
Proximate Determinants of Fertility in Peninsular Malaysia

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Abstract

The continuing decline in fertility despite a contraction in contraceptive use in Peninsular Malaysia since the mid-1980s has triggered considerable interest in the reasons behind this phenomenon, such as increase in abortion, sterility, and out-of-wedlock pregnancy. Fertility decline has been attributed to rapid socioeconomic development, which can only influence fertility through the intermediate variables. Application of vital statistics, population census, and survey data of Peninsular Malaysia on Bongaarts's model vindicates that marriage postponement and contraceptive use are the 2 most important proximate determinants of fertility, but the effects are not uniform across the ethnic groups. For instance, the predicted total fertility rate for Chinese and Malays are 2.9 and 1.6, respectively, compared with the observed level of 3.0 and 1.9. Postpartum infecundability and abortion also play a part in explaining ethnic fertility differentials. The fertility inhibiting effects of these proximate determinants have significant implications on reproductive health and future population growth.

Keywords

abortion, contraceptive use, fertility, proximate determinants, marriage

Introduction

Improved socioeconomic conditions, rising age at marriage, and widespread use of contraception have brought about rapid fertility transition in many developing countries. However, the effects of these variables on the fertility level vary widely across populations. The socioeconomic correlates of fertility have been extensively researched.¹⁻³

In most traditional societies, childbearing generally takes place within marriage. Hence, the timing of marriage is closely associated with fertility level. Consequent upon educational improvement and social changes, age at marriage has been rising steadily.⁴ The pros and cons of postponement of marriage and childbearing on health and happiness are still being debated.

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