

Accuracy of Unwanted Pregnancy Measure: A Check Using Women's Fertility Intentions

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Extended Abstract

Unwanted pregnancy is one of the widely used indicators of the status of reproductive health of a society. It is also of public health and psycho-social importance. It is defined as a pregnancy that the woman did not want at all, as at the time of its conception. It excludes pregnancy that the woman would have wanted at a later time. It is usually derived from the question “At the time you became pregnant, did you want to become pregnant then, did you want to wait until later, or did you not want to have any (more) children at all?”

There have been queries on using question on wanted status of recent births as a measure of wanted or unwanted fertility particularly on account of being subject to rationalization (Ibisomi and Odimegwu, 2007; Adetunji, 2001; Eggleston, 1999; Rasul, 1993; Bongaarts, 1990). It is thus, generally believed that the measure could be under-estimated as some pregnancies that were unwanted at the time of conception could be claimed later as wanted after the child has become a loved member of the family. While this is tenable, we argue in this paper that the measure could actually be an over-estimate due to misunderstanding of the question on wantedness of pregnancies

Using twelve Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data sets for Nigeria, Kenya and Zimbabwe, we demonstrated this position by examining the relationship between two of female respondents' variables. These are: wantedness of the birth in the last three/five years or current pregnancy and women's response to questions about desire for additional children (also referred to as fertility intention). Further, the results were disaggregated by four of the reasons reported in literature that women gave for not wanting their pregnancies. These are age (too young),

education (in school), marital status (not married/unstable relationship) and number of living children (have enough) (Sedgh et al, 2006; Oye-Adeniran et al, 2004).

Social and economic reasons are two other reasons why women did not want their pregnancies.

Ordinarily, one would expect a woman that admitted to, not wanting to be pregnant at all at the time of conception of a pregnancy that occurred in the past to affirm this experience with a response that indicates that she does not want to have any more child(ren) in future. However, examination of the association between wantedness status of recent births/pregnancies and fertility intentions of the surveys' respondents indicated contrasting results as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Women who admitted that their last births or pregnancies (that occurred three/years before survey) were unwanted by their fertility intentions at the time of survey

Country	Survey year	Fertility Intention				Total Number
		Have another ^a	Undecided	No more	Other ^b	
Nigeria	1990	11.6	6.5	80.4	1.4	100/644
	1999	9.9	5.9	83.2	1.0	100/964
	2003	45.6	5.7	47.8	0.9	228/ 756
	2008	44.1	11.6	39.4	4.9	902/18,028
Kenya	1989	4.1	2.3	91.6	2.1	391/3452
	1993	5.5	2.4	80.5	10.4	596/3161
	1998	9.2	1.2	84.4	5.2	347/3048
	2003	28.2	2.8	66.7	2.3	829/3960
	2008/9	24.0	2.4	68.6	5.0	720/4082
Zimbabwe	1988					
	1994	15.1	2.9	78.5	2.6	205/2213
	1999	9.7	1.4	81.5	7.4	216/2818
	2005/6	28.6	4.4	65.1	1.9	564/4073

a- Includes: want within 2 years, want after 2 years and want but unsure of timing

b- Includes: sterilized and declared infecund

Up to 46, 28 and 29 percents of the respondents from Nigeria, Kenya and Zimbabwe, respectively who admitted that their most recent birth or pregnancy was unwanted stated that they wished to have another child or undecided whether to have another. There is obvious inconsistency here. Since responses to future fertility intention compared to retrospective questions are considered to be relatively unbiased (Bongaarts, 1990, Koenig et al, 2006), the response to the question on wantedness of recent births/pregnancy is the suspect source of the

mismatch. The misunderstanding of the question is also noted to grow over time in the three countries.

Figures 1 and 2 show that, the proportion of women who wanted to have another child or undecided whether to have another child, generally decreases with increase in respondents' ages and number of living children. This shows that, the question was certainly misunderstood as the women that were either still young or had few numbers of children were the ones with higher likelihood of stating that they wanted another child or undecided whether to have. Further, in all the three countries, percentage of women that wanted to have another child or undecided was highest among the never married women and generally increases with increase in level of education in Kenya and Zimbabwe. This suggests that the prevalence of unwanted pregnancy using the DHS type of question could actually be an over estimate. There is therefore the need to refine the question used to derive this reproductive health indicator by linking it to fertility intention questions at the data collection stage and or introduce other questions that would clarify what respondents really mean, to enable us get closer to the real estimate of unwanted pregnancy.

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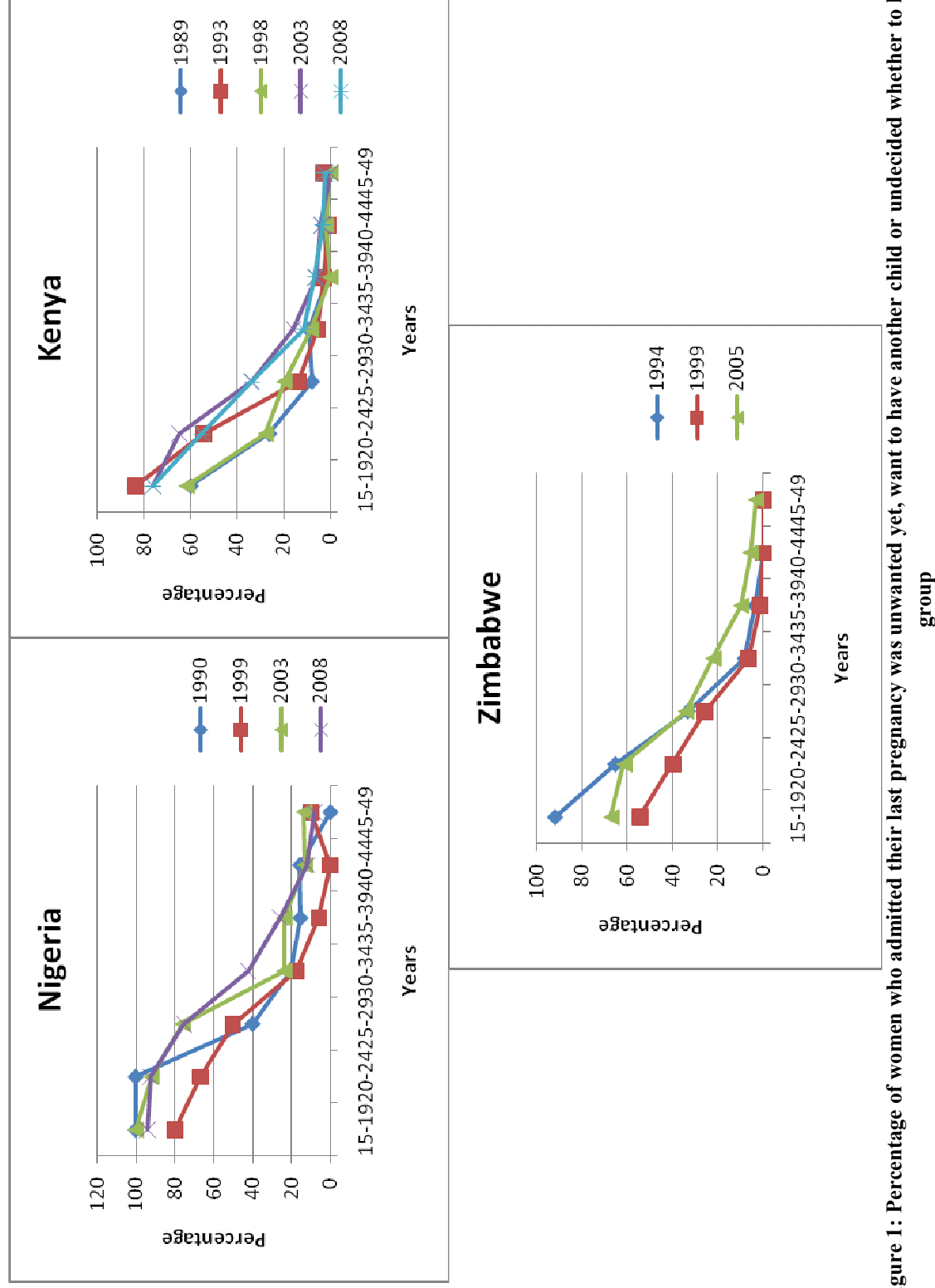


Figure 1: Percentage of women who admitted their last pregnancy was unwanted yet, want to have another child or undecided whether to have by age group

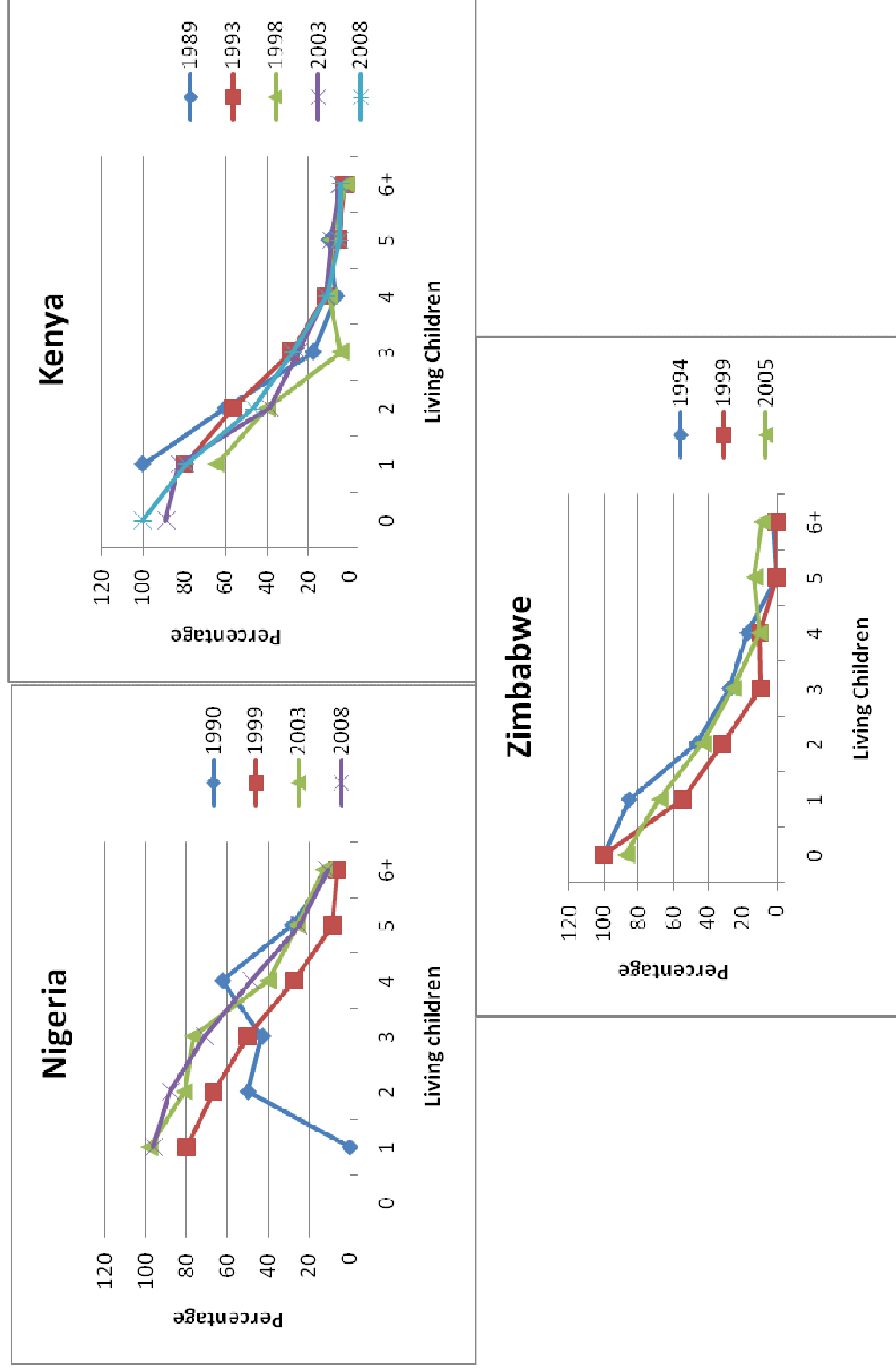


Figure 2: Percentage of women who admitted their last pregnancy was unwanted yet, want to have another child or undecided whether to have by number of living children