

Contribution of Family Planning Effort to Demographic and Macroeconomic Outcomes in High Fertility Countries: A Longitudinal Study

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Abstract : In most studies relating change in fertility to potentially causal factors (such as girls' educational attainment, infant mortality or urbanization), the presence or nature of family planning efforts are not examined, potentially misattributing their contributions. Modest impacts of voluntary family planning programs on fertility change have been claimed, citing the near-term effects of historical quasi-experimental projects - notably in Bangladesh and in Ghana - where recipients and non-recipients could be contrasted. By their nature, such experiments lacked the wider cultural impacts of national programs. Concurrently, analyses relating population growth with economic advancement have been equivocal, discrediting previous widespread concern which prevailed before the 1980s. This neutral view has been revised more recently with demographic dividend theory crediting higher working-age proportion with some economic stimulus if supported by sufficient institutional and human capacity. In this study of country-level data, cross-country comparisons spanning six decades relate fertility decline with family planning effort, GDP per capita and female education, finding that the timing of rapid fertility decline aligns with commencement of voluntary family planning programs, while economic betterment came after substantial fertility fall. The relationship between fertility and primary education completion was inconsistent, with potential channels of causation operating in both directions. GDP per capita was unrelated to rate of fertility decline, but total fertility rates above three children per woman strongly impeded enrichment. By synchronizing countries with respect to their fertility transition, strong relationships are revealed which suggest lower fertility enables economic betterment, rather than the other way around. These results argue in favour of elevating voluntary family planning as a development priority.

Keywords : economic advance, family planning effort, fertility decline, population growth rate

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