

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The mean number of children ever born to Malaysian women based on the 1994/95 MPFS was estimated at 3.3. Data show that fertility level has been declining among Malaysian women. Compared to previous surveys, the mean number of children ever born in 1994/1995 had declined by 8 percent from the 1984/85 MPFS and 21 percent from the 1974 MFFS.

Fertility differentials in terms of number of children ever born persisted among various sub-groups of the population. These differentials were largely attributed to differences in age structure and marital duration among the various socio-economic sub-groups. When these two demographic controls are taken into account, fertility differentials exist only between Malays and non-Malays, rural and urban residents, and East region and other regions. The differentials according to wife's work pattern showed some unexpected findings. Women who started work after marriage had 1.4 children more than those who worked before and after marriage. However, after adjusting for age and marital duration, the latter would have 0.5 child more than the former. The differentials in cumulative fertility according to wife's and husband's educational attainment, husband's occupation and family income were largely explained away by age and marital duration differences among the various socio-economic sub-groups.

Recent fertility which measures the number of children born in the five years preceding the survey was estimated at 0.8. It is interesting to note that the levels of

recent fertility were higher among better educated women as many had entered into marriage closer to the date of the survey, as compared to their lesser educated counterparts. With regards to work pattern, women who worked before marriage but did not work subsequently had the highest recent fertility due to their younger age structure. Analysis on the recent fertility shows that after controlling for age and marital duration, significant differentials can be observed among the main ethnic groups. The observed differentials among other socio-economic sub-groups of the population were rather small.

Completed fertility, which measures the number of children ever born among women aged 40-49 was estimated at 4.6. Data show that the differentials in completed fertility according to socio-economic variables correspond closely to those of cumulative fertility. Standardizing for marital duration accounts for much of the socio-economic differentials except the ethnic differentials.

Birth cohort analysis shows that fertility has declined among all the ethnic groups. Chinese experienced the greatest fertility decline in the first five years of marriage, followed by Indians and Malays. Cumulative fertility in 5-9 years of marriage among Indian women showed the greatest fertility decline the Malays and Chinese.

The trend in reproduction began to diverge after 10 years of marriage. The increment in cumulative fertility between the marital duration of 5-9 years and 10-19 years of marriage differed among the ethnic groups. Except for the birth cohort of 1961-1965, Chinese women had the lowest increase of 0.5 child in cumulative fertility after 10 years and 0.2 to 0.4 child after 15 years. Malay women had the highest increment in

cumulative fertility of about 1 child after 10 years of marriage, and 0.7 to 0.9 child after 15 years of marriage. Regardless of their marital duration, there had been a consistent decline in cumulative fertility among Indian women. Hence, it was apparent the different timing in childbearing termination contributed to the fertility differential among the three main ethnic groups. At the time of the survey, the situation was such that Malay women had the highest cumulative fertility after 20 years of marriage, followed by Indians and Chinese.

The trend and rate of decline in the tempo of childbearing strongly suggest that cumulative fertility among Indian women might fall below those of the Chinese if the current trend persists. Nor Haliza (2000) showed that among better educated women, Indians experienced the steepest rise in age at first marriage, unlike Chinese women who showed more gradual increase. Given the trend in the rise in the age at first marriage, if more (married) Indian women continue to terminate childbearing early, then their cumulative fertility is likely to fall below those of Chinese women in the future.

It is interesting to note that the level of fertility among Chinese women of the birth cohort of 1961-1965 who had been married for at least 10-14 years was comparable to those of the Malays and Indians of corresponding birth cohort and marital duration, dispelling the popularly held notion of much lower fertility among married Chinese women. The much lower fertility among Chinese and Indian women compared to the Malay women reported in the Vital statistics can be attributed to marriage postponement and non-marriage. In view of this, it would probably be useful to find out the "inhibiting effects" of higher education on marriage among the different ethnic

groups. At the multivariate level, it was shown that ethnicity exerted a strong independent influence on the number of children ever born, even after age and age at first marriage were taken into account.

Of all socio-economic variables under study, education acts on fertility with a time lag -- its effects are felt at a later stage of marriage. Past studies showed that education tends to depress fertility by delaying age at first marriage. However, given the fact that women who married at a later age at first marriage were more likely to opt for immediate childbearing, the delaying effects of higher education on early marital fertility had not been quite significant among women who had upper secondary or higher education, as shown in Chapter 3. The cumulative fertility up to 10 years of marriage declined in the small range of 0.3 to 0.4 child across the birth cohorts among all educational levels.

For longer duration of marriage, the effect of educational attainment on fertility differed widely in both direction and magnitude. Between the birth cohort before 1950 and birth cohort of 1955-1960, fertility decline was observed among women with primary or no formal education but the reverse was true among those with higher education. Among women with at least a secondary education, the cumulative fertility in the 15-19 years of marriage had in fact been increasing gradually, showing the catching up effects with their less educated counterparts. This unexpected finding in the education-fertility relationship would be interesting to track in future research. More effort could be fruitfully expended in this direction by expanding the analysis to consider the effects of family planning programs. For instance, Entwisle and Mason (1985) found that the active promotion of family planning in more developed countries

hastens the diffusion of birth control to the less educated, who are assumed to prefer smaller families, and this has reduced fertility divergence. In less developed countries, organized family planning elicits response only among the better educated.

It is interesting to note that the observed importance of both wife's and husband's education on number of children ever born practically disappears after adjusting for age and age at first marriage. This may be explained by the well-documented fact that higher education tends to delay age at first marriage, which is negatively correlated with fertility. For women who first married at the age of 19 and above and who had been married for 10-14 years at the time of the interview, the negative effect on fertility was apparent. Even after adjusting for marital duration, the negative effect of age at first marriage on fertility remains significant. For each three-year advancement in age at first marriage, there was an associated decline of 0.3 child in the mean number of children ever born. The effect of husband's education on fertility may largely be accounted by wife's education due to the tendency of better educated women to marry their equal. It also operates through age at first marriage as it usually takes a joint decision from both partners to decide when to tie the knot, settle down and start a family.

Work pattern is another variable deserving of further study. The burden of childbearing falls more heavily on the wife compared to the husband and this conflicts more strongly with alternative use of time, especially paid employment outside the home.

At the bivariate level, it was shown that the addition of demographic controls such as age and marital duration reverses the direction of differentials according to work pattern. The relationship between work and fertility over a woman's life-cycle is obviously not static and might differ between the short term and long term (see Engarcia and Herrin, 1984). In a broad framework, current work should be compared to recent fertility whereas past work experience is to be compared with cumulative fertility, which would be too complicated to carry out in view of the scope of this study. The analysis requires precise timing of women's work during her childbearing period. In this regard, the 1994/95 MPFS has collected data relating to timing of work at various stages in a woman's life. More fruitful research effort could be expended in this direction to clarify the direction and magnitude of the work-fertility pattern and provide much insight for policy makers.

Work experience also affects fertility through age at first marriage as can be observed by the attenuation of work pattern effect with the inclusion of age at first marriage at the multivariate level. Work pattern also affects a woman's view on fertility regulation behavior. Policy makers should consider policy thrusts in the context of work place and acknowledge the important role of colleagues in terms of disseminating information on contraceptive use. Web-sites for working mothers which support and propagate good family values and disseminate proper upbringing of children at various stages of their growth should be considered.

It was shown that at the multivariate level, the net effects of place of residence, husband's occupation and family income on fertility would become negligible with the inclusion of age and age at first marriage. This analysis showed that women's demographic characteristics have emerged to be more important than socio-economic characteristics. In future research, proper control of such demographic variables are necessary.

The present study has described and examined the fertility trends and differentials according to seven socio-economic factors chosen based on past research findings. This set of variables used is clearly associated with fertility difference but could not provide a better understanding of the complex process of reproduction behavior. Full analysis would require the researcher to combine the insights gained from the individual level study with proximate determinants and those derived from macro models of change. It must be recognized that family and community level influences such as values held regarding desired family size, and pressure from relations to have children should be included in future research.