Reviewer’s report

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

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Reviewer: Eliud Wekesa

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Title: Women's Empowerment and Fertility in Sub-Saharan Africa

By Esso-Hanam ATAKE

General

I have reviewed the above manuscript. The paper has potential with several points of interest on a topic that is of interest to this journal, and the population and public health audience. However, I have a number of concerns that should be addressed to improve the manuscript before it can be published. My verdict is Major Revision.

Title:
The title is too broad and unclear in the present form. There is need to be specific to desired fertility in high fertility countries in SSA. The use of the term fertility is problematic because it implies actual fertility (TFR) and yet yours is just fertility preferences (ideal number of children. You need to replace it with desired fertility throughout the text.

Abstract

You need to say something about high fertility countries or lagging fertility transition countries in SSA in the background. Your study countries fall in this category.

Background

The background is quite modest in respect to literature review and thus misses a number of important points. First, What are the gaps in the literature that your study is addressing? There are several studies on this topic and the reader is also interested in the "catch" and value addition of the paper. The author should examine similar studies on the topic and their shortcomings, and hence justifying the study.

Second, the author is interested in understanding how greater relative power (empowerment) of women allows them to execute their fertility preferences within the marriage irrespective of men's
preferences. There is need for the author to place this study in the broader context of the female autonomy and fertility literature. The study would thus greatly benefit from some demographic literature on women and autonomy and fertility/reproductive health. There also the need to include the demographic literature on the measurement the ideal number of children and its shortcoming of being an abstract notion.

Third, the high fertility (TFR) in the study countries should be placed in the broader context of fertility transition in Africa and elsewhere. The author, should therefore average TFRs for SSA, other developing country regions and the world.

What does the author mean by "taking into account the cultural, economic, social and demographic dimensions of gender" Are these control variables? Why not just say you are controlling for socio-economic and demographic characteristics.

I am not sure it is factually correct to say that "poverty" in Africa makes child control both individual and collective. The author should rephrase the appropriate sentence.

Methodology
The author should start with a section on the data sources before going into variable descriptions.

The author should explain how his measurement of women empowerment is an improvement on the DHS indicator of women empowerment (autonomous decision making and acceptance of wife beating)

The author should move the first 2 paragraphs on explanatory variables to the background; they are more relevant for the literature review section. The same applies to most of the stuff on control variables. I expected to read such stuff in the lit review.

The author should justify the focus on 35 and above year old women? Why not on all married women since you are controlling for the number of living children?

The author should define Economic, social-cultural and familia empowerments here.

Results

Rephrase this statement "According to Table 2, for all women aged 35 and over, the average ideal number of children is 24 6.91, 6.72, 10.24 and 9.53 in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Chad, respectively"

Who are these men that you are comparing with women? Are they husbands? Do we have couple data?

What does a positive and negative empowerment index mean to a lay reader?

Table 4: are they beta coefficients or odds ratio? This should be reflected in the title.
Table 4: The title suggests linear regression while in the text you talk of logistic regression?
Table 5: The presentation of the results in the text is not clear. Please expound.
Table 5: Is it possible to have negative odds ratios?

Discussion
The question that remains unanswered is this: Is more empowerment of Burkina Faso and Chad women reflected in their ability to achieve their reproductive/fertility preferences? Explain your answer to this question.

It is surprising that the reader only gets to understand the description of different components of empowerment in the discussion section.

Rephrase this statement "While fertility is under control in some countries, it is a factor that influences women in other countries where high fertility is regarded as particularly valuable"

Several statements in the discussion need to be supported by appropriate references. eg "societies give a higher social rank, greater privileges and greater authority to women with many children" and many more in the section.

What do you mean by "This result suggests that one of the ways of significantly curtailing fertility in sub-Saharan Africa would be to promote social policies in education for married women and their spouses". Are you suggesting that married couples should go back to school or adult education or what?

Limitations
You also acknowledge the shortcoming of the measurement of ideal number of children. It has various biases.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further
assessment in your comments to the editors.

I am able to assess the statistics

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Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

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