

Determinants of age at first marriage in sub-Saharan Africa: A comparative study of Uganda and South Africa

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Abstract

Marriage has traditionally been early and universal in sub-Saharan Africa and this has been blamed for high fertility and the failure to achieve most MDGs including the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, achieving the goal of universal primary education, promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women, reduction of childhood mortality, improvement in quality of maternal health, and combating HIV and AIDS and other diseases. The paper used the 2006 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey and the 2003 South African Demographic and Health Survey data to investigate the hypothesis that ethnicity has a significant effect on age at first marriage even after controlling for the effects of other socio-demographic covariates. The Cox proportional hazard model was used to analyze the data. The study found that the Median Age at First Marriage (MAFM) was 19 years in Uganda and 29 years in South Africa, and that ethnicity had a significant effect on age at first marriage in both countries. Other factors with significant effects, through which ethnicity may have influenced age at first marriage were region, level of education and age at sexual debut. The paper concludes that marriage is early and universal in Uganda, while it is delayed in South Africa, suggesting that the two countries belong to different nuptuality regimes, this is arising from apparent differences in education and empowerment of women.

Keywords:

Age, marriage, nuptuality, Uganda, South Africa, ethnicity

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