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Book review

The Role of Men in Determining Fertility Among the Banyankore of Southwestern Uganda - By JAMES P. N. NTOZI.

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The Role of Men in Determining Fertility Among the Banyankore of Southwestern Uganda
By JAMES P. N. NTOZI.

This work is the third in a monograph series based on surveys on the determinants of fertility in Ankole, Uganda. As stated in the foreword, this study is significant, in view of the gaps in the existing body of research: the dearth of research on men’s role in determining fertility and the sideline attention devoted to cultural factors which increasingly prove very central to fertility behaviour.

Most African societies are patriarchal and yet the amount of research in this dimension does not reflect the scale of patriarchal influence. This is particularly worth noting, given the fact that most fertility occurs within marital unions and the institution of marriage fortifies the position and power of males. The empirical and measurement limitations associated with male fertility tend to discourage research. The vigour of this area, however, points to its inevitability as a crucial and yet least explained phenomenon. It has become increasingly evident that population research and programmes should tackle
issues around the status of women as the cornerstone of fertility dynamics, in particular, and development, in general. The 1994 Cairo Conference is testimony to this realization. This book could not have come at a better time. Decisions about the number of children and contraception, marriage patterns and status of women are embedded in cultural and patriarchal structures.

In his introduction, Ntozi notes "...marriage patterns, value of children, cultures and non-use of effective contraception were behind the high fertility level attained by women in that area. These factors are all men-related. The aim of this study is therefore to investigate the attitude and behaviour of men vis-à-vis those factors" (p. 1). It is based on the 1984 survey of 546 ever-married men interviewed in a probability sample of 600 households. These were selected from rural parishes inhabited by the Banyankore. Ntozi sets out to examine the attributes, fertility and marriage patterns of the respondents, their knowledge, attitude and use of contraception, their value of children and the existing fertility related customs, taboos and other traditions. He uses bivariate and log-linear analysis and the chi-square to evaluate the interactive effect of the various variables.

The book has nine chapters. The first one includes an overview of research areas on male fertility, family size and preferences, contraceptive use and marriage patterns and the objectives and hypothesis of the study. The second chapter is on the methodology- the survey area is described and the data collection, processing, analysis and limitations of data are outlined. In the third chapter the author describes the socio-economic attributes of the sample. It is characterized by low literacy rates (53%), an almost universal rural background (97% rural childhood residence) and high (99%) religiosity of which less than 1 per cent are Muslims. They are nearly all farmers of one kind or another. In summarizing, Ntozi states "...men’s fertility in Ankole is very high [with parity of about 8] and increases with age...the more educated men have produced more children. Men engaged in mixed farming activities have the highest number of children in contrast with pastoral men who had the smallest numbers. The marriage patterns described in the fifth chapter point to the mean age at first marriage of 24 years and a 22 per cent incidence of polygynous unions of whom at least one out of every three had four wives. Chapter five reveals a high (85%) awareness of contraceptives. Although 65% allowed or advised their wives to use contraceptives only 6.7 per cent ever used them. Attitudes, intentions to use and the differentials are also examined. The seventh chapter reflects the men’s strong desire for children arising from an interest in the continuation of lineage and expectations of assistance at old age. This reinforces the preference for sons. Chapter eight focusses on the cultural factors. The central theme is the customs around sexual relationships. Ntozi surmises that, generally, the traditional practices which encourage a resumption of sexual activity within ninety days of delivery, are intensely pronatalist and they give rise to high risks of fertility and minimal child-spacing. The concluding chapter shows that the area of study is characterized by marriage patterns, contraceptive prevalence and cultural structures that reflect a pronatalist setting, hence the high level of fertility, even among the women- as revealed in his earlier study. Hence, Ntozi emphasizes the need for family life
education for boys and for raising the male literacy levels.

The main contribution of this work is the empirical affirmation of pronatalism in African customs in general and in male attitudes, in particular. Ntozi could have gone far in realizing what he had set to do if he had brought to the fore the cultural influences throughout the analysis. Much of the inference is deterministic in that it is largely rooted in economic causation. For instance, he suggests, "... the pastoralists reported the highest proportion of advantages in having many sons and daughters... This reflects the fact that pastoralists needed many children to provide labour demanded by the group’s economic activities of herding cattle" (p.53). Before drawing the conclusion, he could have made a further multivariate analysis of occupation with education, for example, in order to clarify the variation as a reflection of adherence to cultural practices, independent of the economic factors such as family labour. He also notes, "...the boys are not expected to be beneficial to parents in terms of bridewealth. Instead, the sons are disadvantageous in this respect since the parents have to pay bridewealth for their sons’ brides.." (p.55). Outside the eighth chapter, cultural variables are discussed peripherally. As such, this is disappointing as one would have expected more attention paid to cultural influences. They are presented as one of the many ‘attributes’ analysed. The analysis itself does not flow through the chapters and the differentials observed in earlier chapters are hardly built into the subsequent discourse.

Its strength, however, lies in the breadth and scope of the issues covered. This book succeeds in drawing attention to primary aspects of male fertility and to areas that need urgent work in both research and policy.

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