

Gender and Fertility Patterns for Men and Women in Guatemala, 2002

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The objective of this analysis is to explore gender difference in fertility achievements, intentions and intermediate determinants in a nationally representative sample in a Latin American setting.

Gender equity has recently been pointed out as an important factor in fertility transitions (McDonald, P. Population and Development Review, September 2000). Gender equity leads to lower fertility in a high fertility context but also prevents very low fertility in a low fertility context. McDonald argues that lowest-low fertility is a product of poor gender equity in societies where women have access to participation in economic, social and political institutions but are still expected to shoulder the greater burden for childrearing. Lowest-low fertility results from women choosing to compromise reproduction.

Many studies have attempted to include community level indicators of gender equity as a predictor of fertility. We can look at equity in social and political institutions and with respect to reproductive rights but to consider fertility and reproductive behaviors we need to consider the values of men and women making the decisions. McDonald points out that none have considered the impact of lower fertility on the lives of women as a component of the fertility transition.

We consider that the lower fertility may not be the only component that has a positive effect on women's lives but also that similarities in men and women's reproduction may be an important aspect of gender equity. The woman may be better supported by a spouse who shares her fertility pattern because he will be similar in age and will not have outside partners. Similar fertility patterns for men and women may indicate greater gender equity in reproduction. Where there is greater gender equity, men's lives change as well as women's.

We can use gender equity to model fertility but we can also learn quite a bit about gender through the comparison of men and women's fertility patterns. What can sex differences in fertility tell us about men and women's gendered experiences with reproduction?

We explore these ideas with data from the 2002 National Maternal and Child Health Survey of Guatemala, comprising a female sample of 9,155 respondents 15-49 years of age and a male sample of 2,538 respondents 15-59 years of age.

Preliminary analysis of the data produced the age-specific fertility patterns shown in the attached graphs. These patterns do suggest a convergence of female and male fertility patterns at higher levels of education. The observation of greater similarity in male and female patterns among the urban compared to the rural population and the ladino compared to the indigenous population may simply be a reflection of the educational

distribution in these groups and requires further analysis. Additionally, the data sets contain variables that measure gender role attitudes and a composite of these variables will be included in a multivariate model for the final analysis.

While the focus of the analysis is the relation between gender equity and male and female fertility patterns, this study will also explore competing explanations for the fertility patterns, such as the effect of age at first birth and the first birth interval on age-specific fertility.

(SIX FIGURES FOLLOW)





