

Determinants of preferred birth intervals in developing countries

Background

This study will look at the socio-economic factors associated with women's preferred birth intervals across five DHS countries: Indonesia, Kenya, Morocco, Nepal and Peru. The length of the space between births is of importance for various reasons. Birth intervals are a major determinant of rates of fertility, as well as of parental investment in children (sons versus daughters). Further, a review of the literature shows that the interval between births has important implications for maternal and child morbidity and mortality, as well as that of siblings (for e.g., Rutstein, Johnson, Conde-Agudelo, 2004). While studies have found that socio-economic status of mothers are associated with actual birth intervals (for example, Upadhyay and Hindin, 2005), not enough is known about the factors associated with the preferences of individuals to space their births. Individual's fertility intentions might be a better indicator of parental investment, as well as for unmet need for contraception. Given current circumstances (sex composition of living children, employment, gender status) what might women's preferences be? This study will first describe the distribution of respondents' current preferences and, second, explore the relationships between women's socio-economic characteristics and their preferences for spacing.

Data and methods

The Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data are uniquely suitable for a comparison of birth intervals across countries. Recent data are available for various developing countries, and the standard format of the questionnaires allow for

comparability. Indonesia (2003), Kenya (2003), Morocco (2003), Nepal (2001) and Peru (2000) have been selected for regional and cultural variation.

Given that some of the women might be pregnant at the time of the survey, there are two different groups that will be analyzed separately. Respondents were asked if they would like to have any more births, and if so, when. Those who were pregnant at the time of the interview were asked to state the time in years, and in months after which they would like to have their next child. This interval is considered to be a true preferred interval since the respondent's preference is clear. The preferred interval for respondents who would like another child but were not pregnant at the time of the survey is an open one because it is calculated from the period of the birth of their last child to their preferred date for their next child. It is expected that the preferred birth intervals of women would vary by their socio-economic status, as well as by their country.

Bivariate and multivariate relationships between preferred birth intervals for the two groups will be presented by their age, education, employment, region (rural/urban), union status, age structure, sex composition of children, death of any children, health and nutrition (BMI), empowerment status, as well as the wealth quintile of their households.

References:

Rutstein, S., Johnson, K. and Conde-Agudelo, A. (2004) Systematic literature review and meta-analysis of the relationship between interpregnancy or interbirth intervals and infant and child mortality. Report prepared for the Catalyst Consortium: Washington, DC.