

## **Ethnic differences in starting fertility behaviour: a case study of Maradhana**

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Fertility is a one of the major demographic components, which is connected to various socio-economic and other demographic factors. Fertility behaviour of a group of women depends on various factors such as ethnicity, religion, residential sector, level of education and cultural norms. Researchers have identified that starting behaviour of fertility is one of the factor affecting overall fertility behaviour. In addition to socio-economic factors, age at first marriage, age at first birth, gap between first marriage and first birth are the key demographic factors affecting starting fertility behaviour. According to existing literature, fertility generally differs by ethnicity and related attitudes, identities, cultural practices and sexual behaviour. Therefore, this study mainly focuses on identifying the starting fertility behaviour of married women of different ethnic groups using a mixed methodological approach. Quantitative data was collected through an interviewer administered questionnaire. The sample includes 150 married women who are in the age group 15-29, representing Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim ethnic groups. The study area is Maradhana Grama Niladari (GN) Division in the Colombo district. Purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting the sample. According to this study, the mean age at first marriage of women in the 15-29 age group is 21.07 years, and the mean age at first marriage of the Sinhala, Tamil and Moor women are 22.2, 21.8 and 21.1 years respectively. Majority of the women in all three ethnic groups have entered first marriage between the ages 20-24 years. Mean age at first birth of Sinhala, Tamil and Moor women is 22.94, 21.28 and 21.29 years respectively. Although fertility behaviour in general and also starting fertility behaviour is believed to differ by ethnicity, this study found that it was not so in the study population. This was due to the close interrelationship among different ethnic communities living in the same environment and merging of attitudes, beliefs and practices amongst other. Therefore in relation to this study, it can be concluded that living environment has a major influence on fertility behaviour irrespective of ethnicity.

**Keywords:** *Starting fertility behaviour, ethnicity, age at first marriage, age at first birth*

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