

The Kenya Stall

Charles F. Westoff and Anne R. Cross

Three statistics from the Kenya 2003 Demographic and Health Survey have alarmed the family planning and population community:

- ♦ The lack of further increases in contraceptive prevalence (since 1998);
- ♦ The absence of any further decline in fertility;
- ♦ A reversal of the trend toward preferences for fewer children.

Contraceptive Prevalence

Among all women in the sample, there has been no change in the level of contraceptive use in the population: 29.5 percent in 2003 and 29.9 percent in 1998. The prevalence of modern methods is 23.6 percent at both times. Among currently married women, overall use is up but only slightly from 39.0 to 41.0 percent while, in contrast, among unmarried sexually active women, a substantial increase in use is evident – from 46.5 to 54.4 percent.

There is a clear change in the types of methods used, a change that began a decade earlier (1993). The use of the pill, sterilization and the IUD collectively has declined, while the use of injectables and implants has increased. Condom use has remained very low among married women but has increased significantly among the unmarried. The use of traditional methods has changed little.

The change in contraceptive prevalence appears to be quite different in the various provinces. In Nairobi and Nyanza, there is an actual decline in prevalence while in Central, Eastern and Western provinces, increases are evident. In the remaining two provinces – Coast and Rift Valley, there is a definite stall, at least in the use of modern methods.

There has also been a significant increase in the proportion of births that are unwanted. An analysis of the relative importance of nonuse and of contraceptive failure is planned. The trend by education shows a significant decline in use among women with no education, no change in the two primary school categories, but an increase in use at the Secondary + level.

While problems of supply and availability of contraceptives may be part of the explanation for the stall and for the changes in the contraceptive mix, changes in the number of children desired seem to be playing an important role.

Fertility Preferences

The percentage of married women who say they want no more children has increased from 40 to 45 percent in the last five years. This unexpected increase is evident at each parity although the term “stall” is more appropriate at several parities. These changes follow a virtually uninterrupted decline in this preference since 1989.

The interruption of this trend is evident in all of the provinces and in both urban and rural populations. The reversal is particularly sharp among women with no education where it drops from 59 percent wanting no more children in 1998 to 46 percent in 2003. More moderate reversals appear for women in the primary school categories while among those with some secondary or more years of schooling, the earlier trend continues though at a slower pace.

The trend in the Wanted Total Fertility Rate shows this educational effect very clearly. Overall, there is a complete stall with the WTFR unchanged at 3.5 births per woman (estimated over the three years preceding each survey). However, among the women with no education, the WTFR increased from 4.4 in 1998 to 5.5 in 2003. It also increased for women at the Incomplete Primary level (from 3.7 to 4.2) but shows no change at 3.5 in the Completed Primary category. And, like the trend of the proportion who want no more children, the WTFR continues a downward trend from 2.8 to 2.3 births in the Secondary + category.

For whatever reasons, the change in fertility preferences in Kenya over this recent five-year period is quite different across the educational strata.

Total Fertility

The overall level of fertility has remained essentially the same in the three years prior to 2003 compared with the 1996-98 period. In fact, a slight increase from 4.7 to 4.8 may have occurred. When examined by level of education, most of the changes in fertility are driven by changes in the wanted component. As described above, in the No Education category the increase of 1.1 births in the Wanted Total Fertility Rate accounts for the overall increase of 0.9 births in the TFR, from 5.8 to 6.7. The unwanted birth component of the fertility rates shows little change over the five years.

Discussion

There is little doubt that there has been a significant interruption by 2003 of well-established fertility and family planning trends in Kenya. Fertility has not continued its decline except among the most educated; contraceptive prevalence has stalled; and perhaps most perplexing, there has been a significant reversal in fertility preferences. These changes appear to cut across provinces and rural and urban areas. Educational level does differentiate the trends in fertility preferences and in contraceptive prevalence. The possible connections between contraceptive supplies and motivations to control fertility will have to await further analysis. The significance of AIDS for these changes will also be investigated. It may be coincidental, but the two provinces with the highest HIV prevalence rates (Nyanza and Nairobi) are also the two with the largest declines in contraceptive prevalence. Also, the role of the recent increase in child mortality will be studied in connection with the changes in reproductive intentions.