

# Has the Declining Age at Marriage Contributed to Reverse fertility decline in Sri Lanka?

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# Introduction

- ❖ In many countries, fertility has declined along with the postponement of marriage, particularly in the case of females.
- ❖ The delay in marriage and its impact on fertility led Krik (1969) to refer Sri Lanka as the “Ireland of Asia”.
- ❖ Delay in marriage has contributed to fertility decline significantly until mid 1970s
- ❖ However, since mid of 1990s the average age at marriage is declining
- ❖ Declining age at marriage → **Fertility Increase**

# Objective

To explore the impact of unexpected decline in age at marriage of both sexes, particularly females, on fertility change and implications in Sri Lanka.

# Data and Methodology

- Population Censuses
- Sri Lanka Demographic and Health Surveys (SLDHS) - 1987, 1993, 2000 and 2006-07
- multi-stage stratified probability samples which represent 8,000-12,000 ever married women.
- primary data on marriage timing and its possible impact on fertility – [Key Informants](#)

# Trends in Age at marriage

- Sri Lanka : the exception within South Asian Context where larger number of early marriages take place.
- up to 1970, marriage postponement in Sri Lanka was responsible for about 60% of the fertility decline.
- Decreasing proportion of never married females.

1993 (DHS)	=	38.2%
2006-07 (DHS)	=	31.1%
- Both male and female average age at marriage has declined.

# Trends in Singulate Mean Age at Marriage (yrs.)

Year	Male	Female	Difference
1901 (Census)	24.6	18.3	6.3
1971 ,,	28.0	<b>23.5</b>	4.5
1975 (WFS)	28.2	25.1	3.1
1981 (Census)	27.9	24.4	3.5
1987 (DHS)	-	24.8	-
1993 (DHS)	-	25.5	-
1994 (Demographic Survey)	28.3	24.7	3.6
2000 (DHS)	-	24.6	-
2001 (Census)	27.6	23.7	3.9
2006-07 (DHS)	-	<b>23.6</b>	-

*SMAM of females, reported in 2006-07 DHS (23.6 years), is very much similar to the corresponding figure in 1971 (23.5 yrs.)*

# Factors contributed for decline in age at marriage

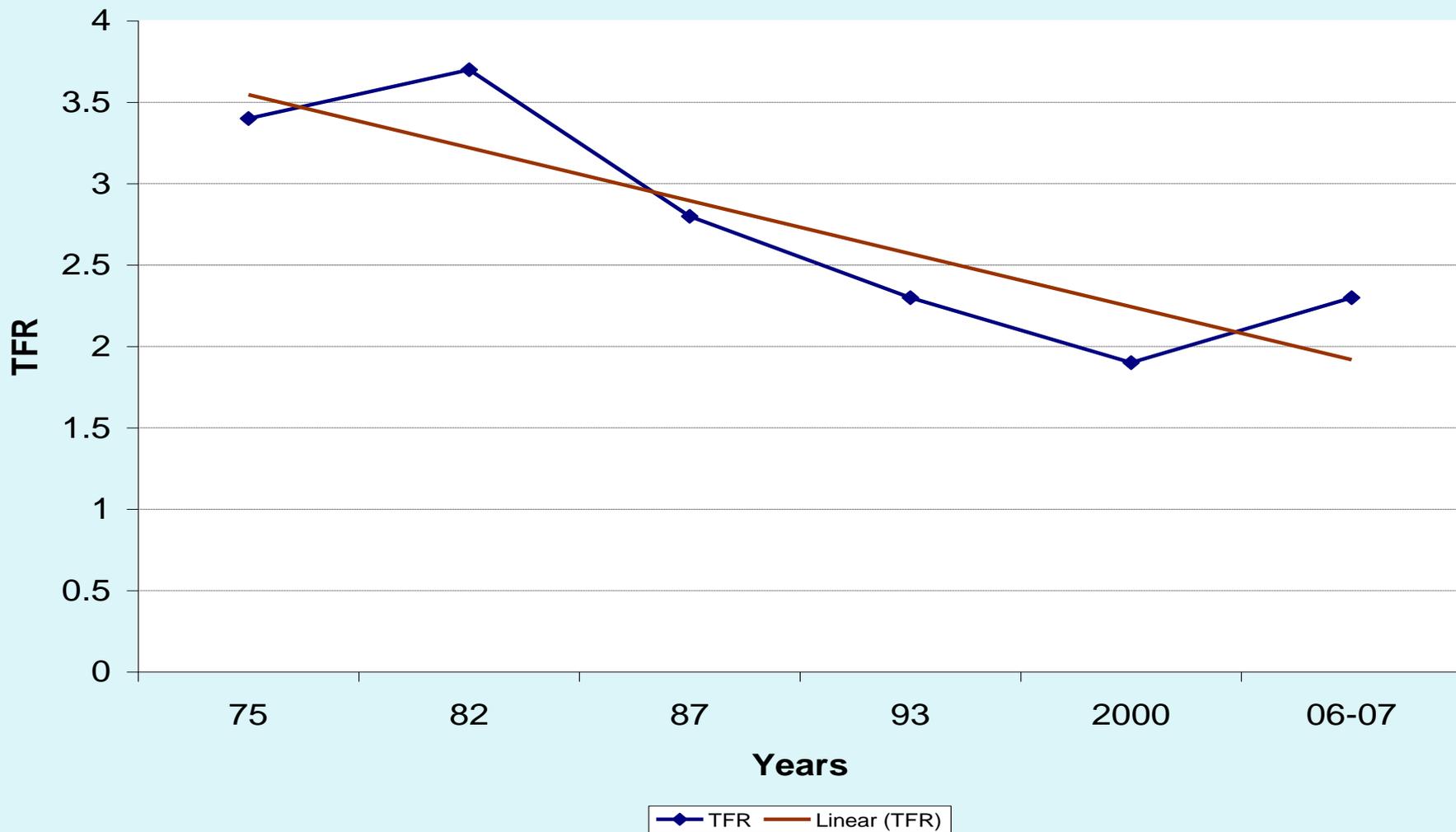
## Demographic factors

- Relaxation of marriage squeeze

## Socio-economic factors

- Restrictions on abortion services
- Remittances
- Education and unemployment
- Other factors

# Trends in Total fertility Rate, 1975-2007



# Age Specific Fertility Rates by Age Groups, Sri Lanka

Age group	Age specific fertility per 1000 ever married women			
	DHS 06-07	DHS 95-2000	DHS 88-93	DHS 82-87
<b>15-19</b>	28	27	35	38
<b>20-24</b>	102	83	110	147
<b>25-29</b>	147	118	134	161
<b>30-34</b>	122	98	104	122
<b>35-39</b>	57	40	54	71
<b>40-44</b>	14	8	14	23
<b>45-49</b>	1	1	4	3
<b>TFR</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>2.8</b>

# Fertility Change in Sri Lanka

**TFR 2.3 (DHS 2006-07)**  
**(Above Replacement)**

Replacement Level (TFR=2.1 or NRR= 1.0)

**TFR = 1.96 (1995-2000)**  
**(Below Replacement)**

# Declining age at marriage: Implications

- Postponement of marriage contributed substantially towards a reduction of fertility in Sri Lanka
- Fertility reduced and that influenced the size of the individual families and the population growth rate of the country
- However a decrease in the female age at marriage could affect the level of fertility and family size in an opposite way
- The latest SMAM of females (23.6 years), reported in 2006-07 DHS, is very much similar to the corresponding figure in 1971

- The decline in age at marriage has demonstrated a strong impact on the rise of fertility in the contemporary Sri Lanka, which was increased from below the replacement to above replacement level
- Consequent to age structure transition the Sri Lankan population now experiencing the best demographic environment - “window of opportunity” - which is conducive for rapid economic development.
- The sudden increase in fertility and rapid ageing process could fade away this favorable window of opportunity of the country earlier than predicted

# Impact of Declining age at marriage on fertility

- Although abortion is illegal in Sri Lanka it was practiced significantly up to mid of the last decade – fertility declined
- Among abortion seekers about 95 percent is married in Sri Lanka (De Silva & others, 2006).
- By the beginning of 2007, the government has launched a drive to bring a halt to abortion services in the country.
- Therefore for a woman who is compelled for pregnancy termination, has no option.
- If there was pregnancy among unmarried female, most available option is to enter in marriage
- Therefore, decreasing age at marriage, particularly of females, is negatively related with fertility.

# Total Fertility and Youth Fertility

Year	TFR (Per Woman)	ASFR (Per 1000 women)	
		15-19	20-24
1963	5.0	52	228
1974	3.4	31	146
1981	3.7	34	172
1982-1987	2.8	38	147
1988-1993	2.3	35	110
1995-2000	1.9	27	83
2003-2006	2.3	28	102

**Youth Fertility** ↑

- Since the childbearing experience of Sri Lankan women starts usually with the formation of marital union, even a slight change of age at marriage can be affected on fertility.
- However, the level of use of contraception and the knowledge of it among newly wedded couples could influence the fertility level
- Therefore, it is worthwhile to examine the recent changes of contraceptive prevalence as well.

# Contraceptive Use among currently married women (15-49 yrs.)

Method	WFS 1973	CPS 1982	DHS 1987	DHS 1993	DHS 2000	DHS 2006-07
Modern	20.2	31.8	40.6	43.7	49.5	53.1
Traditional	14.2	26.0	21.1	22.4	20.5	17.0
All	34.4	57.8	61.7	66.1	70.0	70.2

**Changes in Contraceptive Use** (permanent sterilization)



# **Others factors contributed for recent fertility increase in Sri Lanka**

- **Increase of remarriage rate**
- **Female Labour Force Participation**
- **Pro-natalistic views**
- **Decreasing unemployment rate**
- **Attitudinal Change**

# Conclusions & Policy Implications

- Delay in marriage has contributed significantly to fertility transition in Sri Lanka since 1970's.
- Sri Lanka was the leader of Asia by demographic achievements:
  - Significantly high age at marriage by 1990s – over 25 yrs. & 28 yrs. for females and males
  - The first country in South Asia to reached the replacement fertility - achieved by 1994
  - The first country in South Asia to reached the below replacement fertility - achieved during 1995-2000
- However, unexpectedly fertility shows an upward trend during the last decade- TFR of 2.3 during 2003-2006

- Several factors have contributed for fertility increase
- Of them, undoubtedly decrease in age at marriage has a large contribution for fertility increase.
- Improving the knowledge and availability on contraceptives for those who needed.
- Availability and accessibility of FP services (particularly in locations of unmet need exists)
- Strengthen the implementing the existing laws relating to minimum age at marriage (particularly in the case of females)