

4 Reproductive Intentions

4.1 MEASUREMENT

The ideal number of children or the number desired is aimed at measuring the social norms that govern reproduction. Although highly correlated, the reproductive intentions of women are assessed in order to represent the individual's personal attitude toward the more short-term future, an approach with more predictive utility. Does she want to have another child soon or does she wish to postpone the next birth for some time? Or does she want no more children at all? The standard DHS questions on reproductive intentions (for nonpregnant women)⁵ are:

"Now I have some questions about the future. Would you like to have (a/another) child or would you prefer not to have any (more) children?"

Respondents who replied that they would like to have another child were then asked:

"How long would you like to wait from now before the birth of (a/another) child?"⁶

Women are classified as wanting the next child soon, wanting to wait two or more years, or wanting no more children at all. There is no information on how intensely motivated the woman might be to realize such intentions.

4.2 INTERNATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN REPRODUCTIVE INTENTIONS

As is evident in the earlier comparative report for countries in DHS-I, there are clear regional differences in reproductive intentions in the countries included in DHS-II (Table 4.1). In sub-Saharan Africa, an average of 27 percent reply that they want no more children, compared with 59 percent in the other regions of the developing world. Kenya is an exception in sub-Saharan Africa, with 52 percent wanting to terminate childbearing; in the other regions, Pakistan and Paraguay show the lowest proportions in this category: 40 and 44 percent, respectively.

Conversely, the women of sub-Saharan Africa show comparatively high proportions who want their next child soon (an average of 26 percent) or who wish to delay the next birth for two years or longer (37 percent). The corresponding estimates for countries in the other regions are an average of 14 and 19 percent, respectively. The concentration of sub-Saharan African women in the spacing intention category is well known but undoubtedly reflects a weaker motivation than the desire to avoid any further childbearing.

As would be expected, the proportion of women who want no more children rises progressively with the number of children (Table 4.2). The regions differ markedly, however, in the steepness of that ascent. In the Latin American countries, there is a significant proportion of women with one child who want no more children (22 percent on average). This percentage climbs to an average of 60 percent for those with two children. In contrast, only 13 percent of sub-Saharan African women with two children wish to terminate childbearing. The most extreme case is Niger, where only 30 percent of women with six or more children say they want no more. The average for women at this parity in all of the sub-Saharan African countries included here is twice that proportion. Thus, in this region it is not until the interval between five and six or more children that half of the women, on average, wish to terminate childbearing. This halfway mark is reached sooner in Kenya, Madagascar and Zimbabwe.

The contrast between Bangladesh and Pakistan is consistent with the earlier observations. Among Bangladeshi women with three children, 80 percent want no more, compared with 36 percent in Pakistan. The curve for Bangladesh is very similar to that for Egypt, while that for Pakistan bears more resemblance to the curve for Jordan, Madagascar and Zimbabwe.

4.3 COVARIATES OF INTENTION TO TERMINATE CHILDBEARING

The association of the (standardized) proportion of women who want no more children with rural-urban residence, education and media exposure is shown in Table 4.3.

⁵ A different phrasing of these questions is used for pregnant women.

⁶ Women who have difficulty with this question are asked: "How old would you like your youngest child to be when your next child is born?"

Table 4.1 Reproductive intentions of currently married women

Percentage distribution of currently married women according to reproductive intentions, Demographic and Health Surveys, 1990-94

Country	Want a child within 2 years ^a	Want a child after 2 years	Want no more children ^b	Others ^c	Total	Number of women
Sub-Saharan Africa						
Burkina Faso	27	44	19	9	100	5,326
Cameroon	38	35	14	13	100	2,868
Ghana	17	39	34	10	100	3,204
Kenya	13	26	52	10	100	4,629
Madagascar	25	30	41	5	100	3,736
Malawi	21	37	25	16	100	3,492
Namibia	27	30	34	9	100	2,259
Niger	36	45	9	9	100	5,561
Nigeria	33	33	15	18	100	6,880
Rwanda	16	42	37	5	100	3,785
Senegal	31	39	20	10	100	4,450
Sudan	34	32	25	9	100	5,400
Tanzania	28	41	23	7	100	6,038
Zambia	27	41	24	8	100	4,457
Zimbabwe	21	36	38	5	100	3,788
Near East/North Africa						
Egypt	12	17	67	4	100	9,153
Jordan	15	26	53	6	100	6,168
Morocco	18	24	52	6	100	5,118
Turkey	10	14	70	6	100	6,270
Asia						
Bangladesh	14	24	57	5	100	8,980
Indonesia	14	25	54	7	100	21,109
Pakistan	25	18	40	17	100	6,364
Philippines	9	19	63	9	100	8,961
Latin America/Caribbean						
Bolivia	8	12	72	7	100	5,334
Colombia	13	16	64	7	100	4,449
Dominican Republic	15	17	65	3	100	4,083
Paraguay	20	29	44	8	100	3,574
Peru	8	13	72	7	100	8,741

^a Includes those who want more but are not sure of timing

^b Includes sterilized women

^c Includes those who are undecided about whether they want any more children, who have declared themselves to be infecund or who did not respond to the question

Table 4.2 Women who want no more children, by present number of children

Percentage of currently married women who want no more children, by number of living children, Demographic and Health Surveys, 1990-94

Country	Number of living children ^a							Total	
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+	Unstan- dardized	Stan- dardized ^b
Sub-Saharan Africa									
Burkina Faso	1	2	5	12	22	32	56	19	17
Cameroon	--	1	5	8	12	21	40	14	11
Ghana	1	3	17	31	48	55	79	34	31
Kenya	--	7	26	47	65	71	84	52	41
Madagascar	1	6	18	40	52	58	79	41	34
Malawi	2	6	12	18	34	45	60	25	23
Namibia	8	15	35	35	39	41	46	34	31
Niger	1	3	4	6	8	12	30	9	9
Nigeria	1	3	5	9	17	24	44	15	14
Rwanda	1	2	13	25	45	54	75	37	28
Senegal	1	1	4	9	17	28	53	20	14
Sudan	1	3	11	16	23	36	49	25	19
Tanzania	2	3	8	12	25	35	60	23	19
Zambia	1	3	8	11	24	34	62	24	18
Zimbabwe	3	6	20	31	51	61	80	38	33
Near East/North Africa									
Egypt	2	9	59	81	89	91	93	67	60
Jordan	2	6	24	38	54	67	79	53	36
Morocco	1	7	29	52	67	79	88	52	43
Turkey	2	21	81	91	91	93	91	70	69
Asia									
Bangladesh	3	9	58	80	86	91	85	57	58
Indonesia	6	12	51	73	81	86	90	54	56
Pakistan	2	4	17	36	52	63	73	40	32
Philippines	1	14	49	75	84	86	89	63	56
Latin America/Caribbean									
Bolivia	8	31	69	83	89	90	90	72	66
Colombia	3	23	62	86	89	94	92	64	64
Dominican Republic	5	14	58	87	96	96	97	65	63
Paraguay	4	14	36	53	57	67	71	44	42
Peru	4	29	73	85	89	90	90	72	67

-- Less than 0.5 percent

^a Includes current pregnancy

^b Percentages are standardized on the number of living children (including current pregnancy) in Indonesia, 1987

Table 4.3 Women who want no more children, by residence, education, and media exposure

Percentage (standardized) distribution of currently married women who want no more children by residence, education, and exposure to mass media, Demographic and Health Surveys, 1990-94

Country	Residence		Education			Exposure to mass media			
	Urban	Rural	None	Primary	Secondary	None	Any one	Any two	All three
Sub-Saharan Africa									
Burkina Faso	25	15	16	21	37	15	17	23	39
Cameroon	14	10	9	12	17	9	12	17	a
Ghana	38	28	24	33	38	25	32	35	46
Kenya	51	38	31	40	48	34	40	47	53
Madagascar	52	30	26	33	44	27	38	46	60
Malawi	30	22	22	23	43	22	24	27	a
Namibia	46	22	24	25	41	20	23	27	54
Niger	12	8	9	9	17	8	8	11	17
Nigeria	17	13	12	16	22	11	13	20	a
Rwanda	35	27	29	26	35	U	U	U	U
Senegal	18	13	13	17	28	13	13	17	24
Sudan	23	16	16	21	28	16	20	a	a
Tanzania	26	17	17	21	29	17	18	28	37
Zambia	21	16	19	16	27	15	18	20	28
Zimbabwe	43	29	27	31	42	28	30	38	46
Near East/North Africa									
Egypt	65	54	56	62	62	52	59	59	63
Jordan	38	30	35	35	38	41	37	34	37
Morocco	52	35	40	52	59	36	38	45	58
Turkey	69	67	66	68	72	61	67	68	70
Asia									
Bangladesh	64	67	57	58	62	56	59	62	70
Indonesia	60	54	61	55	58	52	56	57	59
Pakistan	43	27	29	35	48	27	36	40	44
Philippines	58	54	38	56	57	47	54	56	58
Latin America/Caribbean									
Bolivia	66	69	70	69	65	68	70	68	62
Colombia	65	62	72	63	66	65	63	64	65
Dominican Republic	65	61	66	64	63	63	63	65	59
Paraguay	47	36	49	41	47	39	40	39	45
Peru	67	68	74	69	67	70	68	69	66

U = Unknown (not available)

^a All three media exposure questions not included

Note: Percentages are standardized on the number of living children (including current pregnancy) in Indonesia, 1987

The reason for the standardization⁷ is that the likelihood of wanting no more children increases with the actual number of children, and the more educated women are more likely to want no more but have fewer children. Thus, when the unadjusted percentages are examined, the true direction of the association is distorted. For example, in Zimbabwe, the

percentage of women with no education who want no more children is 46, dropping to 43 for women with primary schooling and to 27 percent for those with secondary or higher education. When standardized, the corresponding percentages are 27, 31 and 42. The direction of the relationship is reversed when the number of children, in effect, is held constant. Less distortion occurs with rural-urban residence and media exposure.

⁷ The percentages are standardized on the number of living children (including current pregnancy) in Indonesia, 1987. This standard population is arbitrary and was selected only because it was the population used for this purpose in the DHS-I report.

With few exceptions, women living in cities are more likely to want no more children than women in the country. The association with education, again with some

exceptions, follows the example of Zimbabwe above, with the percentage who want no more increasing with level of education. The main exceptions are in Latin America, where the fertility transition is more advanced and small differences exist between educational categories. This weak association was also observed for the Latin American countries in DHS-I, but the African countries in Table 4.3 show a stronger and more systematic pattern than in DHS-I. The relationship with media exposure follows the same pattern as with education, again with the exception of the Latin American countries.

4.4 TRENDS IN INTENTION TO TERMINATE CHILDBEARING

The change in the proportion⁸ of women who want no more children over the 10-15 years since the WFS is shown in Table 4.4. In all but two (Pakistan and Zimbabwe) of the 19 countries for which trends can be assessed from the major surveys, the intention to terminate childbearing has increased. In most of the countries, the absolute increase has ranged between 10 and 15 percentage points. The most dramatic rise in this statistic is in Kenya, where the increase has been from 17 percent who want no more in 1977-78 to 52 percent in 1993. Ghana also shows a considerable increase, from 12 to 34 percent.

4.5 PERCEPTION OF PARTNER'S ATTITUDES

One index of the erosion of traditional supports for high fertility is whether the very subject of the number of children desired is ever explicitly discussed in the household. Two questions were included in DHS-II about such behavior:⁹

"Have you and your husband/partner ever discussed the number of children you would like to have?"

and

⁸ Because only fecund women in the WFS were asked whether they wanted more children, the comparison is limited to fecund women in union in both surveys. The definition of fecundity differs in the two surveys.

⁹ Neither of these questions on wife-husband communication was asked of women who were sterilized or women whose husbands were sterilized, because the subject is no longer relevant. The implication is that in countries where sterilization is common, such as in the Latin American countries, the amount of discussion or agreement is probably underestimated.

"Do you think your husband/partner wants the *same* number of children that you want, or does he want *more* or *fewer* than you want?"

Table 4.4 Trends in desire for no more children

Trends in the percentage of fecund women in union who want no more children, from the late 1970s to the early 1990s, World Fertility Survey and Demographic and Health Surveys

Country	WFS	DHS-I	DHS-II or DHS-III	Absolute increase from earliest to latest survey
Sub-Saharan Africa				
Cameroon	3	U	15	12
Ghana	12	22	34	22
Kenya	17	49	52	35
Nigeria	5	U	14	9
Rwanda	19	U	36	17
Senegal	7	17	19	12
Sudan	17	23	U	6
Zimbabwe	U	32	31	-1
Near East/North Africa				
Egypt	53	64	68	15
Jordan	42	U	54	12
Morocco	42	48	53	11
Turkey	57	U	72	15
Asia^a				
Indonesia	39	50	52	13
Pakistan	43	U	39	-4
Philippines	54	U	64	10
Latin America/Caribbean				
Colombia	61	70	66	5
Dominican Republic	52	64	66	14
Paraguay	32	U	45	13
Peru	61	73	75	14

U = Unknown (no information)

^a Although Bangladesh participated in the WFS and DHS, the questions on fertility intention in the two surveys are not comparable

In most of the countries outside of sub-Saharan Africa, the topic has evidently arisen in the majority of marriages (Table 4.5). In Peru, where fertility is falling rapidly, 87 percent of women report having discussed the number of children with their husbands. The comparison of Bangladesh and Pakistan is again revealing, with 76 percent reporting such discussions in Bangladesh and 34 percent in Pakistan.

The pattern is quite varied in sub-Saharan Africa, although on the whole, such communication is far less frequent than in the other regions. There is very little discus-

sion of this topic reported in Burkina Faso, Niger and Senegal—all lower than 20 percent report ever having discussed the desired number of children. Kenya again stands out, with 62 percent of women reporting discussion of the topic with their partner. Madagascar and Rwanda are the other two countries in the region where more than half have discussed it.

Table 4.5 Discussion with husband of desired number of children

Percent of currently married women who have or have not ever discussed the desired number of children with their husband, Demographic and Health Surveys, 1990-94

Country	Have discussed	Have not discussed
Sub-Saharan Africa		
Burkina Faso	15	85
Cameroon	28	72
Ghana	48	52
Kenya	62	38
Madagascar	57	43
Malawi	36	64
Namibia	49	51
Niger	17	83
Nigeria	23	77
Rwanda	52	48
Senegal	11	89
Sudan	U	U
Tanzania	27	73
Zambia	44	56
Zimbabwe	73	27
Near East/North Africa		
Egypt	46	54
Jordan	60	40
Morocco	66	35
Turkey	69	31
Asia		
Bangladesh	76	24
Indonesia	60	40
Pakistan	34	66
Philippines	79	21
Latin America/Caribbean		
Bolivia	76	24
Colombia	71	29
Dominican Republic	77	23
Paraguay	73	27
Peru	87	13

Note: Women who were sterilized or whose husbands were sterilized were not asked the question

U = Unknown (not available, question not asked)

The question of whether women thought that their husbands agreed with them on the desired number of children was asked of all women in union, regardless of whether they reported ever having discussed the topic with their partner (Table 4.6). It is no surprise, therefore, to find that substantial proportions of women in sub-Saharan Africa do not

Table 4.6 Spousal agreement on number of children desired

Percent distribution of currently married women by whether they want the same, more or fewer children than their husband, Demographic and Health Surveys

Country	Fertility preferences				Total
	Both want same	Husband wants more	Husband wants fewer	Don't know ^a	
Sub-Saharan Africa					
Burkina Faso	19	14	2	65	100
Cameroon	28	34	5	33	100
Ghana	49	12	5	34	100
Kenya	55	15	7	23	100
Madagascar	55	15	4	25	100
Malawi	38	16	15	31	100
Namibia	37	26	6	31	100
Niger	31	32	2	35	100
Nigeria	25	19	3	53	100
Rwanda	49	15	13	23	100
Senegal	15	24	2	60	100
Tanzania	23	25	11	40	100
Zambia	32	22	11	36	100
Zimbabwe	45	26	23	7	100
Near East/North Africa					
Egypt	60	17	10	14	100
Jordan	52	29	10	9	100
Morocco	65	18	10	7	100
Turkey	69	16	9	6	100
Asia					
Bangladesh	65	11	8	16	100
Indonesia	60	7	3	30	100
Pakistan	44	14	5	37	100
Philippines	63	16	18	3	100
Latin America/Caribbean					
Bolivia	60	17	9	14	100
Colombia	68	17	8	6	100
Dominican Republic	55	23	10	11	100
Paraguay	62	19	10	9	100
Peru	69	16	8	7	100

^a Includes women who did not respond to the question

know whether they are in agreement.¹⁰ Where they do offer an opinion, these women typically, though not universally, say that they both want the same number. If disagreement is reported, it is usually the husband who is perceived as wanting more children than the wife—an observation that holds for all countries except the Philippines. Pakistan and Indonesia stand out among the countries outside sub-Saharan Africa with relatively high proportions of women responding that they do not know whether or not their husband wants the same number. In Pakistan, where a survey of husbands of the women interviewed was also conducted, more than 60 percent agreed that the ideal number was "up to Allah."

The likelihood of discussion and agreement between spouses about the number of children may well be influenced by whether the woman's husband is shared with other wives. The extent of polygyny in sub-Saharan Africa is sufficient (Westoff, Blanc and Nyblade, 1994) to compare such communication patterns for women in monogamous and in polygynous unions. It is clear that discussion of the number of children is reported more frequently by women in monogamous unions (Table 4.7) and that there is greater consensus in such unions (Table 4.8). Where disagreement is reported, it is more likely that the husband is perceived as wanting more children than the wife, a perception that is consistently more common in polygynous unions. Whether these differences are directly caused by the type of union or by other associated social characteristics would require further analysis.

¹⁰ The whole notion of discussion and agreement about reproductive matters is probably quite foreign to many women in traditional societies in sub-Saharan Africa, where fertility has not been rationalized as in more modern societies.

Table 4.7 Spousal discussion of number of children by type of union

Percent of women who have discussed the desired number of children with their husbands by whether the union is monogamous or polygynous, Demographic and Health Surveys, 1990-94

Country	Monogamous	Polygynous
Sub-Saharan Africa		
Burkina Faso	21	10
Cameroon	35	17
Ghana	53	38
Kenya	65	50
Malawi	36	35
Namibia	52	44
Niger	17	16
Nigeria	28	16
Rwanda	55	37
Senegal	14	7
Tanzania	29	20
Zambia	47	32
Zimbabwe	77	56

Table 4.8 Spousal agreement on number of children by type of union

Percent of women who report that they want the same number of children or that their husbands want more children by whether the union is monogamous or polygynous, Demographic and Health Surveys, 1990-94

Country	Both want same number		Husband wants more	
	Monogamous	Polygynous	Monogamous	Polygynous
Sub-Saharan Africa				
Burkina Faso	24	14	13	15
Cameroon	33	19	28	44
Ghana	52	41	12	13
Kenya	58	41	13	23
Malawi	40	32	15	21
Namibia	39	29	25	28
Niger	35	25	28	40
Nigeria	30	19	17	21
Rwanda	52	31	14	24
Senegal	18	11	21	26
Tanzania	25	17	23	32
Zambia	35	19	20	29
Zimbabwe	47	33	22	42