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An Investigation of Declining Marriages in Post-Apartheid South Africa, 1995-2006

In South Africa, both researchers and policymakers have been interested in the performance of post-apartheid trends. Availability of nationally representative cross-sectional datasets has sparked an increasing interest in tracking the economy, survey by survey, to capture and study the trends of interest. This study focuses on marriage trends. Marriage rates for African (indigenous black) South African women of working age (between 15 and 59) declined from 38.7 percent in 1995 to 31.4 percent in 2004. This phenomenal change in marriage patterns sparked interest in the current research, especially because the decline was concentrated in the ages 25 to 34 and hence suggested a generational shift in marriage behavior.

The broad objective of the study is to investigate declining marriages in the post-apartheid South Africa. The specific objectives are threefold. First, we use the independent surveys from 1995 to 2006 and employ the Age-Period-Cohort Model to disentangle marriage trends into age, period, and cohort effects to determine whether the change in marital patterns observed in the post-apartheid period is a real shift in marital behavior and not just a trend driven by change in sampling designs and erratic fluctuations.

Having established that the change in marriage rates indeed demonstrates a generational change in marital behavior, the second objective focuses on the determinants of women's marriage decisions. To this end, we account for the interdependence between female labor force participation and marriage decisions by estimating simultaneous equation models using the two-step procedure, which is precisely Maddala's model 6 (1983, page 246), for each of the years.

The third objective begs for an explanation of the trend towards fewer marriages. The analysis from the previous objective signifies that age, education, labor market status, availability of potential partners, and location where one stays are all important factors in a woman's marriage decision. However, samples drawn from the population at different points in time likely lead to observations that are not identically distributed. The population may have different distributions in variables across time. Thus, simply comparing estimated coefficients from different cross-sections does not clarify whether marriage decline is a result of change in coefficients (functional relationship of a model) or change in characteristics (distribution of characteristics).

The challenge lies in isolating the separate effects of the likely explanations of marriage decline. The importance of this chapter, therefore, lies in the investigation of the observable behavioral relationships which might have influenced declining marriages in the post-apartheid South Africa.

We adopt a variant of the Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition technique (independently Oaxaca, 1973, and Blinder, 1973), which accounts for the simultaneous equation modelling proposed by Yun (2000). The technique is widely used to identify and quantify the separate contributions of measurable characteristics to racial and gender differences in outcomes. In this study, decomposition analysis enables separation of the effect of the changing coefficients from the changing characteristics on the decline in marriages. In addition, it enables us to establish the factors that mostly contribute to the declining marriages. The results from this analysis are not yet available.

Country where the research will take place

South Africa

How does the research describe the impact of population/reproductive health on poverty reduction and/or economic growth?

Focusing on the relationship between women's marriage and labor force participation decisions, it appears that a tradeoff between the two decisions is likely. An economically active woman is less likely to be married. However, being economically active also includes the unemployed and in some cases, the employed women may be in inferior and low-paying jobs. As marriages decline, one of the family alternatives that may emerge is single motherhood. Single motherhood is correlated with a wide range of social ills

including stigma, teenage/early pregnancy, high school dropout rates, lack of father role model, and juvenile delinquency, all of which are likely to lead into poverty.

How will the research address a policy need, and what kind of policy lesson is expected?

What makes this research important is that the decline in marriage is linked to social ills and hence is of some community concern. As controversial as it is, marriage is fundamental and foundational. Policy may focus on how to accommodate the family alternatives that results from nonmarriage behavior, such as cohabitation and single motherhood. Among other ways, the government may intervene by ensuring that single mothers and their children do not suffer from the consequences of their family type, as well as from the absence of the father in the household.

Methods used

The Age-Period-Cohort model is used to disentangle age, period, and cohort effects from the marriage trends in

order to establish whether the observed decline in marriage rates is a real decline rather than one driven by change in sampling designs.

Two-step procedure proposed by Maddala (1983) is used to establish the determinants of women's marriage decisions, while taking into account the simultaneity of the marriage and labor force participation decisions.

A variant of the Blinder-Oaxaca (independently Blinder, 1973, and Oaxaca, 1973) decomposition technique proposed by Yun (2000) is applied in the simultaneous equations framework to identify and quantify the separate contributions of measurable characteristics to the declining marriage rates.

Data used

Data are from nationally representative cross-sectional household surveys known as the October Household Surveys (1995 to 1999) and the Labor Force Surveys (2000 to 2006). The working sample constitutes African (indigenous black) women in the prime ages of 15 to 49 years.