Conflict and Fertility in the Occupied Palestinian Territories

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This paper investigates the effect of the Palestinian 1st and 2nd Intifadas on the transition to births in the occupied Palestinian territories. In times of conflict, personal and group securities are usually in question where numerical strength of relatives justifies the high demand for children. This is especially true in the Palestinian context and it thus hypothesized that transition to births is faster during the periods of the 1st and 2nd uprisings compared to periods before and after. Hazard regression models will be used for this purpose where women year records are constructed under the assumption that all ever-married women enter the 'risk period' of birth at the age of 15 years; all years prior to first birth are also included for each woman separately in the analysis.

This study uses data from the 2004 Demographic and Health Survey DHS-type household survey undertaken by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). This survey was based on a multi-stage stratified sample design, with stratified random samples drawn using the 1997 population census and includes conventional maternal and child health data. Complete birth histories from women aged 15-49 at the time of survey are also included and will be used in this study. It collected data from 5799 households and 4972 ever-married women with an overall response rate of 88.2 percent.

Prior research in Palestine has shown a persistent high fertility despite the notable socioeconomic transformation that both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip have undergone ranging from a transformation of an agricultural economy into a modernized one with different lifestyles, polarization of labor force, different living arrangements, universal education, improved services and access to social services to a remarkable progress in the public health services evidenced by the sharp decline in infant mortality rate from over 100 to 24 per thousand births between 1970s and the 1990s. All these extraordinary transformations would normally have lead to a decline in fertility had it been elsewhere in the world (Khawaja and Randall 2006). These have lead researchers to suggest a potential influence of the political context mainly conflict on fertility behavior (Courbage 2005; Khawaja and Randall 2006).

This project extends this prior research by specifically identifying the impact of conflict operationalized through the 1st and 2nd uprisings (intifadas) on transition to births in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In order to assess the impact of conflict on transition to births the hazard rate will be the dependent variable. Because almost all births occur within marriage in the Palestinian context, the sample is restricted to ever-married women 15-49. All ever-married women who do not give any births during the period of

observation (1961-2004) will be censored at the end of the period (2004 year of survey specifically in June of that year). First multistate hazard models are estimated for birth transitions (that is first a model of transition to 1st birth is estimated, then from those who had a first birth, their transition to 2nd birth is estimated and so forth) till the end of the period of observation mentioned above. Parity controls are included in each model. In a second stage of the analysis all birth transitions are pooled together and estimated in one model.

The main independent variable will be the year of observation which will be categorized from the time exposure variable into four categories: period prior to 1st intifada (corresponds to the year 1986 and below), 1st intifada (corresponds to period between 1987 and 1993 inclusive), period prior to 2nd intifada (corresponds to period between 1994 and 1999 inclusive) and finally 2nd Intifada (corresponds to the year 2000 and above). Since fertility does change over the years and in order to disentangle the effect of period fertility from actual intifada effects period dummy variables will be created and compared with the actual intifada period variables. The transition analyzed is assumed to depend on the following covariates: age, education, locality, and region. Age would be entered into the model as a continuous variable; age squared would be also included as births have an age pattern usually where the risk of it increases at a certain age then decreases again in an upside-down U shape. Education is dichotomized into less the secondary education, secondary and above. Region is categorized as West Bank and Gaza Strip. Locality (residence) is categorized as urban, rural and camp.

Except for mothers age and the main time exposure variable that are time variant, all the other covariates specifically education, region will be assumed to be time invariant. In the Palestinian context most women would have completed their education at the time of marriage and are unlikely to pursue a higher degree beyond marriage. For region, due to the difficult political situation that is caused by the protracted Israeli occupation, moving between the West Bank and Gaza Strip is extremely difficult. As for locality (residence), the 2007 Palestinian census will be used to check the level of internal migration among this study's women of interest 15-49, if the level of internal migration among those women is low then it would be safe to assume that locality is time invariant, otherwise it will be assumed to be time variant.