

Researcher

Angela Baschieri (Angela.Baschieri@lshtm.ac.uk)
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

Updated: December 2008



Unintended Childbearing and Family Welfare in Rural Malawi

In Malawi, women on average bear about six children. One-quarter to one-third of these children are unwanted or occur sooner than desired and could thus be prevented by greater uptake of effective contraception. The key aim of this research is to assess the impact of unwanted births on family welfare. Family welfare is represented by the physical growth of children and by retention in school. In a very poor country such as Malawi, the adverse effect on family economics of an extra mouth to feed and child to rear is likely to be expressed by inadequate nutrition of children leading to slower growth and school dropout of teenage children.

This research will inform the debate by conducting a study linked to an ongoing Demographic Surveillance Site (DSS) in Karonga District in Northern Malawi. Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world; it is a high fertility country, with only 26.3 percent of women using any method of contraception. The DSS data of Karonga district provide the ideal setting to study the relationship between family planning and fertility and investment in children's schooling and nutrition.

Country where the research will take place

Malawi

How does the research describe the impact of population/reproductive health on poverty reduction and/or economic growth?

The study will seek to understand to what extent greater contraceptive use and smaller family sizes will enhance investment in human capital and economic growth or what are the consequences of unwanted or unintended childbearing on children's life chances.

How will the research address a policy need, and what kind of policy lesson is expected?

In sub-Saharan Africa, the lack of attention to this issue has been detrimental to the development of sound economic policy. Reproductive health issues are routinely overlooked by the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers supported by the World Bank and other international donors. Furthermore, only recently has "universal access to reproductive health" been included as one of the Millennium Development Targets. Widespread poverty accompanied by a lack of investments in future generations is keeping African economies in a "poverty trap."

Methods used

The study will apply econometric methods for the analysis of panel data such as event history modeling. I will also explore the use of instrumental variable methods and possible simultaneous equation modeling techniques.

Data used

DSS in Karonga District in Northern Malawi.