

**Women's empowerment and fertility decision-making in Africa:
Does the presence of in-laws make a difference?**

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Prior studies on fertility decision-making have revolved around the influence of extended family networks (Davis and Blake, 1965; Cain, 1982; Caldwell, 1987). Caldwell (1987) for instance states that extended family networks contribute to the persistence of high fertility as the older generation exerts considerable control over the next generation's reproductive lives. This could be due to couple's need to live up to the expectation of elders in the family and/or intergenerational continuity (Bell and Sang, 1994; Blanc et al, 1996).

During the last decade, the effect of women's empowerment and changes in the family on fertility decision-making has captured the attention of most scholars (Presser and Sen, 2000, Mason, 1987; Gage, 1995). Larsen and Hollos (2003) argue that a shift towards a nuclear family system has empowered women and increased their role in fertility decisions (see also: Hollos and Larsen, 1997; Hogan et al., 1999). The argument is that in patriarchal systems the status of women is considered to be very low which contributes to the likelihood that their reproductive decisions are made by someone else such as the husband and/or the paternal kin (Hollos and Larsen, 1997).

Some studies have proposed that even within a nuclear family setting, members of the immediate and extended family may still have considerable influence over women's fertility decisions (Dadoo, 1998). Dadoo (1998) looked at couple fertility decision-

making and found that men continue to have relative influence on women's reproductive decision-making (see also: DeRose and Ezeh, forthcoming). These studies have however mainly focused on the influence of the husband.

We argue another source of influence could be from the in-laws given marital contract in Sub-Saharan Africa still involves a wide alliance of in-laws despite nucleation. The influence of the in-laws could be deriving from couple's need to live up to the expectation of elders in the family (Bell and Sang, 1994; Blanc et al, 1996). The extent to which the presence of in-laws may influence couples fertility decisions while controlling for factors associated with empowerment of women has been less investigated in the existing literature. Therefore, in the following paper we extend the arguments of previous studies by examining whether couple's fertility decision-making is conditioned by the presence of in-laws net of the usual women's empowerment indicators.

Data:

The data we will be using for the study comes from the 1995/96 negotiating reproductive outcome study in Uganda (henceforth referred to as UNRO). The UNRO is an effort to understand the nature of negotiation within sexual unions¹ (Makerere University and Macro International, 1996). The study was conducted in two districts of Lira and Masaka. The survey population includes 1750 women aged 20-44 and 1356 of their partners, whether formally married or living together.

¹ The countries with modules that capture female empowerment are: For full module – Nicaragua, Cambodia, Haiti and Dominican republic. Adopted modules: Peru, and Cambodia. Summary modules: India, Egypt, Cambodia 1990, 95, South Africa and Zambia. Special Modules: Uganda and Philippines.

Dependent variables:

Our dependent variable is a set of indicators on couple fertility decision-making.

Independent variables:

Our primary independent variables are the presence of in-laws whether in the household or in close proximity of the couple. We control for the set of women's empowerment and household socio-economic indicators.