

## ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN DESIRED BIRTH SPACING: A CASE STUDY OF THE MARADANA GRAMA NILADARI DIVISION COLOMBO DISTRICT

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**Abstract:** *Fertility is an important element of demography which is connected to various socio-economic and other demographic factors. Fertility behavior directly affects changes in fertility levels, trends and patterns. There are three main behavioral patterns related to fertility; namely starting, spacing and stopping behavior. Differences in fertility are related to socio-economic and demographic factors such as ethnicity, religion, geographical area and education. This study mainly focuses on identifying the desired spacing fertility behavior among married women of different ethnic groups. The sample includes 150 married women in the age group of 15-29, representing the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim ethnic groups in Sri Lanka. The study area is the Maradhana Grama Niladari division in the Colombo district. A purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting the sample. The study did not show a marked variation of spacing fertility behavior by ethnicity. The findings showed that socio-economic and cultural factors, the total number of expected children, the total number of expected children in addition to the first child, the number of expected girls and boys, the desired gap between (spacing) births of children and the expected contraceptive use for spacing behavior can be identified as key demographic factors affecting expected spacing fertility behavior. In the 1985-1999 birth cohort which was selected for this study, women in all three ethnic groups expected a long birth spacing between children. A majority of the women in all three ethnic groups had limited their expected fertility to two children. An important finding of this study was that although ethnicity is known to influence differences in fertility behavior, when different ethnic groups live in a closely connected community, this living environment can markedly reduce variations in fertility behavior among different ethnic groups.*

**Keywords:** Fertility, Spacing Fertility Behavior, Ethnicity, Desired Fertility

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### Background

Fertility is the natural capability of living beings to produce offspring, directly linked to a population's ability to reproduce. 'Fertility behaviour' refers to the starting, spacing and stopping behaviour of fertility which directly affects changes in fertility levels, trends and patterns. Several researchers have identified that the spacing behaviour of fertility is the main factor affecting overall fertility behaviour (Dissanayaka, 1996; Knodel, 1987; Bavel, 2004). According to McDonald's Model of Fertility Behaviour, spacing behaviour played a major role in the European historical fertility transition. Couples who have started to reproduce have subsequently wanted to limit their fertility using two approaches: birth spacing or stopping (Knodel, 1987).

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