in general the declining trend in fertility is underway. The most interesting fact revealed from the analysis that there is a link between the desired number of children and the child survival as a whole. The fertility is ceased to decline, with a rather slight increase in the most successful regions, irrespective of the increase in CPR, which is observed to be attributed mainly to the slow decline in child mortality, relative to increase in CPR. In other words, the decline of fertility is ceased when it reaches near replacement level. The analysis of the proximate determinants of fertility suggests that the fall in fertility is consistent with the underlying trends in most important proximate determinants of fertility. Until early 1990s postpartum lactational infecundability was the most important and strongest fertility reducing factor in Bangladesh, but in recent years its fertility-inhibiting effect is gradually decreasing owing to the declining trend in the lactational infecundability period. The analysis reveals that although the fertility reducing effect of the marriage pattern is increasing but its effect is offsetted by the declining trend in lactational infecundability period.

This paper suggests that without improvement in socio-economic condition of women, age at marriage, child survival and change in fertility preferences, it would be difficult to achieve replacement level fertility in Bangladesh in near future.

