ABSTRACT

This study set to find out the contribution of each of the principal proximate determinants of fertility to the total fertility rate from a national and a sub-group perspective.

Four factors were examined and these were marriage, contraception, postpartum infecundability and total fecundity. The other factor, abortion, which was identified by Bongaarts as a proximate determinant was not examined due to lack of data. The study calculated the indices of the four factors at a national level and then by subgroup using ethnicity as a filtering variable. This study is based on the Malawian DHS data, 2010.

Among the three proximate determinants of fertility estimated in this study, it was established that post-partum infecundity was the most important fertility inhibiting variable nationally and among the ethnic subgroups in Malawi. Marriage was the second most important variable in all the groups followed by contraception.

It is also interestingly notable that the ethnic groups with the least TFR, Ngoni and Lomwe have the least indices of marriage, 0.59 and 0.56 respectively indicating the fact the these groups have marriage as a very strong inhibitive factor to their total fertility levels.

The findings of this study also provided a basis for drawing policy conclusions and making recommendations with the aim of reducing the general fertility levels among ethnic groups in Malawi. One key recommendation was to commission further behavioural and socio-cultural research, qualitative in nature, on the ethnic groups with low fertility levels so as to replicate these practices at a grand level if deemed feasible.