

“Come We Stay”: Changes in Family, Marriage and Fertility in Western and Coastal Kenya

*Abstract*

In high fertility populations, marriage and marriage processes are known to play a critical role in regulating fertility. I examine the connection between changes in marriage and attitudes towards fertility. How do different men and women perceive marriage and family? How do changes in family formation influence marital practices like marital timing, spouse choice, living arrangements, marital stability and fertility behaviors?

Qualitative data from Bungoma and Kwale, Kenya are used to show that marriage processes are fast changing, favoring pragmatic unions, commonly called ‘come we stay’, most of which are driven by pre-marital pregnancies and lack of resources required for formal marriage. ‘Come we stay’ unions are common among the young cohort, but are increasingly becoming acceptable. Their temporary nature causes women to be insecure and desire more children to secure the marriage. The desire for permanence in the union is shown to influence women’s fertility desires and outcomes.

Key words: Cohabitation, family, fertility, Kenya, marriage

Fertility has dropped below replacement level in an increasing number of countries. Over the last three decades, as observed by Lutz and his colleagues, 'birth rates have been on decline in virtually all countries of the world' (2006: 168). This is largely attributed to an increase in the empowerment of women, through increased access to education and modern family planning services. Other scholars have attributed this development to a global economic system that makes children more costly (Caldwell and Schindlmayr, 2003). Whether caused by the changing role of women or a world economic system, the decline has expanded to such a level that scholars such as Wattenberg note that 'Never have birth rates and fertility rates fallen so far, so fast, so low, for so long, in so many places, so surprisingly' (2004: 149).

Nevertheless, in many developing countries, fertility remains high. Kenya is one of the African countries that has recorded fertility decline in the last couple of decades. Kenya's total fertility rate (TFR), declined from an estimated 8.1 children per woman in the late 1960s to 5.4 in the early 1990s, according to UN estimates. Nevertheless, like in other sub-Saharan countries like Zimbabwe and Uganda, Kenya's fertility decline has slowed considerably since then, with the 2008 TFR estimated at 4.6 children per woman--below the 5.5 children per woman average for sub-Saharan Africa, but above the average for all less developed countries (Munguti and Buluma, 2010). While the fertility decline is observed countrywide, there is indication that it is not happening at the same rate. Within the country, regional differences are substantial (Blacker, 2002). Two regions, Western and Coast, capture this variation. Western Province, predominantly Christian, had high fertility and a sharp fertility decline which came to a halt by the end of the 1990s. A slight increase has occurred in the recent years. By contrast the Coast Province, predominantly Muslim had low fertility in the Kenyan context and little change has taken place

since (Opiyo, 2004; Munguti and Buluma, 2010). While the difference is not stark, it highlights variation in the way in which fertility is conceptualized and practiced in the two different cultural and religious settings.

In populations that are characterized by high fertility, marriage and marital practices are known to play a critical role in fertility outcomes (Caldwell, 1987; Pebley and Mbugua, 1989; Bledsoe, 1990; Ezeh, 1997; Dodoo, 1998). Two studies done in Western Kenya (1988) and Coastal Kenya (1991), showed marked differences in terms of fertility desires and intentions (Jensen and Juma, 1989; Jensen and Khasakhala, 1993). Both areas were rural, and poverty was widespread. The predominant ethnic groups were Bukusu and Digo in Western and Coast, respectively. In these two studies, 132 women and 15 men were interviewed on fertility, marriage and gender. Key findings from this round of studies were that women in Bungoma in Western Kenya had a high number of children, in addition to high fertility desires. By contrast, women in Kwale in Coastal Kenya, had a relatively low number of children combined with relatively lower fertility desires. They were, however, also unable to accomplish their fertility desires and wanted more children than they actually had. Marital patterns differed substantially. In Bungoma, polygyny was prevalent, marriages were stable and universal, and fertility pressure on women was substantial. Women in monogamous marriages declared that they had to give birth to many children in order to prevent their husbands from marrying additional wives. By contrast, in Kwale, polygyny was relatively uncommon, but marital instability was relatively high. Half of the women in the study were either separated, divorced, remarried or were 'staying with a man'. The studies found an interaction between fertility and marriage patterns. In Bungoma, women in monogamous marriages endeavoured to have many children in order to prevent their husband from taking additional wives. In Kwale, many women had problems getting pregnant and reported

spontaneous miscarriage, hence their fertility was lower than desired. Women's marital histories indicated that these problems were associated with unstable marriages, which seemed to have a long history in the community (Jensen, 1995).

The study on which this paper is based is a follow-up to the two studies described above, done in Western and Coastal Kenya. The study sought to, among other objectives, explore the impact of gender systems in two different cultural and religious contexts, on fertility and poverty. This paper examines the connection between changes in marriage and family formations, and attitudes towards fertility. How do different generations of men and women perceive marriage and family? How do changes in family formation influence marital practices such as marital timing, spouse choice, living arrangements, marital stability and fertility behaviors? In other words, how have changes in marriage formations affected fertility behaviors in Western and Coastal Kenya?

#### *Data and methods*

This paper is part of a larger study for which design included the use of quantitative secondary data, mainly from the 2008 Kenya DHS, as well as qualitative data collected from locations in Bungoma, Western Kenya and Kwale, Coastal Kenya. According to the study design, Kenya DHS data were to be used to answer questions relating to the linkages between fertility, child mortality and poverty. Qualitative tools were used to capture information showing change over time with regards to gender systems, fertility and poverty. This paper uses only the qualitative tools to understand the interaction between marriage, family formations and fertility.

In Western, the study was done in two sub-locations, Muchi and Makuselwa, both of which are sub-locations that represent a different economic system. Muchi represents a cash crop economy as the population there is highly dependent on sugarcane as a source of income. Makuselwa is

characterized by a subsistence economy, where most of the population owns small pieces of land and depends on subsistence farming for food and income. In Coast, the study was also done in two sub-locations, each representing a different economic system. Kibundani is a semi-urban setting where residents live close together and depend on small businesses and tourism to earn a living. Mtambwe is located in the rural area, where the mainstay is subsistence farming.

Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews (IDIs), key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) in Western and Coast. In addition, data based on field observations for the entire period of the study were collected and recorded as field notes in both study areas. Data were collected in two phases: Phase 1 involved IDIs and KIIs, while phase 2, which involved FGDs, was done 5 months later, and sought to fill gaps on issues that were not fully explored in phase 1.

*A summary of the interviews conducted is shown in Table 1 below:*

<i>Type</i>	<i>Area</i>								<i>Total</i>
	<i>Bungoma</i>				<i>Kwale</i>				
	<i>Makuselwa</i>		<i>Muchi</i>		<i>Kibundani</i>		<i>Mtambwe</i>		
	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	
<i>IDIs</i>									
18-35 yrs (young)	6	17	3	14	3	12	2	13	70
36+yrs (old)	0	6	3	8	3	6	5	8	39
<i>Total</i>	6	23	6	21	6	18	7	21	109

<i>FGDs</i>									
18-35 yrs (young)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		8
35+ yrs (old)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		8
<i>Total</i>									<i>16</i>

As seen in table 1, the IDI interviews were administered to women and men from the age of 18 and 68. There were two reasons for including informants above reproductive age. First, comparing perspectives and practices of the young and the old is essential in identifying intergenerational differences and changes in fertility perceptions and behaviors. Second, the previous studies focused on women in reproductive age, but we had to include them in this study as they were the link to new respondents as described below.

The respondents were selected through snowballing, where the initial respondent, referred to as the ‘core’ respondent, was a participant in the two aforementioned studies 20 years earlier. It was a difficult and frustrating process to identify and recruit core participants in both areas, as some were dead and others had moved out of the study areas. In Western, more than 7 core participants were identified. It was more difficult to find core participants in Coast, as many of the women had relocated, probably due to re-marriage. Also, the record of participants in the prior study was scanty as the women’s names were not accurately recorded or had changed. In spite of this, a number of core participants were identified through a ‘recall’ method, where the only core participant we could identify provided information about other participants she remembered to have taken part in the study 20 years earlier. Using this information, a few others

were found, and their identity was later verified through photographs that were taken with their consent for the prior study, twenty years earlier.

Using references by core participants, women and men of reproductive age within their networks were recruited. The participants who were snowballed were mostly younger than, and related to, the core participants - daughters, sons, daughters-in-law, sons-in-law, grandchildren, nieces and nephews. In addition, a few participants were randomly selected when it was verified that they satisfied the criteria of belonging to the desired age group and had interesting views and experiences to share. This snowball approach was favored for this study because, by collecting views from core respondents from the previous studies, and also from the younger (current) cohort, it allowed the study to explore generational and temporal differences in attitudes towards marriage and fertility.

Eight focus group discussions in each area were held with married and unmarried women and men (see table 1). The issues discussed, and pertinent to this paper included perspectives on marriage patterns and practices, gender roles and fertility desires and outcomes. Participants were selected on the basis of their age and, for women, status as having ever given birth. The selection process was done with the help of community mobilizers who were familiar with the discussants and their fertility history. The discussions were held in Bukusu in Bungoma and Digo in Kwale, and moderated by a research assistant who was duly trained in FGD moderation, as well as on the subject matter of the discussion.

In the first phase of the study (which involved use of IDIs), it emerged that marriage patterns played a key role in the women's decision-making with regards to fertility desires and outcomes, and other household dynamics. The issue was therefore interrogated further in the follow-up phase (which involved use of FGDs), where discussions sought to reveal a more nuanced picture



of the various marriage forms and patterns. The data excerpts presented in this paper are from both phases of data collection, but more so from the follow-up phase because of the depth of the data on the issue.

The data were transcribed and coded using Atlas.ti qualitative software. The coding process captured emerging themes and also enabled us to continue to make discoveries about deeper realities in the data that were referenced by the codes. Data were analyzed using these themes to identify connections between the themes and the respondents. For example, the theme of ‘come we stay’ emerged from descriptions coded under marriage, but further analysis of the scripts showed that this marriage type is not categorically classified as a marriage by study participants, but rather, a transitional status that leads to permanent unions that would be culturally and religiously acceptable.

### *Results*

#### *“Come We stay”*

All respondents, men and women, were asked in the in-depth interviews to talk about their marriage/relationships history. The interest was in understanding various aspects of marriage, including the meaning of marriage, reasons for marriage, types of marriage, duration of marriage, age at marriage, dowry, expectations in marriage and prospects for the future of marriage, among others. The respondents, including FGD participants, shared their personal experiences, as well as their thoughts about these issues from a community perspective.

It emerged that women and men in both Western and Coast had varied marriage and relationship experiences, but it was also apparent that there was a pattern in the processes, especially with

regards to marriage. 'Come we stay' was cited by most respondents and FGD participants as a common relationship/marriage trend in their communities. From the responses, 'Come we stay' is a marriage formation in which a man and a woman get together in a union that would formerly be deemed legally, culturally and religiously unacceptable. In this formation, the couple lives together, with or without the knowledge or blessings of parents or guardians, or the community in general. Usually, following different sets of circumstances, some of which are presented later in this paper, the woman is 'invited' by the man to live with him, hence the name "come we stay". This relationship also had other names such as 'sneaking', 'passing through the bush', 'eloping', 'running away' and 'living together'.

'Come we stay' was discussed in detail in both study areas, as it was seen as one of the most common marriage forms in these communities. As the two conversations below from Western indicate, 'come we stay' unions are increasingly popular and occur on a relatively large scale. They are also increasingly acceptable in the community in general.

R: One [type of marriage] is come we stay.

I: Come we stay?

R: Those are the most common ones.

I: Is it an acceptable method?

R: Yes it is acceptable.

R: For most, this is how it is. For example if I have maybe just completed school and I have a small job, and just like a joke I meet someone [a woman] and we become friends. Two years down the line we decide to start living together ( Muchi, Bungoma, Young Men, FGD)

“Come we stay” unions were reported to occur across a wide age range, but more so among young people, as the quote below indicates.

I: Now this come we stay is it usually with the young generation or even the older ones?

R: Mostly it is with the young people (Muchi, Bungoma, Young Men, FGD.)

### *Reasons for changing marriage formations*

The participants in the study were asked to discuss the reasons that were associated with the increasing preference for ‘come we stay’ marriages. It was apparent that the popularity of this type of union was a recent development, and it was gaining acceptability at an unprecedented rate. A number of reasons were given for this development across the board, and it appeared that most decisions to have a ‘come we stay’ union were reactionary, rather than planned. In most cases, decisions to ‘come and stay’ were reached after couples discovered that they had an unplanned premarital pregnancy. Usually, the women were young, still in school and dependent on their parents. Though the men in this situation were also young, most of them were said to be slightly older than their female counterparts, completed secondary school and with a better financial status than the women.

Unwanted premarital pregnancy was cited as a common reason for many couples to ‘elope’ and live together in a ‘come we stay’ union. In both study areas, but particularly in Western, many respondents, men and women, young and old, spoke about the immense pressure on couples to get married when it was discovered that the woman was pregnant. In most cases, it appeared that many couples wanted to avoid the social stigma that is associated with premarital pregnancy, and therefore arranged to live together to somewhat legitimize the pregnancy and the baby. As in the

quote below by a woman who was in a 'come we stay' union, premarital pregnancy prompted strong negative reaction from society, as well as family, to the extent that the pregnant women were inevitably driven into 'come we stay' unions with the men responsible for the pregnancy.

I: I want us to talk more about marriage? What made you to get married?

R: I told you earlier, I realized that my stomach had a problem [I was pregnant]. I suspected that I was expectant. Since my parents were very harsh and this is why I decided to run away [and live with a man]. (Makuselwa, Bungoma, IDI, older woman)

The problem of unplanned premarital pregnancy was not usually viewed in isolation, but in relation to school completion. Study participants often cited pregnancy as the main cause for dropping out of school for young girls. While the Kenyan school policy supports the return to school of girls after childbirth, many girls preferred not to return to school due to stigmatization. As such, many opted to join their partners in 'come we stay' unions, as the conversation below with a young female participant clearly illustrates:

I: By the time you got pregnant, were you still in school?

R: I was still in school by the time I got pregnant. I was in class five.

I: Is this the reason you decided to quit school?

R: Yes, it is pregnancy that caused me to leave school.

I: Did you just come here or you told him that you were pregnant before you came here?

R: I had already informed him that I was pregnant with his baby.

I: Which step did he take?

R: He told me to go home with him to start life [together].

I: This means that you never informed your parents that you were pregnant? You just went?

R: Yes. (Makuselwa, Bungoma, , IDI, young woman)

While most discussion about pregnancy and ‘come we stay’ unions was largely in the context of girls dropping out of school, it also emerged that some women got pregnant immediately after completing secondary school. In such circumstances, the women abandoned their ambitions to continue to higher education, and opted to live in union with their partners.

The discussions around ‘come we stay’ unions pointed to the role of scarce resources for community members in both Western and Coast. It was felt that ‘come we stay’ was gaining popularity because there were few financial obligations for the couple prior to co-habiting. In ‘normal’ marriages, it was procedural for the man or his family to pay dowry to the family of the bride, or to the bride herself (in the case of Coast) prior to the marriage being approved and formalized. Dowry takes several forms and is sometimes a protracted process,<sup>1</sup> which in turn discourages some couples from participating. But beyond that, many study participants were of the opinion that the financial demands of dowry and marriage ceremonies discouraged many couples from taking the culturally and religiously acceptable route to marriage, and led them to take alternative options such as ‘come we stay’, as demonstrated in the three quotes below from Bungoma and Kwale:

---

<sup>1</sup> Details of the dowry process and forms are not discussed as they are beyond the scope of this paper.

R: Many people do that ['come we stay'] because when you want to get married openly, you know when you do that kind of arrangement, you must also arrange something small for the old people [pay dowry] and if you don't have money, then you pass through the bush ( Makuselwa, Bungoma, FGD, young men).

R: .....there is a difference between the way they used to pay dowry before and [what happens] today. For my case dowry was paid the same year I got married, after a while they added more [cows] and in total they paid nine cows for my dowry. But today, even for it to reach nine [cows] would be pure luck.

I: Why is there that difference between then and now?

R: I think right now poverty has increased and is biting hard.

I: So is there no dowry paid for girls these days?

R: These days, let me tell you, if you get our in laws paying dowry, then you are very lucky, there is a lot of poverty amongst people right now and they don't do it well. (Muchi Bungoma, FGD, older women)

I: Is there a reason that causes that [eloping]?

R: Its traditions, if your girl is eloped, you won't think of religion; you opt for traditions where you will demand for several stuffs some of which you haven't even used in your lifetime. So our traditions contribute very much to this trend of girls being taken away before marriage. (Kibundani, Kwale, FGD, older women)

This sentiment was expressed by both men and women, even though it was clear that the requirement to pay dowry was only directed at the men. It emerged that both males and females were responsible for dowry payment as it was assumed that the groom's family (parents and siblings) were equally responsible for meeting his dowry obligations. The burden of paying dowry, therefore, was not just for the men, but also for the women, as the conversation below indicates:

I: If by bad luck the girl is married and dies before you pay that dowry, will she still be considered as married?

R: She will be considered because you will have to pay

I: You will pay during that time?

R: Yes, you will pay before she is buried

I: And if you have no money for dowry?

R: Your parents can do that for you (Muchi, Bungoma – , FGD, older women)

As much as the popularity of 'come we stay' marriages was blamed on the lack of resources for dowry and formal marriage ceremonies, it also emerged that most of the women who opted to 'come and stay' were school dropouts, as a result of lack of fees to complete their education. Dropping out of school meant that the women were 'idle' and exposed to risky sexual behavior that would lead to unplanned premarital pregnancy, and ultimately, 'come we stay' unions. It was apparent from the discussions that many men and women saw their route to 'come we stay' as emanating from their lack of resources to continue with school. Marriage, and particularly

‘come we stay’ was an escape from what they viewed as ‘boring’ routine out of school, as the two quotes from Kwale and Bungoma suggest:

I: And reason as to why you were married (eloped) early?

R: The reason was because I did not have assistant to make me proceed with my education that’s why I decided to married early maybe I would succeeded in other ways when married. (Mtambwe - Kwale, IDI, older woman)

I: What reason made you to get married (eloped)?

R: The thing that made me to marry is that I was at school but it was difficult for me to afford school fees. Life of just sitting at home became difficult for me and this prompted me to marry so that I could bear children. ( Makuselwa – Bungoma, , IDI, young man)

#### *Trajectory of ‘come we stay’ unions*

“Even if you don’t approve it, it will still happen. It’s not allowed but we are helpless”. ( Kibundani, Kwale, , FGD, older women)

As seen elsewhere in this results section, ‘come we stay’ is a union that is increasingly gaining support among men and women, as well as the young and the old. In most cases, ‘come we stay’ was viewed as a union of convenience, as it arose from various circumstances experienced by individuals and society as a whole, as discussed earlier in this paper. ‘Come we stay’ is occurring more among young people, but old people are also players in the dynamics involved. As such, its



acceptability was universal, and its occurrence was seen as inevitable, as illustrated in the quote above.

I: Now let's talk about marriages and families in general. Which type of marriage is popular in our area here, as in, is there monogamy, polygamy and that one where people just live together without marriage?

R: People mostly stay together without marriage here. Girls elope. You may have about 5 girls [in an area] and all of them may have eloped. (Kibundani – Kwale,, FGD, Older women)

The sentiment in the quote above suggests that 'come we stay' unions are not entirely viewed as marriage. The respondent above implies that this kind of union is not necessarily a marriage in cultural and religious contexts, both of which are the basis upon which marriage values are prescribed in the communities in Western and Coast. In fact, the respondents in the study seemed to agree on the idea that 'come we stay' unions were temporary and/or transitional, as seen in the quote below:

R: ...Others will later on decide to go [back to their] home or, after living together for a while, they go to the marriage registration officer and register the marriage so that it becomes officially a marriage.

I: What you mean is that there are stages?

R: You agree between the two of you and say you want it to be like this and like that.

I: But it starts with come we stay?

R: Yes, and it is acceptable. (Muchi – Bungoma, Young Men, FGD)

Transition from ‘come we stay’ status is expected to occur when the circumstances that led to the union change. For example, once an unplanned pregnancy is ‘legitimized’ through ‘come we stay’, it is expected that after a period of time, the couple will move to the next level of their union – a formal marriage sealed with a cultural or religious ceremony. In these circumstances, dowry is paid and/or a religious wedding ceremony is performed. The first quote suggests that there is constant dialogue between the families of the couple, as there is between the couple, to arrive at an acceptable decision to move the relationship to the next level. The second quote suggests that the couple is equally responsible for their transition to marriage, because they are both expected to mitigate the circumstances that led to their cohabitation.

I: And once they have eloped a lady, are there decisions made or...?

R: Decisions are always made. For instance if my boy has taken someone’s daughter, I will try my level best to report the incident to her dad and I will listen at the father’s demands and so we will reach an agreement, pay the demands and lastly, it is marriage (Kibundani - Kwale, FGD, older women).

R: She might come in at a stage when you are not able to manage yourself, and she is supposed to come and help you seek for a livelihood and also be able to pay that dowry, you see. ( Muchi - Bungoma, FGD, young men)

While the above evidence shows ‘come we stay’ as a positive influence on the couple, some study participants suggested that the temporary nature of the union makes women vulnerable and unsure of the union’s transition to marriage. In which case, women opted to have children in order to secure their place in the marriage. Also, it emerged that marriages that progress from ‘come we stay’ unions were usually unstable, as the women were vulnerable to abuse, and in the case of Bungoma, were exposed to the likelihood of being enjoined in a polygynous marriage.

The two quotes below illustrate these sentiments:

I: Okay, does that woman in such a relation feel she is in a marriage?

R: Of course.

R: But the most important thing is to have a baby.

I: After getting a baby, she is then a wife?

R: Yes (chorus)

I: Let us hear one by one please.

R: She will feel she is at her home now. (Muchi – Bungoma,, FGD, young men)

R: I don’t know whether to call it forced marriage or temporary (all of them laugh)

I: and so you will just live for a while and then separate?

R: it is very easy for those ones to separate or very easy to add another (all people still laughing) (Makuselwa – Bungoma, FGD, young men)

It was suggested by some study participants that marriages that begin as ‘come we stay’ were likely to last longer than those that begun in acceptable forms such as weddings and cultural ceremonies. The reason behind this sentiment was that ‘come we stay’ couples developed a relationship that was based on an understanding of equality, dialogue and working together to resolve issues. This was particularly so because these unions begun under very difficult circumstances and so the couple learned early to work through problems together. The conversation below illustrates this point.

Res: The one where you get a girl and stay together you start life, that kind of marriage can survive the storms. When you decide to go the Christian way, that marriage does not mostly survive.

Int: Why does the ‘come we stay’ marriage last longer than the others?

Res: You have agree to stay together and also do your things together [in ‘come we stay’] but the other one you just talk and do nothing because she is still at her home. And you know these things go at the same time - dowry, wedding and then living together - and by the time you come to understand one another, things are bad. (Muchi – Bungoma, FGD young men)

### *Discussion and conclusion*

This paper examined the connection between changes in marriage and family formations, and attitudes towards fertility in two distinct geo-cultural settings in Kenya. The evidence presented shows that marriage processes are fast changing in both the areas, favoring pragmatic unions, most commonly known as ‘come we stay’, most of which are driven by unplanned premarital

pregnancies and a lack of resources required for formal marriage. The lack of resources, which was mentioned in both Western and Coast areas, by men and women, old and young, emerged as a major driver for temporary unions. Many men did not have enough money to pay dowry to the family of the bride (in Western) or the bride herself (in Coast), or finance a formal marriage ceremony/wedding, and often resolved to co-habit with the pregnant woman until their economic situation improved. In many cases, the man's economic situation did not improve, but the couple continued to live together, and continued to have children. In some cases, the woman contributed to the savings towards dowry and/or wedding in order to ensure that it happened.

'Come we stay' unions are most common among the young cohort (18-35), but are increasingly becoming acceptable in the society. Their temporary nature makes women insecure in the marriage and prompts them to desire more children to secure the marriage. This was the case in both areas, but more so in Western, where there is a strong value for bigger families than in Coast. As such, such temporary unions as 'come we stay' are a major driver for not just fertility in general, but premarital and non-marital fertility in particular. Having children during the temporary premarital stage was perceived to be the nudge that was required to spur the union's evolution to a more socially acceptable and permanent marriage.

Most women expressed a desire to transition from 'come we stay' to formalized unions as this would empower them to perform their roles as wives and mothers without inhibition. The evidence shows that in both areas, 'come we stay' unions did not necessarily lead to permanent unions as desired by the women, but to unstable quasi-permanent marriages that further exposed the women to circumstances that continued the pressure for high fertility. In Western, most of the 'come we stay' unions evolved to polygynous unions. This transition pathway seems inevitable, given the long history of cultural support for polygyny among the Bukusu. In addition, the lack

of cultural, religious and legal ceremonies to recognize 'come we stay' unions allows men to have little commitment to their partners and to engage in other similar relationships. This has also been recently observed elsewhere by Manning and Cohen (2012), showing a link between premarital cohabitation and marital instability among men and women.

Like in Western, the strategy to have children in 'come we stay' unions in order to secure the relationship did not get the desired results in Coast. Despite the presence of a child/children in the 'come we stay' union, the pace of transition to the next level was slow to the extent that many women despaired and opted to leave. In most cases, they went on to another 'come we stay' situation, where they got another child, and the cycle continued. As such, there were many reported cases of divorce and remarriage, under which circumstances, the women continued to feel the pressure to have children with each partner. The desire for permanence in a union is shown to influence women's fertility desires and outcomes.

Looking at the way the unions evolve, it appears that women in Coast enjoy relatively wider spaces of freedom than women in Western. This may be due to the Digo cultural and Islamic religious laws and values about marriage, which allow women in Coast to leave their partners and enjoin in another marriage with ease and without stigmatization in the community. On the other hand, Western women seem to be restricted in their marriage decisions, especially when their marriages are unstable. While Christian marriage values do not support polygyny, women in predominantly Christian Western are bound by the Bukusu cultural values that favor polygyny. In fact, some study participants viewed polygynous marriage as a better arrangement than 'come we stay', as it was a more socially recognized marriage, based on local cultural values.

These findings lend support to diffusionist ideas about reproductive health and fertility. That women bound by the same geo-cultural values tend to behave similarly, despite differences in their individual circumstances (Caldwell and Caldwell, 1990; Irons, 1979; Cleland and Wilson, 1987; Coale and Watkins; 1986). The cultural and religious values in support of high fertility and marriage in both areas pressure women to have more children, irrespective of their marriage situation. The repeat cycle of desire for children in subsequent 'come we stay' unions in Coast shows that geo-cultural values for children supersedes individual circumstances to the extent that the women are little influenced by their previous premarital and non-marital birth experiences in their subsequent decisions. In Western, the pressure for women to bear children within a marriage context leads them to 'come we stay' arrangements, and later, polygynous unions, in order to legitimize their fertility. In both these types of unions, women feel the need for higher fertility in order to secure the union.

Given the transitional and temporary nature of 'come we stay', it would be in order to ask about the future of the phenomenon, and its long term effects on fertility. Based on prior studies in this area (Jensen and Juma, 1989; Jensen and Khasakhala, 1993), it is clear that there have been changes in marriage and fertility desires in Western and Coast. At the Coast, 'come we stay' is continuing in a tradition of cohabitation variants that often lead to unstable relationships.

Nevertheless, it appears that cohabitation has gained a level of acceptance and legitimacy that was absent in previous studies. In Western, 'come we stay' has emerged as a critical component of the marriage process. In both areas, this development reflects changing social and economic realities. From the evidence in this study, it appears that this type of unions will endure, based on the persistence of the circumstances that drive them. Poverty, premarital and non-marital pregnancy, high school dropout rates and changing cultural values are on the increase in these

areas. As seen in this study, these factors are also the main drivers for 'come we stay' unions. Based on this, it appears that temporary marriage unions and resultant high fertility are likely to continue in Western and Coast. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that 'come we stay' unions are viewed as a phase in the fluid marriage process in these communities and may change to a different status at any given time in the process. Nevertheless, there is every indication that under the circumstances of poverty, premarital and nonmarital pregnancy, high school dropout rates and changing cultural and religious values, 'come we stay' will continue to feature as part of the marriage continuum.

### **References:**

- Blacker, J. (2002, March). *Kenya's fertility transition: How long will it go?* Expert Group Meeting on Completing the Fertility Transition, New York, New York.
- Bledsoe, C. (1990). Transformation in Sub-Saharan African Marriage and Fertility. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 510, 115-125.
- Caldwell, J. C. (1982). *Theory of Fertility Decline*. London: Academic Press.
- Caldwell, J.C. (1987). The cultural context of high fertility in sub-Saharan Africa. *Population and Development Review*, 13, 409-437.
- Caldwell, J.C. & Caldwell, P. (1990). High fertility in sub-Saharan Africa. *Scientific American*, 262(5), 118-125.
- Caldwell, J. C. & Schindlmayr, T. (2003). Explanations of the fertility crisis in modern societies: A search for communalities'. *Population Studies*, 57, 241-263.



Cleland, J. & Wilson, C. (1987). Demand theories of the fertility transition: An iconoclastic view. *Population Studies*, 41, 5-30.

Coale, A.J. & Watkins S.C. (1986). *The decline of Fertility in Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Dodoo, F.N. A. (1998). Marriage type and reproductive decisions: A comparative study in sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60, 232-242.

Ezeh, A.C. (1997). Polygyny and reproductive behavior in sub-Saharan Africa: A contextual analysis. *Demography*, 34, 355-368.

Irons, W. (1979). Cultural and biological success. In N.A. Chagnon and W. Irons (Eds), *Evolutionary Biology and Human Social Behavior: an Anthropological Perspective* (pp. 257-72). North Scituate, MA: Duxbury.

Jensen, A-M. & Juma M.N. (1989). *Women, childbearing and nutrition: A case study from Bungoma, Kenya*. NIBR-report no 16, Oslo: Norwegian Institute of Urban and Regional Research.

Jensen, A-M. & Khasakhala, A.A. (1993). *Too many children? Fertility and family planning in a Muslim society of Kenya*. NIBR-report, no 15, Oslo: Norwegian Institute of Urban and Regional Research.

Jensen, A-M. (1995). The Status of women and the social context of reproduction. *Journal of International Development*, 7, 61-79.

Lutz, W., Skirbekk, V. & Testa, M.R. (2006). The Low Fertility Trap Hypothesis: Forces that may lead to further postponement and fewer births in Europe. *Vienna Yearbook of Population Research*, 4, 167-192.

Manning, W.D. & Cohen, J.A. (2012). Premarital cohabitation and marital dissolution: An examination of recent marriages. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 74,377-387.

Munguti, J.N. & Buluma, R. (2010). *Fertility levels, trends and differentials*. In, *Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 2008-2009* (Pp 47-56). Calverton, Maryland: KNBS and ICF Macro.

Opiyo, C. (2004): Fertility levels, trends, and differentials. In, *Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 2003* (pp 51-62). Calverton, Maryland: CBS, MOH, and ORC Macro.

Pebley, A.R. & Mbugua, W. (1989). Polygyny and fertility in sub- Saharan Africa. In R.J. Lesthaeghe (Eds), *Reproduction and Social Organization in Sub-Saharan Africa* (pp. 338-64). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wattenberg, B. J. (2004). *Fewer: How the new demography of depopulation will shape our future*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee.