

Non-Marital Childbearing in Suriname

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Abstract

Like most South American countries, Suriname has experienced a major decline in fertility, but adolescent fertility has remained fairly high. In Suriname, there are indications that childbearing may not always be a prelude to marriage. Census data indicate that unmarried women account for a substantial share of all children born, and that many single women have more than one child. Although unmarried motherhood is fairly well accepted, and children born out-of-wedlock are legally protected, the abortion rate among young women is believed to be high and there is considerable concern about teenage pregnancies. Considerably less attention is paid to unmarried childbearing among adult women, many of whom will need to make do with limited support from the child father. This paper analyzes data from the 2000 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey to describe socio-economic and demographic differences in the prevalence of non-marital childbearing in Suriname. Non-marital fertility is estimated using parity progression ratios. We calculate the Singulate Mean Age at Marriage and Mean at First Birth to examine variations in timing of family formation.

Introduction

The Total Fertility Rate in Suriname has declined from above 6 children per women in the early 1960s to about 2.5 during the early 2000s (Guzman et al. 2006). Data from the 2004 Census shows that the mean number of children ever born is 1.6 for single women, compared to 2.8 for married women (Suriname Bureau voor Statistiek, 2005).

Out-of wedlock childbearing is relatively well accepted among some ethnic groups. For example, many Maroon communities have been affected by male migration. Because of long-term (and sometime permanent) migration of males to the city and abroad for employment or education is said to have disintegrated family life. Hence, there has been an increase in Maroon single women with family responsibilities (Vrede, 2001). In Maroon culture, a girl becomes eligible for marriage when she starts menstruating. Because women without a husband have an inferior position in Maroon society, young women are often encourage to find a husband, which may lead to teenage pregnancies, which are culturally accepted.

Article 35 of the Constitution of the Republic of Suriname specifies that “All children shall have the right to protection without any form of discrimination”, and that ‘Parents shall have the same responsibilities toward legal or natural children” (Republic of Suriname, 1987, 1992). It further specifies that “The State recognizes the extraordinary value of motherhood.” Despite this legal protection, it is unclear what happens in practice.

Data

Our analysis is based on data from the 2000 Suriname Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (S-MICS), which was designed to provide estimates on a wide range of health indicators (Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing and UNICEF, 2001). Data collection was conducted under the auspices of the Suriname Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing, with technical assistance from UNICEF and Macro International. Fieldwork was conducted between November 1999 and April, 2000. The data were collected using a two stage sampling procedure. In the first stage, 123 clusters (voting bureaus) were randomly selected with probability of selection proportional to their population size. Within the selected clusters, 4,397 dwellings were selected using systematic sampling, which contained 4,692 identifiable households. In total, interviews were successfully completed with 4,293 of the households. Within each household, all women aged 12 to 49 were eligible for an individual interview. In total, 4,535 women were successfully interviewed, of whom 1,794 were never married or in union.

Our analysis is based on the results from the S-MICS women's questionnaire, which covered a wide range of health topics. Our outcomes measures are the percentage of never-married women who ever gave birth, who are currently pregnant, and who gave birth in the year preceding the survey. Variation in the level of non-married childbearing are studies using parity progression ratios. To examine variations in the timing of family formation, we calculate Hajnal's Singulate Mean Age at First Marriage. We use a similar procedure to calculate the Singulate Mean Age at First Birth.

Results

Preliminary results confirm the high levels of non-marital childbearing in Suriname. Table 2 shows that nearly one in four never-married women (24%) have given birth. Consistent with ethnographies of the Maroon populations, the level of non-marital childbearing is highest in the interior region of the country, where 43% of never-married women have given birth. Breakdown by age-group further shows that the percentage of non-marital childbearing increases sharply with age. While less than 5% of unmarried teenagers have given birth, this percentage increases to 50% for women aged 25-29 and to about 90% for women aged 40 and older. This finding suggests that there is considerable pressure for women to have a child, whether or not they are married.

Table 3 shows that overall 1.7% of never-married women reported to be pregnant at the time of the survey, while 3.1% report having a child in the year before the survey. However, there are substantial differences by sub-group. As anticipated, indicators of recent fertility are highest for women in their 20s. Among women aged 20-24, 3.9% were pregnant at the time of the survey, and 7.3 report having a child during the previous year. For the age-group 25-29, these percentage increase to 6.2% and 12.4, respectively. Breakdown by region shows that recent fertility is highest in the interior regions, which was anticipated. 3.1% of unmarried women in this region were pregnant, while 4.4% had a child during the past year. Unmarried women who have no education and those from the poorest families also have above average levels of recent fertility.

Table 4 shows the parity progression ratio for never-married and ever-married women. When parity progression ratios are used to estimate completed fertility, they are usually calculated for older women only, as these who are closer to the end of their reproductive life. Since we are mainly interested in the likelihood that women progress to the next parity, we calculate them for all women in the sample. The results show that 24% of never-married women in the sample already became mothers, despite the fact that the sample of never-married women is very young. However, among never-married women who have one to 8 children, roughly 70% continue to have an additional child. In fact, comparison with married women suggest that for several parity levels, unmarried women are just as likely as married women – if not more likely – to have another child.

Discussion

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Table 1 Sample Characteristics

	Never-Married Women	Ever-Married Women	
Age			
12-14	25.6	0.4	
15-17	36.3	6.9	
20-24	13.0	15.1	
25-29	6.3	17.9	
30-34	5.9	18.6	
35-39	4.9	17.0	
40-44	4.4	13.6	
45-49	3.8	10.6	
Region			
Paramaribo	41.9	35.6	
Wanica	23.5	24.4	
Nickerie	9.5	13.9	
Other	25.1	26.2	
Type of Place of Residence			
Urban	55.4	50.8	
Rural	33.1	37.8	
Interior	11.5	11.4	
Education			
None/Kindergarten	4.5	7.4	
Primary	30.6	30.5	
Middle School	46.8	43.6	
High School	18.2	18.6	
Socio-Economic Status			
Poorest	14.8	15.1	
2 nd Quintile	22.6	23.1	
3 rd Quintile	27.0	21.9	
4 th Quintile	23.9	26.3	
Wealthiest	11.8	13.6	
N of Cases	1,794 (100%)	2,741 (100%)	

Table 2: Percentage of Never-Married Women Who Ever Gave Birth

	Percentage	N of Cases
Age		
12-14	0.0	459
15-19	3.7	651
20-24	27.5	233
25-29	51.3	113
30-34	70.5	105
35-39	82.8	87
40-44	89.7	78
45-49	91.2	68
Region		
Paramaribo	26.3	752
Wanica	17.1	422
Nickerie	12.3	170
Other	29.6	450
Type of Place of Residence		
Urban	24.0	994
Rural	16.2	593
Interior	43.0	207
Education		
Primary	22.4	544
Middle School	23.2	831
High School	15.8	253
Higher Education	17.1	70
Socio-Economic Status		
Poorest	37.0	265
2 nd Quintile	20.3	405
3 rd Quintile	25.2	485
4 th Quintile	20.3	428
Wealthiest	16.6	211
Total	23.6	1,794

Table 3: Percentage of Never-Married Women Who Are Currently Pregnant and the Percentage Who Gave Birth in the Past Year

	% Currently Pregnant	% Who Gave Birth in Past Year	% Currently Pregnant <u>or</u> Gave Birth in Past Year	N of Cases
Age				
12-14	0.0	0.0		459
15-19	1.5	1.8		651
20-24	3.9	7.3		233
25-29	6.2	12.4		113
30-34	1.0	5.7		105
35-39	3.5	6.9		87
40-44	1.3	1.3		78
45-49	0.0	0.0		68
Region				
Paramaribo	1.7	4.0		752
Wanica	0.7	1.4		422
Nickerie	0.6	0.0		170
Other	3.1	4.4		450
Type of Place of Residence				
Urban	1.4	3.1		994
Rural	1.5	1.7		593
Interior	3.1	7.3		207
Education				
None/Kindergarten	5.0	6.3		544
Primary	1.1	3.1		831
Middle School	2.2	3.5		253
High School	0.6	1.2		70
Socio-Economic Status				
Poorest	2.6	6.4		265
2 nd Quintile	2.0	3.5		405
3 rd Quintile	1.9	3.9		485
4 th Quintile	1.6	0.9		428
Wealthiest	0.0	1.0		211
Total	1.7	3.1		1,794

Table 4: Parity Progression Ratios for Never-Married Women and Ever-Married Women

Children Ever Born	Never-Married Women	Ever-Married Women
0	0.24	0.86
1	0.69	0.79
2	0.73	0.67
3	0.68	0.59
4	0.69	0.56
5	0.59	0.56
6	0.73	0.66
7	0.64	0.54
8	0.61	0.52
9	0.53	0.60
10	0.44	0.62
11	0.50	0.50
12	1.00	0.00
13	0.50	
14	1.00	
15	1.00	
16	0.00	

Table 4: Single Mean Age at First Union and Single Mean Age at First Birth

	Age at First Union	Age at First Birth		N of Cases
Marital Status				
Never Married				
Ever Married				
Region				
Paramaribo				
Wanica				
Nickerie				
Other				
Type of Place of Residence				
Urban				
Rural				
Interior				
Education				
Primary				
Middle School				
High School				
Higher Education				
Socio-Economic Status				
Poorest				
2 nd Quintile				
3 rd Quintile				
4 th Quintile				
Wealthiest				
Total				