

1 Introduction

The subject of reproductive preferences is of fundamental importance for population policy and for family planning programs. Whether couples want to cease childbearing or delay the next pregnancy determines the demand for family planning and the potential impact on the rate of reproduction. The spread of a small-family norm has accelerated rapidly in some parts of the developing world (in much of Asia, Latin America, and North Africa) and is beginning to emerge in a few sub-Saharan African countries such as Kenya and Zimbabwe. Most of the countries in which fertility has remained at its traditional high level are in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East.

In this comparative report, the authors examine women's statements of their ideal family size, whether they desire more children and, if so, how long they would prefer to wait before the next birth. Levels of unwanted childbearing and the demographic implications of current reproductive preferences are also examined. Derived mainly from 28 surveys conducted in the second round of the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) program, this report is a sequel to the earlier comparative analysis of reproductive preferences based on DHS-I data (Westoff, 1991). For those countries represented in both rounds of the DHS or included in the World Fertility Survey (WFS), trends in childbearing attitudes are analyzed. Also included are estimates of the ideal number of children for never-married women; these data have not been represented in earlier reports.