Author’s response to reviews

Title: Women’s empowerment and fertility preferences in high fertility countries in Sub-Saharan Africa

Authors:

Esso - Hanam ATAKE (atakesyl@gmail.com)
Pitaloumani GNAKOU ALI (gnak2005@yahoo.fr)

Version: 2 Date: 05 Feb 2019

Author’s response to reviews:

We would like to express our gratitude to the editor and reviewers for their interest in our manuscript. The comments and suggestions have been valuable and very helpful for revising and improving our manuscript. As described below, we have made revisions according to your comments and suggestions. Thank you very much.

Editor Comments:

Besides the additional issues identified by the reviewer, the authors should consider sharing the paper with an expert in English language to assist them polish the language and thus tighten the arguments. In its current form, the paper has several simple grammatical mistakes while some arguments do not simply make sense (e.g. the last statement of the second paragraph of the background section).

Response: the revised manuscript has been edited by an English speaking native, so we hope it now matches the journal standard.

Reviewer 1

Comments

• Overall, the authors have incorporated some of the comments. However, I have a few comments, though, about sections of the manuscript that could be revised or further developed. First, the manuscript needs an edit for grammar and spelling.

Response: The manuscript has been edited by an English speaking native, so we hope it now matches the journal standard.
Background

- Consider deleting the first paragraph as it is redundant

Response: Please, it has been taken into account. Please refer to page 3.

- The authors should strengthen literature review to make it ‘tight’, that is, readers should be able to understand the current knowledge and gaps on the association between women’s empowerment ideal number of children and ability to achieve that ideal number in the Sub-Saharan African context. Generally, women’s empowerment is associated with a desire for fewer children in four Sub-Saharan African countries. In some context, the results are mixed, while in others it’s negative. However, the results could be an artefact of data or a reflection of the flaws in the measures of empowerment—these are some of the debates missing in the current paper.

Response: we elaborated more on the current knowledge and gaps on the association between women’s empowerment, ideal number of children and ability to achieve that ideal number in the Sub-Saharan African context, according to your suggestion. Please, refer to pages 4 and 5.

The literature review shows that generally, fertility preferences are proxied by desired family size, ideal number of children, and desire for additional children. However, especially in a socio-cultural context of high fertility, there could be another pathway through which women’s empowerment affects fertility preferences. In fact, empowerment may expand a woman’s agency and resources which enhances a woman’s ability to achieve her ideal number of children. There are gaps in the association between women’s empowerment and ability to achieve that ideal number in the SSA context. In this study, we explore whether a woman’s level of empowerment affects her ability to achieve her ideal number of children. Another important challenge is that, some studies found both positive and inverse associations between empowerment measures and fertility. These results could be an artefact of the flaws in the measures of empowerment. There is consensus that empowerment is multidimensional and is expressed at multiple levels. However, there is contestation and debate on which dimensions and levels matter most. In this study, we used a single empowerment index which takes into account all dimensions.

- The first research question appears irrelevant to the current study as it focuses on women’s empowerment as the main outcome. However, in the analysis, authors are trying to determine the association between women empowerment and fertility preference (ideal family size), and further to disentangle the role of economic and cultural factors in the 4 francophone countries.

Response: The present study tries to answer the following research questions: would improving women’s empowerment help them have just the number of children they want? Through which means does women’s empowerment influence the fertility preferences of married women in FSSA? We hypothesize that: (i) more empowered women will have a smaller ideal family size than less empowered women; (ii) access to job market, ownership of land and house, education, and the participation in decision-making explain the fertility preferences in FSSA. Please, refer to last para of page 5.

Conceptual framework

- The conceptual framework should form part of the background as it is part of the literature
review. The conceptual framework should also be summarized (maybe to one paragraph) and the authors should ensure that all relevant citations are provided.

Response: we revised significantly the conceptual framework according to your suggestion. Please, refer to page 6.

- In Figure 1, the main outcome should be fertility preference (ideal family size) & having more than one’s ideal number of children. Avoid indicating etc. in the boxes in Fig1, instead include only the variables that are used in the study and if there are some that are not measured/used, then the authors should indicate which ones. Indicate the source of the Conceptual framework and indicate “adapted from (source)”. The source should be the authors since we do not have empirical evidence

Response: we revised the figure 1 according to your suggestion. Please, refer to figure 1.

Source of data

- It is not clear the utility of merging the three datasets considering the unit of analysis-married women 35+.

Response: That's absolutely right. The error has been corrected. For our estimations, we mainly used the births record files.

Discussion

- The discussion should focus on the relationship between women empowerment and ideal number of children; and whether such a relationship is explained by family, economic and cultural factors.

Response: Please, we revised the discussion section according to your suggestion. Please refer to pages 14-18.

- There is some inconsistency in the findings that require more clarification. for example, in Burkina Faso, economic empowerment index have a significant relationship with ideal number of children (Table 4); however, it does not matter in the ability to achieve the desired family size- authors should shed more light on such discrepancies.

Response: Our findings emphasized the importance of the ability to have desired number of children in fertility policies. For example, in Burkina Faso, economic empowerment index has a significant relationship with ideal number of children (Table 4); however, it does not matter in the ability to achieve the desired number of children (Table 5). Ideal number of children and ability to limit fertility to that ideal number are two concepts that should be analyzed differently. In fact, the key pathways through which empowerment influences ideal number of children and ability to limit fertility to that ideal number are not the same. In FSSA context, except for Niger, improving women familial empowerment affect positively their ability to have the desired number of children. Our results suggest that familial empowerment matter more than other dimensions in increasing women’s ability to make fertility decisions. These results corroborate those of previous studies which found that freedom of
movement and decision-making power were positively correlated to women’s ability to make fertility decisions [47]. Upadhyay and Karasek [9] found that in Mali negative attitudes toward wife beating were associated with women’s ability to achieve desired family size. The findings suggest that higher age at marriage of women, self-choice of mate by women and decision-making power have positive effect on their ability to achieve desired family size. Furthermore, given the lack of associations between women empowerment and women’s ability to achieve desired family size, future research should explore these issues in FSSA countries.

Please, refer to pages 14 – 17.