Abstract: How the decline of family size affects the intergenerational transmission of social inequality: Evidence from Ouagadougou in West Africa.

This paper aims to quantitatively assess the effects of the decline of family size on the intergenerational transmission of socioeconomic inequality in Ouagadougou, the capital city of Burkina Faso. More specifically, we will seek to ascertain the extent to which children’s schooling outcomes vary across families with fewer versus more children, by social class. Does fertility limitation appear to be as viable (successful) a strategy for poorer families as for richer ones and, if so, might the decline in family size act to reduce the intergenerational transmission of inequality over the long-term?

The intergenerational transmission of socioeconomic inequality— the fact that children of disadvantaged parents tend to be themselves disadvantaged as adults— has been documented in various societies across the world. However, how transition of family size and other demographic factors affect intergenerational transmission of inequalities is little known in the sub-Saharan context. The few studies that exist on this issue indicate that, in the short-term, children from richer families tend to benefit more from fertility decline than those of poorer parents. If true, the onset of rapid fertility decline (as is occurring in many sub-Saharan African cities at present) may at first lead to a strengthening of socioeconomic inequality among members of the next generation. Thus, the socioeconomic status of a family would be a key factor to understand the extent of benefits perceived by children from fertility limitation (Mueller, 1984; Haussman and Szekely, 2001; Bloom et al., 2010).

This study examines how family size and the composition of kinship affect parents’ decisions with regard to investing in their children’s schooling and work activities, taking into account family size and socioeconomic status, thus acting to reinforce or reduce inequality over time. As sibship size declines, parents should potentially have greater leeway to investment in their children’s schooling, affecting their chances of future economic success. Data for the analysis are from the DEMTREND survey that collected detailed information on children’s work and schooling behaviors, based on a subsample of the Ouagadougou DSS—a surveillance system that longitudinally follows a population of over 80000 people residing in five neighborhoods of the city.

Below, we first present our theoretical framework and literature review on the relation between fertility decline and social inequalities, followed by the methodological approach for the analysis. The proposal ends with a brief description of expected results.

Theoretical Framework

Existing literature has discussed a number of channels that can lead to intergenerational transmission of poverty. In both sociological and economic studies, the general view has been that demographic changes, especially fertility decline, have potentially beneficial economic returns (Bloom, 2003). As fertility declines, fewer children in the household implies more resources per child and potentially more investment in children human capital. However, some researchers have argued that this relation is most valid for richer people and city dwellers; it is less true for the poorest people and those living in rural areas, for whom children are a source of income and a hedge against uncertainty (e.g., Muller, 1984). In other words, a decline of family size may increase investment in children’s
schooling in richer families; while at the same time putting at risk essential income in poorer homes. If true, fertility limitation by poor families may at times lead to an increased need for child labor among those who are born, and a corresponding decrease in their schooling. This situation would result in the rich getting richer and the poor, poorer, during the early phases of the fertility transition.

This paradoxical relation would reinforce the intergeneration transmission of socioeconomic inequalities and limit social mobility of the poorest families. In a study of 17 Latin American countries, Haussman and Szekely (2001) reported that the fall in fertility acted to increase socioeconomic inequality. This relation is confirmed, on the short-term, in A recent study by Bloom (2010) found the same outcome in the short-term; their findings were more ambiguous in the longer-term. However, Mason (2001) has argued that the longer-term impact of fertility reductions in Asia seems to have benefited both poorer and richer households.

At the risk of overly simplifying people’s strategies and behaviors, we presume that the effect of fertility decline on transmission of social inequalities depends on the importance of potential children’s contributions to the family economy:

- Richer families can afford to take a longer view: the economic contribution of their children is not immediately essential for family well-being or to insure against uncertainty. In this case, child labor is necessary and children are considered as source of longer-term investment and for their non-economic roles (love, emotional support in old-age...). Their fertility strategies are of the “quality-quantity tradeoff” type: fewer children leads to higher investments in human capital;

- In poorer family, the children’s economic contributions are important for family survival. In the poorest families or after an adverse shock (i.e., a breadwinner falling ill), young children must work, and paying school fees may be viewed as an unaffordable luxury. Child labor in this situation encompasses not only “economic” activities but also often domestic work (especially for girls), at times freeing their mothers to seek employment outside the home. For these families, falling fertility often incurs economic costs, and will not be so strongly linked with higher schooling attainment.

- In the past, larger families were often those who were most successful – able to afford better nutrition (and thus lower child mortality), husbands who were able to afford more wives, etc. In this situation, one would expect to observe a positive correlation between the number of surviving siblings in a household and their schooling attainment.

As economic development and the fertility transition proceed, and access to quality schooling improves, one would expect these discrepancies to disappear, as seems to have been the case in Asia (Mason, 2001). In this study, we examine patterns of family size and schooling attainment over three generations: grandparents, parents and children.

**Data and methodology**

Data are from the DEMTREND survey that provides detailed information on children’s work and schooling behaviors for a subsample of the OPO – the Ouagadougou demographic surveillance system.
The DEMTREND project was designed to for the study of causal relationships between family size and children’s education and contains considerable data on women’s fertility, household health and socioeconomic status, household composition, on their partners, on their social origin and social origin of their partners (parents' education and socioeconomic status, family composition and educational attainment of sibship of parents(of women), on their children's schooling, money spent on schooling, child work activities, their children's schooling, school quality and expenditures, etc. The OPO longitudinally follows a population of over 80,000 people living in five neighborhoods in the capital city of Burkina Faso.

This study aims to examine patterns of the relationship between declining fertility and schooling outcomes, distinguishing the socioeconomic status of families over three generations and controlling for several other available covariates. The analysis will make use of logit regressions with cluster controls for households (to account for autocorrelation) and will cover three generations: children living in sampled households, their parents and their grandparents. Results should indicate how the ongoing fall in fertility and the hypothesized demographic dividend differentially affects children of poorer and richer households, and how patterns in this intergenerational transmission of disadvantage have evolved over time.

Bibliography


