

6 Wanted and Unwanted Fertility

Another useful measure of reproductive preferences is the prevalence of unwanted fertility—the births that occur after the last wanted birth. This concept has been approached here with two measures: the proportion of women who have more children than they say they desire or consider ideal (Table 6.1) and the proportion of births in the past year that these women report as unwanted (Table 6.2).

6.1 CHILDBEARING BEYOND THE DESIRED NUMBER

Several patterns stand out in the measure of excess fertility, derived from the comparison of preferences and current parity (Table 6.1). As would be expected, in all countries the proportion of women who have more children

Table 6.1 Distribution of women who have more children than they desire

Percentage distribution of currently married women who have more children than they desire, by number of living children, Demographic and Health Surveys, 1990-94

Country	Number of living children ^a							All
	<3	3	4	5	6	7	8+	
Sub-Saharan Africa								
Burkina Faso	--	2	6	13	26	38	45	8
Cameroon	--	2	5	11	17	30	40	8
Ghana	0	10	14	41	48	78	71	17
Kenya	1	18	31	65	69	84	80	36
Madagascar	--	2	8	19	25	41	45	12
Malawi	--	4	10	20	31	41	49	11
Namibia	3	8	11	19	16	17	26	10
Niger	--	--	1	2	6	7	18	2
Nigeria	--	--	1	4	5	12	14	2
Rwanda	1	7	16	52	69	81	88	29
Senegal	--	2	7	15	27	39	56	12
Sudan	--	3	6	14	16	17	19	8
Tanzania	--	1	2	8	16	30	42	7
Zambia	1	2	5	16	21	48	45	12
Zimbabwe	--	7	10	36	39	59	65	17
Near East/North Africa								
Egypt	1	37	51	61	69	61	60	33
Jordan	--	9	14	43	42	50	52	27
Morocco	1	20	28	51	59	71	80	30
Turkey	4	57	78	91	91	91	88	36
Asia								
Bangladesh	--	51	74	89	85	85	81	36
Indonesia	--	19	30	46	45	53	51	16
Pakistan	--	4	7	22	26	26	26	10
Philippines	1	11	30	56	63	80	80	26
Latin America/Caribbean								
Bolivia	7	40	56	72	79	80	76	39
Colombia	4	30	58	66	76	80	87	28
Dominican Republic	2	22	50	65	67	72	80	25
Paraguay	1	9	19	29	28	45	32	13
Peru	6	49	68	84	88	92	88	43

-- Less than 0.5 percent

^a Includes current pregnancy

than they want increases with the number of children. Very few women with fewer than three children report a lower ideal number. Among the sub-Saharan African countries, only in Kenya and Rwanda do the majority of women indicate that five children exceeds their desires. Even at the highest parity—eight or more children—less than half (47 percent) of the women in sub-Saharan Africa report a lower desired number. Overall, without regard to parity, an average of only 13 percent of sub-Saharan African women indicate any unwanted childbearing by this measure.

The picture in the other regions of the developing world is very different. By the fourth or fifth birth, the majority of women report excess fertility. Among women with three children in Turkey and in Bangladesh, 57 and 51 percent, respectively, are classified as having more children than wanted; Peru is close behind with 49 percent. The countries with the lowest proportion of women with excess fertility are Pakistan, Paraguay and Indonesia. On average, 28 percent of the women outside of sub-Saharan Africa have had more children than they say they want.

6.2 TREND IN UNWANTED CHILDBEARING

In Figure 6.1, the trend in the proportion of women who have more children than they desire is depicted for those countries in DHS-II that also participated in DHS-I and/or in the WFS. The trend is generally toward an increase in unwanted fertility. In Kenya, the increase is quite dramatic from the late 1970s to the last five years, when approximately one-third of women are classified as having more children than they want. A tabulation by the number of children (not shown) indicates that this measure for Kenyan women with eight or more children has increased from 17 percent to around 80 percent over that time span. Large relative increases are also evident for Rwanda, Ghana and Senegal, but there is no change in Nigeria and Sudan. Jordan and Morocco both show increases to levels roughly commensurate with Egypt and Turkey, in which the fertility transition began earlier. There is a large increase in Bangladesh but not apparently in Pakistan, although this may be an artifact of the procedures followed with nonnumeric responses in Pakistan. Very little change is evident in Latin America, where unwanted childbearing remains at a high level, except in Paraguay, which is at an earlier stage in the fertility transition.

There are two interacting components underlying the level of unwanted fertility: the number of children desired and the regulation of fertility. As the number wanted

decreases, the proportion unwanted will increase, depending on the ability to avoid pregnancy. Also, in countries that are passing through the fertility transition rapidly, such as Kenya, the norms of smaller families may be internalized by older women whose childbearing followed more traditional expectations. Such women may now respond in the more "modern" way to the question on the ideal number of children.

6.3 FERTILITY PLANNING STATUS

The other indicator of unwanted fertility that is included in the DHS is the woman's retrospective report of the planning status of her recent births (described above in connection with the preferred last-birth interval). The responses to this question are shown in Table 6.2 for women who had a birth in the past 12 months or who were currently pregnant.¹⁵ By and large, the countries showing the highest proportions of unwanted fertility with this indicator are the same countries so indicated in Table 6.1. The level is lower, but this is to be expected considering that the time reference of 12 months would exclude earlier unwanted births to other women.

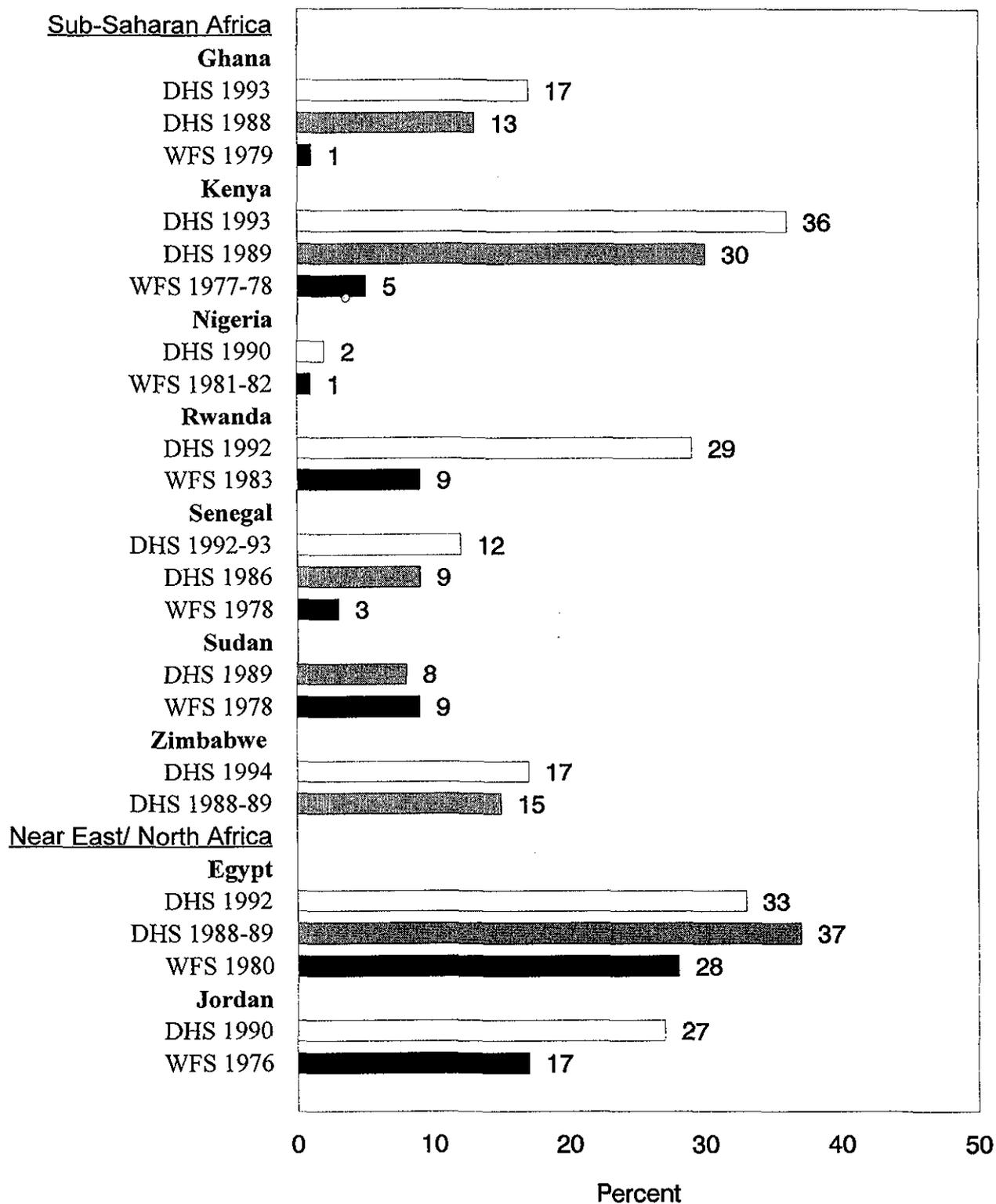
On average, only 7 percent of women in sub-Saharan Africa who had a birth in the past year reported it as unwanted, compared with 19 percent in the other countries. The fact that nearly one out of every five women with a birth in the past year reported it as never wanted is a finding with significant policy implications.

Although the women of sub-Saharan Africa have the lowest rate of unwanted fertility, they have the highest proportion of births that occurred sooner than they wanted, an average of 26 percent, compared with an average of 20 percent elsewhere.¹⁶

¹⁵ The "last 12 months" definition was used both to reflect the most recent time period and to represent women with a birth no more than once, as well as to fix a definite time period. If the entire experience of the past five years is included, the unit of observation becomes the birth rather than the woman, because individual women could contribute more than one birth. In the definition used here, the status of the birth or current pregnancy is filtered through the reproductive-intentions question; therefore, for the birth to be classified as unwanted, the woman had to report the event as unwanted and also report not wanting any additional children (otherwise it would be reclassified as mistimed rather than unwanted). If a woman reported a birth in the past 12 months and was also currently pregnant, priority was given to the status of the birth.

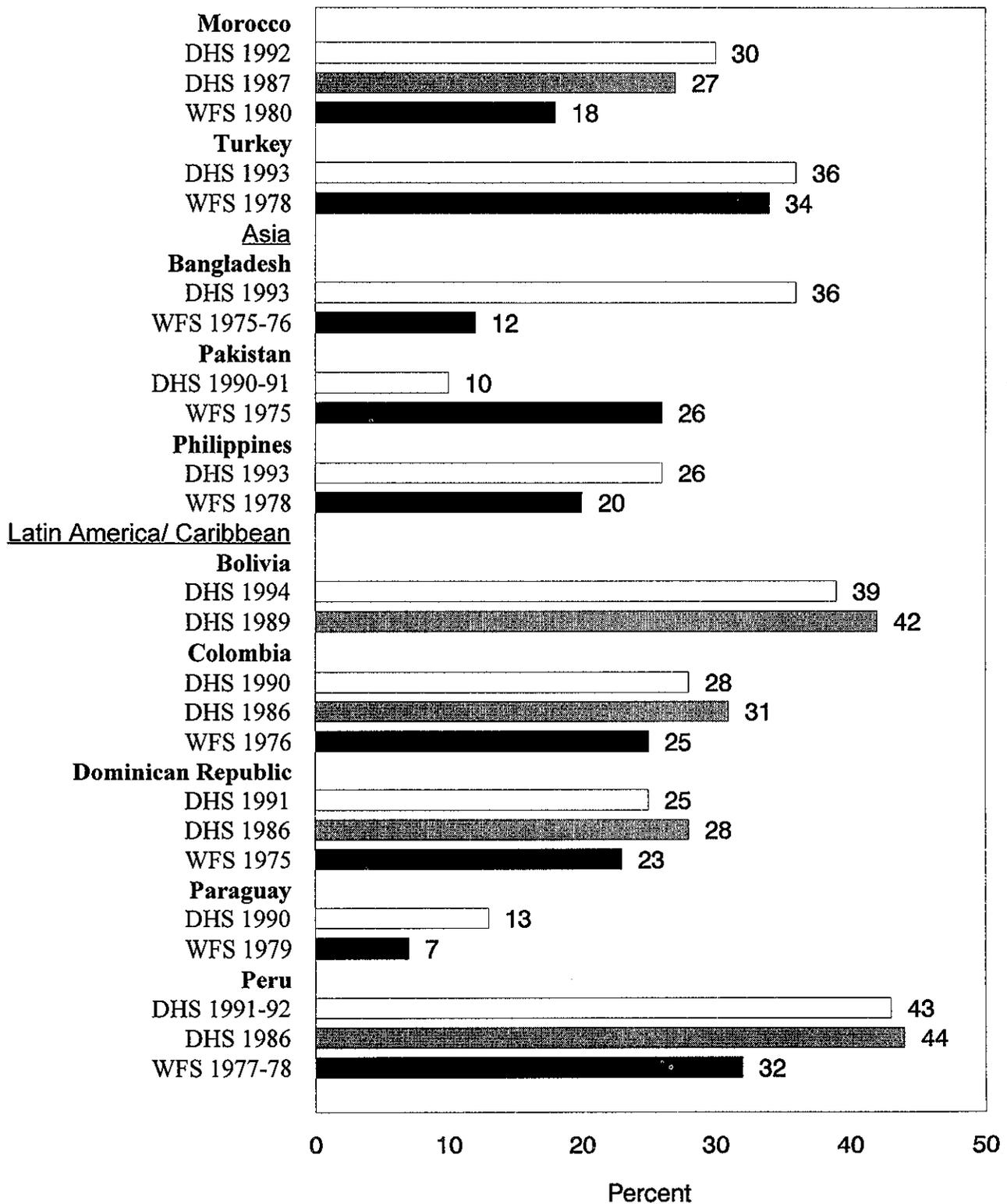
¹⁶ It is possible that there is more rationalization of unwanted births as mistimed in Africa than elsewhere.

Figure 6.1 Trends in the percent of currently married women who have more children than they desire, from late 1970s to early 1990s, World Fertility Survey and Demographic and Health Surveys



Note: Number of living children; includes current pregnancy.

Figure 6.1—Continued



Note: Number of living children; includes current pregnancy.

Table 6.2 Fertility planning status preceding survey

Percent distribution of the fertility planning status of births (including current pregnancies) in the one year preceding the survey, Demographic and Health Surveys, 1990-1994

Country	Planning status of birth including current pregnancy ^a				Total
	Wanted then	Wanted later ^b	Not wanted	Missing	
Sub-Saharan Africa					
Burkina Faso	71	24	3	2	100
Cameroon	77	20	3	--	100
Ghana	57	35	7	1	100
Kenya	44	38	16	3	100
Madagascar ^c	60	24	15	1	100
Malawi	58	35	7	--	100
Namibia	71	19	7	3	100
Niger	84	13	1	2	100
Nigeria	86	10	2	2	100
Rwanda	44	37	16	3	100
Senegal	67	27	4	2	100
Sudan ^d	74	23	3	--	100
Tanzania	70	23	5	3	100
Zambia	61	32	5	2	100
Zimbabwe	56	36	8	0	100
Near East/North Africa					
Egypt	61	13	26	--	100
Jordan	63	24	13	--	100
Morocco	61	19	19	--	100
Turkey	64	15	21	--	100
Asia					
Bangladesh	64	23	13	--	100
Indonesia	76	17	7	--	100
Pakistan	75	12	10	4	100
Philippines	52	31	16	1	100
Latin America/Caribbean					
Bolivia	44	20	34	1	100
Colombia	58	19	23	--	100
Dominican Republic	55	28	17	1	100
Paraguay	73	20	6	--	100
Peru	39	24	36	1	100

-- Less than 0.5 percent

^a The planning status of the birth was used in cases where a birth and a current pregnancy both occurred in the 12-month period.

^b Births reported as not wanted are reclassified as "wanted later" if the mother wants more children.

^c A category "not sure" had been added to the question in Madagascar into which 12 percent of the births were classified. Those births were redistributed to "wanted later" or "not wanted" based on the mothers' responses to the question on fertility intention.

^d Excludes current pregnancies because the planning status of the pregnancy was not known (not asked in the survey).

6.4 WANTED AND TOTAL FERTILITY RATES

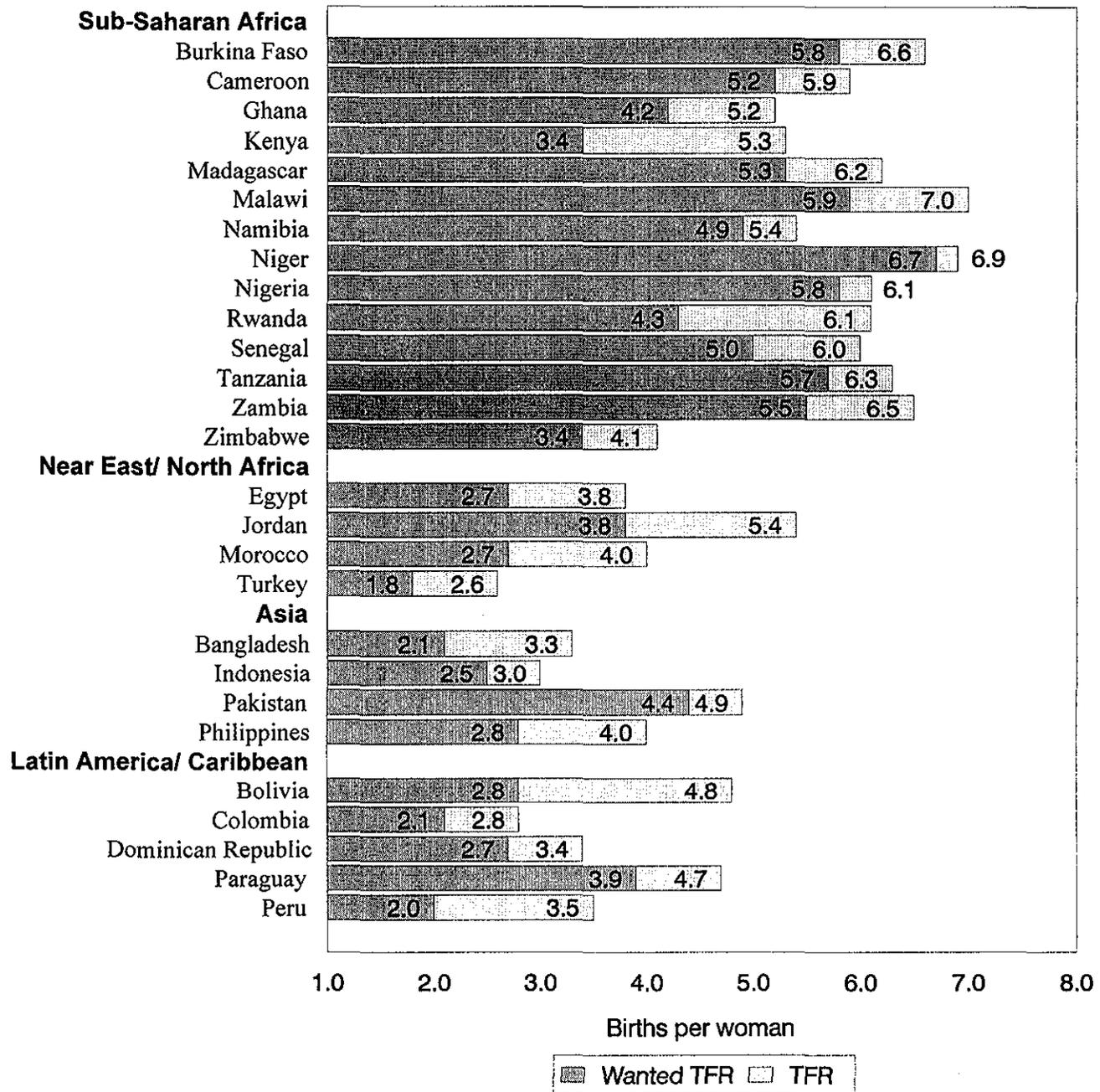
One of the principal reasons for measuring levels of unwanted fertility is to compare what the fertility rate would be if women's reproductive preferences prevailed over the observed fertility rate. The statistic used in the DHS currently is the Wanted Total Fertility Rate (WTFR), which was originally proposed by Lightbourne for use in the WFS. This rate is calculated in exactly the same way as the conventional Total Fertility Rate (TFR), except that the numerator is confined to births that are less than or equal to the number desired.¹⁷ These rates for the countries in the DHS-II are displayed in Figure 6.2.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the observed TFR averages 5.6, compared with an average WTFR of 5.1. Kenya shows the greatest divergence in the two rates in this region, with a TFR of 5.3 and a WTFR of 3.4. The implication of this wide spread in Kenya is that there is a significant potential for fertility reduction. This is consistent with the earlier finding (Westoff and Bankole, 1995) of a very high level of unmet need for family planning in that country. Rwanda also shows a wide divergence between the two rates (a TFR of 6.1 and a WTFR of 4.3) and a high unmet need. The main picture in this region, however, is that there is a limited immediate potential for fertility decline.

In other countries, there is a much greater relative difference between the two rates, in part because the TFR is much lower than in sub-Saharan Africa. Many of these countries show a WTFR that is 30 percent or more lower than the TFR, notably Jordan, Morocco, Turkey, Bangladesh, Philippines, Bolivia and Peru. In the latter two countries, the WTFR is more than 40 percent below the TFR. If women's reproductive preferences were realized, fertility would decline significantly in most of these countries outside of sub-Saharan Africa.

¹⁷ The measure is constructed by deleting any births that occurred in the past two years that exceed the woman's current ideal number of children and summing the age-specific rates that result. Nonnumeric responses to the question on the ideal number of children such as the "It's up to God" response, are considered wanted. The WTFR can never be greater than the TFR because births can only be subtracted. A two-year reference period was selected (unlike the longer periods published in the DHS First Country Reports) in order to ensure comparability with the earlier comparative report and to achieve greater contemporaneity.

Figure 6.2 Total fertility rate and wanted total fertility rate, Demographic and Health Surveys, 1990-1994



Note: Rates are based on the two years prior to the survey.

6.5 TRENDS IN WANTED AND TOTAL FERTILITY RATES

In most but not all countries in which trends in the WTFR can be assessed, it has declined more than the TFR (Table 6.3). This indicates that the demand for effective fertility regulation is outpacing its practice. The same pattern was observed in the earlier comparative report for the countries included in DHS-I (Westoff, 1991). In the countries in which this is not the case, the two rates show similar de-

lines. In Pakistan, the WTFR has remained essentially unchanged, while the TFR shows a significant decline; however, there is evidence that there was substantial under-reporting of births in the Pakistan DHS, which overestimates the decline (Curtis and Arnold, 1994).¹⁸

¹⁸ If the TFR declines without a commensurate decline in the WTFR, it means that women are coming closer to their preferences, implying that unmet need is declining.

Table 6.3 Trends in fertility rates

Trends in the total fertility rate (TFR) and the wanted total fertility rate (WTFR) from the late 1970s to the early 1990s, World Fertility Survey and Demographic and Health Surveys

Country	WFS		DHS-I		DHS-II or DHS-III		Percent decline from earliest to latest survey	
	TFR	WTFR	TFR	WTFR	TFR	WTFR	TFR	WTFR
Sub-Saharan Africa								
Cameroon	6.4	6.1	U	U	5.9	5.2	8	15
Ghana	6.1	6.0	6.4	5.3	5.2	4.2	15	30
Kenya	7.9	7.6	6.4	4.5	5.3	3.4	33	55
Nigeria	5.9	5.8	U	U	6.1	5.8	+3	0
Rwanda	9.0	8.8	U	U	6.1	4.3	32	51
Senegal	7.1	6.9	6.6	5.6	6.0	5.0	15	27
Sudan	5.6	5.0	4.6	4.1	U	U	18	18
Zimbabwe	U	U	5.2	4.3	4.1	3.4	21	21
Near East/North Africa								
Egypt	5.0	3.6	4.4	2.8	3.8	2.7	24	25
Jordan	7.0	6.0	U	U	5.4	3.8	23	37
Morocco	5.5	4.4	4.6	3.3	4.0	2.7	27	39
Turkey	3.8	a	U	U	2.6	1.8	32	a
Asia								
Bangladesh	5.4	4.6	U	U	3.3	2.1	39	54
Indonesia	4.3	4.0	2.9	2.4	3.0	2.5	30	38
Pakistan	6.0	4.3	U	U	4.9	4.4	18	+2
Philippines	5.1	4.1	U	U	4.0	2.8	22	32
Latin America/Caribbean								
Bolivia	U	U	5.1	2.8	4.8	2.8	6	0
Colombia	4.6	3.4	3.1	2.1	2.8	2.1	39	38
Dominican Republic	5.2	3.8	3.6	2.6	3.4	2.7	35	29
Paraguay	5.0	5.0	U	U	4.7	3.9	6	22
Peru	5.3	3.5	4.0	2.3	3.5	2.0	34	43

U = Unknown (no information)

^a Cannot be calculated