

Exploring Fertility Dynamics: A Comparative Analysis of Ethnic Groups in Segregated and Integrated Living Spaces in Sri Lanka

P.P. Masakorala*

University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya. 20400, Sri Lanka

**pushpikam@arts.pdn.ac.lk*

There is a social claim that the fertility of minority ethnic groups is increasing at a rate greater than that of the majority Sinhalese in Sri Lanka. Addressing this issue is important because it affects the ethnic integrity of the society. Despite there being substantial studies on fertility in Sri Lanka, previous research has not looked into the spatial and ethnic differences of fertility, despite its significance. This research aims to analyze ethnic fertility differences from a spatial perspective. The data was collected from 480 women aged 18 to 81, spanning three generations where different ethnic groups live integrated and different ethnic groups live segregated. Summarizing the study's results, it can be concluded that ethnic differences in fertility vary according to spatial context. In integrated spaces, there are no significant ethnic differences in fertility. However, ethnic differences in fertility becomes distinct when ethnic groups live in segregated areas. Sinhala women, compared to minorities, exhibit significantly lower levels of fertility when living in segregated environments. Previous studies have also reported a decreasing number of childbirths among Sinhalese over the past several decades, with no underlying reasons identified. Moor women, on the other hand, have the highest level of fertility, compared to Sinhala women. Factors such as higher fertility levels among the Moors and deliberate avoidance of family planning due to community pressures, as highlighted by community leaders, are crucial contributors to high fertility among the Moors. It is important to note that this difference may not persist into the future, as it is primarily present among older generations of different ethnicities and not as prominent among the younger generation. As a result, it can be inferred that ethnic differences in fertility will likely diminish in the country. However, the level of fertility has transitioned from below to above replacement level across all ethnic groups in each space. Thus, it is recommended that further studies be conducted with a theoretical framework rooted in ethno-nationalism and majority-minority concepts.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Ethno- nationalism, Fertility, Minority- majority, Spatial approach

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