

Watch Report

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Fertility in Bangladesh Villages: Socio-economic and Community Differentials

Abstract: This report assesses the role of development programme in reducing fertility in rural Bangladesh. Data for this research came from *Watch*, a demographic and health surveillance system of BRAC covering 70 villages in 10 regions of the country. A total of 9,862 married women of reproductive ages were interviewed that provided their fertility history along with the basic socioeconomic information of the households. Findings reveal that both general and total fertility rates were inversely associated with age, education, land ownership and socioeconomic status of women. The regional variation in fertility was very high and significant. The credit programme participation played a negative and statistically significant role in reducing both general and total fertility in rural Bangladesh.

fertility change (Cleland and Phillips 1993; Amin et al. 1993). The credit-based income generating projects have now been considered instrumental for many organisations seeking to curb rapid population growth. The basic premise is that participation of poor women in credit activities leads to empower them and increased decision making role and status within household aside from relieving them of a condition of extreme social and psychological dependence from their physical and social isolation (Amin et al. 1993; Dixon 1976). Studies reported that credit programme empower women that ultimately reduce the fertility. This report assesses the role of socio-economic and community factors along with development intervention on general fertility rate.

Introduction

One of the goals of Bangladesh family planning program is to reach the replacement level of fertility by the year 2005. While family planning services are widely recognised as a major means to reduce unplanned and unwanted child bearing, there are other options, which should be considered as well. The socio-economic changes are often put forward for explaining fertility change in Bangladesh. Similarly, development interventions by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have been attributed as major causes of

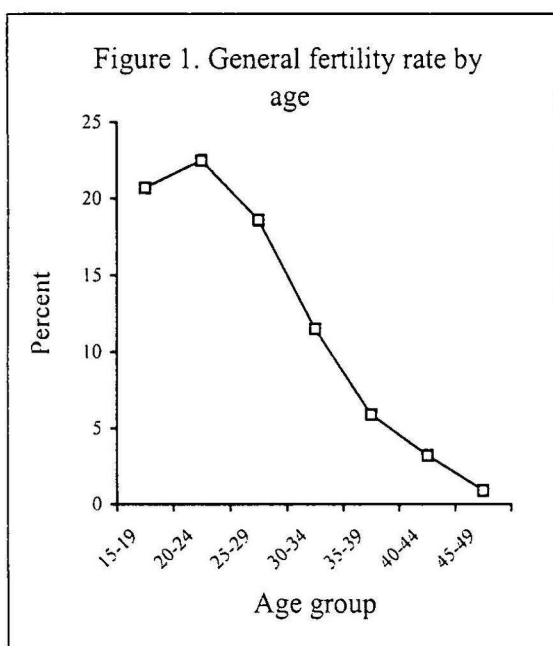
Methodology

Data for this study were collected from a nationally representative intensive monitoring system, known as *Watch*, in 70 villages located in ten districts of Bangladesh. The system was introduced to document the changes in social life of the community that was induced as a result of development programs in such areas as credit-based income generating activities, essential health care for the poor, and legal and social awareness

for women. The study samples consisted of all married women of reproductive age living in the study villages. A total of 9,862 eligible women were interviewed in December 1996.

Results

The general fertility rate (GFR) was 13.4% and the total fertility rate (TFR) was estimated as 4.16 in the study villages in 1996. The distribution of general fertility rate by the age of women showed the expected pattern (Figure 1). The younger women aged <30 years were significantly more fertile than relatively older women indicating that the family planning should be focused more on younger rather than older women.



Unlike other studies (Cleland and Phillips 1993), fertility rate was no longer negatively associated with the education of women (Figure 2). The fertility among the illiterate women was much lower ($p < 0.01$) than the educated women probably because some of the illiterate women might have been targeted by special program.

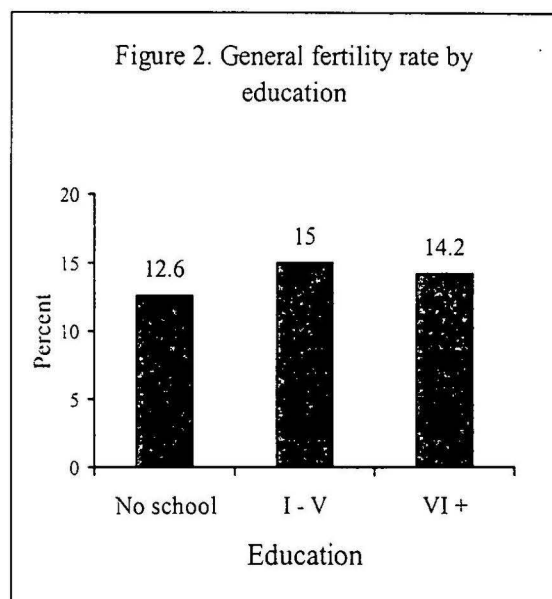
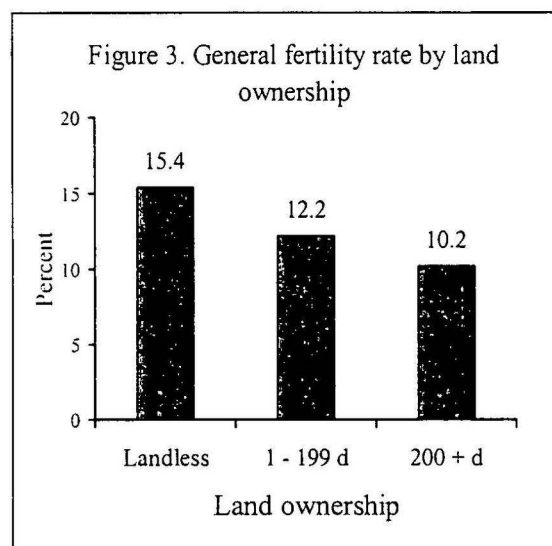
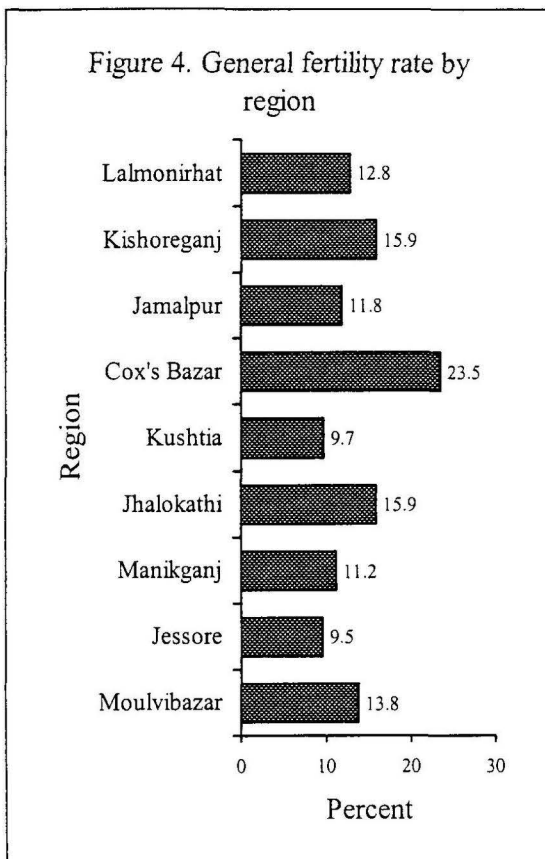


Figure 3 showed that fertility reduced with the amount of land owned by the household. The difference in fertility rates among land categories were statistically significant ($p < 0.01$).

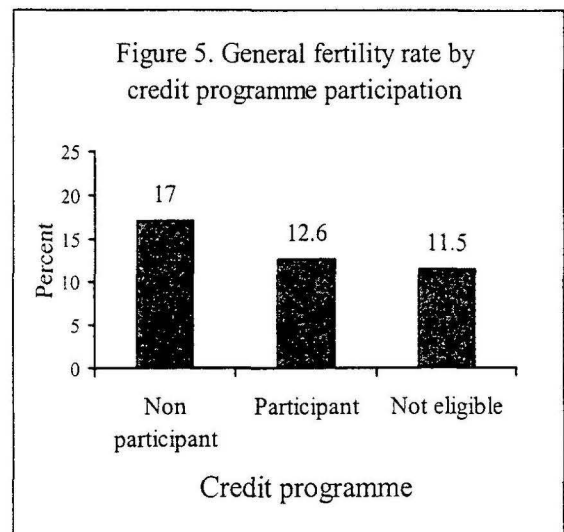


In addition to socioeconomic variation, the general fertility rate differed significantly at the community level as well. Figure 4 shows the range of variation of fertility rate among the study region ($p < 0.01$).



The fertility was much lower in Jessore and Kushtia compared to other regions. Cox's Bazar and Moulvibazar had very high fertility rates among the study regions.

The credit-based development intervention significantly ($p < 0.01$) reduced the fertility rate among the participants than the comparable non-participants of the program (Figure 5). It is not known exactly how the credit program participation reduces fertility.



References

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