

Nonmarital Childbearing in the Philippines: Trends and Correlates

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Extended Abstract

Background

Fertility in the Philippines has now fallen below replacement, declining from a TFR around 6.0 (mid-1970s) to around 4.0 (mid-1990s) to 1.9 in the 2022 national survey (PSA & ICF, 2023). A notable and under-studied facet of the Philippine fertility transition is the substantial increase in the share of births that are nonmarital, that is, births to women not formally or legally married. This increase has been nothing short of phenomenal, from 10% of births in the early 1990s to 48% of births in the early 2020s, according to national demographic survey data. These increases in nonmarital births are more pronounced among young mothers.

Such trends correspond with declines in marriage rates and increases in cohabitation over time. While the overall proportion of “married women” has not changed dramatically, the proportion legally married has shrunk, replaced by women in live-in or cohabiting unions (Kabamalan, 2023).

This paper examines the trends and correlates of nonmarital childbearing in the Philippines. The high level of nonmarital childbearing sets the Philippines apart from other Southeast and East Asian countries, and certainly was not anticipated at the onset of fertility decline decades ago.

This paper will constitute the most in-depth demographic analysis to date of what has emerged as a prominent feature of Philippine fertility.

Data

We will analyze extensive survey data collected from the early 1990s to the present. These surveys are of two types.

National Demographic and Health Surveys [NDHS]. These surveys were conducted in five-year intervals 1993 – 2013, in 2017, and again in 2022 – seven surveys in total. These are national probability samples of women of reproductive age of all union statuses (never in formal union, consensual union, formally married, formerly married). These surveys conform to the well-known protocol of the international DHS program.

Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Surveys [YAFS]. These are nationally representative surveys of the population ages 15 to 24. The most recent were fielded in 2013 and 2021. These surveys obtain detailed information on attitudes and behaviors with respect to sexual and reproductive health, along with demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the

respondents.

Analytic Approach

We will precede the more rigorous analysis of the survey data with a concise summary of Vital Statistics information on births by marital union status. The Vital Statistics data of course has the advantage of (nearly) complete population coverage. And the historical trends evident in these data serve as a kind of validation of the rather remarkable trend toward nonmarital births evident in the survey data.

The analysis will consist of four components.

1. Using seven Demographic and Health Surveys 1993 – 2022, we will decompose fertility trends in terms of its marital and nonmarital components. Total fertility has declined substantially while at the same time nonmarital fertility has sharply increased. On the face of it, these are counter-vailing trends. We will conduct conventional demographic decomposition analysis to provide a sound and balanced portrait of these trends that at first glance are contradictory.

2. Extending analytic component #1, we will examine trends in marital and nonmarital fertility according to age, urban-rural residence, educational attainment, and wealth index. One outcome of this portion of the analysis will be a decomposition of the increase in nonmarital fertility according to this set of correlates. That is, we will answer the question “is the increase in nonmarital fertility concentrated in certain ages and/or certain socioeconomic sub-groups?”

3. Using the most recent DHS (2022), we will conduct regression analysis on the marital-nonmarital distinction, in order to obtain net effects of the correlates listed above (age, urban-rural residence, educational attainment, and wealth status). This will provide an up-to-date contemporary portrait of the social location of nonmarital fertility in the Philippines.

4. Finally, drawing on the rich set of attitudinal and behavioral information collected in the YAFS surveys, we will examine attitudes toward marriage and childbearing that help explain the enormous increase in nonmarital childbearing that has occurred in recent decades. Regression analysis will be done to examine for example, whether certain attitudes are concentrated in urban areas, net of education, or if certain attitudes are independent of their economic status.

Status of the Analysis

All the surveys are available in a standardized and easily analyzed format.

We have already carried out extensive preliminary analysis. Specifically, initial results from a decomposition analysis of the NDHS indicate that the increase of nonmarital births is higher in urban areas, more rapid among women who attained high school education (as compared to lower or higher education), and larger in the middle wealth quintile. And simple tabulations with the YAFS reveal that young adults have become more accepting of cohabitation and nonmarital childbearing over time, but they perceive the society and the community to be not as accepting.

Already the preliminary analysis has uncovered patterns in nonmarital fertility that are intriguing and suggest it is more complex than might be imagined. Specifically, the data indicate that the motivations driving the increase in cohabitation differ according to economic status: for the poor, it is financial stress, whereas for the wealthier, it is the emergence of more liberal social/cultural attitudes. These differences in motivations underlying cohabitation correspond with different rationales for nonmarital fertility.

Significance of This Research

Because the increase in nonmarital fertility in the Philippines has been so dramatic, in our view providing for an international audience a detailed empirical portrait – of trends, of differentials – is an important and overdue contribution. Nonmarital fertility is now established as a prominent feature of Philippine fertility, a feature that was largely absent only a few decades ago.

Beyond this, the paper will conclude with some reflections on the likely consequences of the new prominence of nonmarital fertility – for women, for children, for families. From this we will offer some thoughts about practical implications for public policy.

References

Kabamalan, M.M. (2023). The separation of marriage and childbearing in the Philippines. A presentation prepared for the “Philippine Studies: Exchanges between Filipino and EU-based Scholars” international conference 7-9 June 2023. Namur.

Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) and ICF. (2023). *2022 Philippine National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS): Final Report*. PSA and ICF.