

**WOMENS' LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION AND FERTILITY IN NAIROBI**  
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*Abstract*

The past two decades have witnessed notable advances in studies seeking to illuminate potential connections between women's roles and demographic phenomena. Whereas, in more developed countries, an inverse relationship is most often observed between women's productive and reproductive activities, in less industrialized countries the relationship is not clear.

This study used data from the Nairobi Urban Integration Project (Nurip) collected in June 2001 to examine the relationship between women's labour force participation and fertility in Nairobi. Specifically, this study examined the extent to which labour force participation influences fertility and the extent to which participation in the formal/informal sector influences fertility. The study was based on a sub sample of 864 women covering three generations aged 25-54, from whom retrospective data on birth and employment histories were collected. The study used a conceptual model proposed by Mason (1981) with modifications to suit the study variables.

Descriptive statistics were used to show the distribution of observation periods, and a summary of survival data showed that 417 of the women had experienced a birth at end of the reference period with 50% having at least one birth. The main method of data analysis was event history analysis. Specifically, Cox's proportional hazards model was used to establish the effect of several covariates on the hazard rate of getting a next child during the observation period. The risk involves multiple failures since childbearing is a repeated event. It was important to restrict the analysis to women who had continuously lived in Nairobi from the age of fifteen since social and demographic analyses ignore the effects of time and space relationships.

This study provides evidence of a relationship between women's labour force participation and fertility in Nairobi. The most significant finding is that the relationship is only clear when the type of sector is considered, that is whether it is formal or informal. This finding indicates that both the employment status and the type of economic sector have some impact on the extent to which work affects childbearing. The study found no fertility differentials between employed and unemployed women despite unemployment reducing the relative risk of getting an additional child. But this observation did not persist when the type of employment sector was considered. At this stage there were significant fertility differentials between employed and unemployed women. Of special interest is the finding that women in the informal sector were less likely to get an additional child than those in the formal sector. The observed effects are inconsistent with the Role Incompatibility Theory, but indicate that working conditions in the informal sector in Nairobi may not be compatible with childbearing and childrearing as hypothesized. It could also reflect the problem of high unemployment that has forced women with training suited to the formal sector to enter the informal sector. These results imply that role incompatibility is correlated to the predominant form of employment. The exact mechanism of this observed effects were however not very clear.

Availability of paid childcare was found to increase the relative risk of getting an additional child, which could be due to the fact that where childcare substitutes are available and considered acceptable women do not feel pressured by time constraints to limit their fertility (Oppong, 1983). This study may have had its limitations but it has far reaching implications for policy makers. It suggests that policies be put in place to promote women's labor force participation especially in the informal sector since work in this sector has an effect on the rate at which women give birth. For further research the study recommends the inclusion of fertility regulation behavior, women's education, age at marriage, husbands' income, precise timing of women's work and organization of work in the informal sector for more refined results.