

The Pakistan Demographic Survey

The Pakistan Demographic Survey provides the crucial evidence of fertility decline in Pakistan, but this survey has been neglected both by the Federal Bureau of Statistics (FBS), which conducts the survey, and by other users. The published annual reports of the survey have not been widely disseminated. Neither the library of the Pakistan Institute for Development Economics (which has a generally excellent collection of source materials) nor the library of the FBS contains a complete set of PDS's published reports. The reports for 1993 and 1994 were never published, although photocopies were made available to the first author in Islamabad in July 2003 (they had to be obtained by the FBS office in Islamabad from the FBS office in Karachi, which is responsible for the survey).

Conversations with Pakistani demographers in Islamabad in July 2003 suggest that the PDS results are not considered reliable. Early PDS reports presented identical estimates for several successive years, leading to doubts about the integrity of the estimates. The lack of detailed documentation of sample design, matching, and adjustment procedures (the survey was initially carried out quarterly with a six-month retrospective reporting period) may have compounded these doubts.

The high level of fertility indicated by the PDS for 1984–87 may play a role as well, for misreading of evidence from previous surveys had suggested a much lower level. This was presumably the reason that Blacker was asked in 1988 to evaluate the PDS. He found no evidence that fertility was being overestimated (Blacker, ca 1988).

Given the critical importance of the PDS evidence, it would be useful for the Federal Bureau of Statistics to further support it by (1) providing detailed documentation of how it is implemented, (2) carrying out and publishing formal evaluations of the data quality, and (3) disseminating a complete set of reports in digital form (via the World Wide Web and on CDROM, for example) as well as in traditional printed form.

(Excerpt)