# CAUSES OF HIGH FERTILITY IN WESTERN UGANDA Jennifer Kasabiiti Asiimwe

#### Introduction

Fertility rates in other developing regions have continuously declined, except sub-Saharan Africa, with the fastest population growth (5.2 children per woman – WDI, 2004); this is so, despite high mortality levels due to AIDS pandemics, decline in per capita income and the relatively high contraceptive availability and knowledge. This pattern of events has consequently, reduced productivity and undermined the welfare of the people in the small family units and nations at large, the result of which is unproductive human resource, environmental degradation, and high disease burden distorting the benefits that would have come through the Millennium Development Goals.

The reasons for high fertility rates in Uganda currently the 5<sup>th</sup> highest() 6.9 in the world (world data, 2005) are attributed to various social economic, political and cultural perspectives. Review of Microeconomic studies (Chytilová 2007, et al) shows causes of high fertility as arising mainly from two Identifiable approaches, the unmet need; due to lack of contraceptives (Robey, Rutstein and Morris, 1993; Westoff and Bankole, 2000) and the desired fertility due to peoples' preference for big families (Easterlin, 1975; Pritchet, 1994; Becker, 1990), determined by the net economic benefits of having many children (Gille, 1985; Merrick, 2002; Becker, 1991), poor health environment (Sachs, 2004; Gille, 1985), community institutions that favour childbearing (Caldwell and Caldwell, 1987, Makinwa-Adebusoye, 2001), and the unequal position of women (Mason and Taj, 1987).

#### Statement of the problem

Many explanatory studies have especially been carried out on the causes of high fertility, in LDCs but a few have explained the major obstacles to small family size as arising from the social economic, cultural and political constraints even where such studies have been carried out, In Uganda, they have focused on the central region where effects of urbanization could have offset the salient findings. This study therefore is setting out to examine the origins of high fertility in western Uganda based on the majority rural agrarian population, with limited impact of the city urbanization to provide benchmark quantified information for the attainment of the MDGs

# **Objectives of the study**

The main aim of this study is to quantify causes of high fertility rates in western Uganda. For a systematic body of knowledge currently lacking, upon which future population policies can be based for sustainable development. More specifically, the study was focus on;

- 1. Identifying the causes of high fertility rates by origin
- 2. Examining, the most frequent causes of high fertility rates
- 3. Comparing causes of fertility by unmet needs and desired fertility
- 4. Examining the role of physiological variables on high fertility levels

#### **Justification of the study**

Current findings show a decline in fertility levels to an average of 6.1 in Uganda (UDHS 2006), however, fertility rates are still highest in rural areas 7.1. The study is therefore based on rural western Uganda. About 89% of the population of Uganda is rural and agrarian to quantify the findings in line with the origin (cultural social, economic, political perspectives) in order to provide a balanced profile for future intervention in achievement of the millennium development goals.

#### Theoretic framework

Review of related literature has shown causes of high fertility levels as a result of intermediate factors such as the cultural, family structure and function, economic and social factors including urban -rural differences, education status, and occupational groups, growing employment levels of women, religious and ethnical consideration. A relation ship between these factors and the 3 identifiable phases of reproductive process; sexual intercourse, conception and parturition are anticipated to significantly contribute to high fertility in western Uganda and are a focus of this study.

## **Data and Analysis**

The study was based in western Uganda. In the districts of Rukungiri and Kanugu. Both qualitative and quantitive methods of data collection were used. The study covered the counties of kinkizi, Rujumbura and Rubabo(Runkungiri District). Six random numbers in range of 0-100 two for each country were generated by computer. Using accumulative distributions, the random numbers were assigned to the parishes in which they fell.

Table 1 shows area of study

District	County	Subcounty	Parish
Kanugu	Kinkizi	Kihiihi	Rwanga
		Kirima	Rutugunda
Rukungiri	Rubabo	Kebisoni	Kigiiro
			Nyeibingo
		Nyarushanje	Ibanda
			Ndago

Analysis was done at three levels, univariate, bivariate examining the relationship between two selected variables and the net effect of explanatory variables on levels of fertlity. Qualitative findings were also incorporated.

# **Study Hypotheiss**

- In most rural parts of western uganda, causes of high fertility are mainly social cultural factors
- The overriding reasons for high fertility in western Uganda as a whole, are economical
- Higher education and income levels, reduce fertility in Households
- Communities rather than the household, strongly influence family size
- Fertility is highest in rural areas
- Agricultural farmers, produce more than other forms of employments
- High fertility is as a result of unmet needs, such as lack of contraceptives
- Men prefer more children than women
- Women have no say on how many children to bear
- Quantity as opposed to quality of children is preferred.

#### Results and discussion

## Fertility in Rural areas

According to the UDHS 2006, Total fertility rate for rural areas is 7.1, higher than the urban, 4.4 (UDHS 2006). In the selected two districts of western Uganda, it was found that 96.7% are rural dwellers, with a population growth rate of 2.51% (UBOS 2001) lower than the national figure of 3.3% and 49.9% of the population is aged 49.9%. The total fertility rate is 8.08 ranked the fourth highest. Due to high risk births, anaemia and inaccessibility to medical services, maternal mortality rates are equally high 700 per 100,000 compared to the national figures, 435 per 100,000

# Social/Cultural Reasons for high fertility

Most African communities with little variations are polygamous, rural, mostly patriarchal give great perpetuation to lineage and the role of the extended family with heavy family networks makes decisions concerning childbirth, a community issue the consequence of which has been, large, impoverished, illiterate and often unhealthy families

A great deal of importance is attached to big families, this been attributed to relatively lower levels of contraceptive use. Giving raise to high fertility levels. Also due to higher mortality rates in Africa, it is deemed necessary to have more children in order to ensure that some of them was survive, and to give their parents a better chance for security in their old age. Perhaps the overriding reason for high fertility in this perspective is the fact that, in many African societies, people are looked down upon if they don't have children.

Despite evidence from the study on the disadvantages of big families, The total fertility rate is still high due to the strong desire to have many children. Evident in many African setting.

Findings from the study show that out of a total 423 interviewed, 43.5% agree that children are a source of labour, 86.3 % agree that it is expensive to maintain many children, 50.6 % disagree that family planning is against God's word and 75.9% agree that the quality of children is affected by large families, while the majority, 70.2% agree that mother's education affects children's health

#### **Economy and fertility**

In most African communities, agriculture being the basic form of activity, accounting for over 80%, Children's labor is very important to their families and the cost of raising children is lower than the value of their labor and so this has boosted a high fertility rate especially among the rural of 7.1 children per woman in Uganda. This has given rise to a population that is predominatly rural highest in the southern regions of the country.

# Unmet family planning needv

Uganda's population growth is growing at a high rate, 3.37% Although the percentage for unmet need for child spacing as a component of family planning in south western Uganda is among the lowest in the country 21.1 (UDHS 2006),

The study found out, contraceptives are sometimes not used even where available, just because, children are much treasured (50.4%) while about 17.8% said they could not access family planning. This therefore shows that accessibility to family planning has a minimal impact to the total fertility rate.

Table 2 Unmet family planning need and fertility

Reason for none use	Frequency	Percentage
Still want children	122	50.4
FP not accessible	43	17.8
Other reasons		31.8
Total	242	100

# **Education and high fertility**

Reviewed studies show the existence of an inverse relationship between women's education to fertility. There is a negative association between the number of years a girl spends in school and her childbearing as an adult. Education has a direct effect on fertility through the knowledge, skills, and behaviors imparted through schooling that guide childbearing and childcare practices in adulthood (Caldwell 1980, 1982; Cleland and van Ginneken 1988; Dexter, LeVine, and Velasco 1998; Diamond, Newby, and Varle 1999; LeVine et al. 1991). Education also affects fertility through a number of indirect pathways by delaying the age at first marriage and increasing the practice and efficacy of contraception (Cochrane 1979; Jejeebhoy 1995; Lesthaeghe et al

Table 3shows the role of education on fertility level

LEVEL	0-4 CHILDREN %	5-9 CHILDREN %	10 ABOVE %
No school	19.1	39	34.5
Post primary	2.2	4.7	0
Post Secondary	6.9	8.1	0

From the findings, the highest percentage 34.5% of respondents for 10 children and above, was among the no school category, although there is a contradiction among the post secondary desiring more children 8.1% for 5-9 children as compared to 6.9% for 0-4 children. This could be eplained be the high mortality in the region that necessitates desire for more children at a later stage.

# Age at first marriage

The study found out that, 70% of spouses of house holds got married before the age of 20 and that the average age at marriage is 16. About 80.1% of the respondents were married compared to 4.5 un-married; also, the figures show that of those, approximately 60% is among the reproductive age, this explains the high fertility levels in the region.

# **Conclusions**

Despite the low growth rate in the western region (2.51), the total fertility rate for the western Uganda remains fourth highest in country, approximately 8.1% This is mainly due to the importance/prestige attached to having many children and has little to do with the availablity of accessing contraceptives or the many challenges of having many children.

Due to the high spread poverty in the rural areas, children are desired for the labour they provide on farms, and also the bride price for the girl children that makes having many children an attractive venture

#### Recommendation

Efforts to curtail and reduce the fertility in the region, should forcus on sensitisation of the masses on the need for smaller families, provide alternative ways such as schooling, to reduce the reproductive time for girls and establishments of alternative forms of employment as a mechanism against heavy reliance on agriculture.

# Reference

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