

My Ph.D. In my thesis, I study how public policies affecting women's economic security and opportunities impact—intendedly or not—marriage and fertility. I delve into the mechanisms to shed light on the underlying incentives shaping nuptial and fertility patterns in sub-Saharan Africa. In my first chapter, we use six experiments to explore the unintended impacts of two prevalent development programs on fertility: business training and land titling. Contrary to the common belief that an increase in female earnings would naturally decrease fertility due to the rising opportunity costs of childbearing, our findings tell a different story. In Togo and Ethiopia, female business owners who experienced a 30% boost in their profits actually increased their fertility. We also find large positive fertility responses to land titling programs in Benin and Ghana. These results are driven by women who need a son to secure their old-age subsistence in contexts deprived of pensions, health care, or widows' inheritance rights. Our findings suggest that women's lack of long-term economic security significantly contributes to high fertility rates in SSA.

I test a corollary prediction of these findings in my second chapter. I exploit a natural experiment in Namibia to study the causal impact of a reform improving widows' inheritance rights on fertility. I find that the reform led to a 24% decrease in the annual birth rate, equivalent to a reduction of one child over a woman's reproductive life. I also find that the reform delayed the onset of fertility by 5.5 months. In contexts where the widowhood risk may materialize at a young age, women anticipate the need to have a financially independent child by their 40's. The insurance capacity of children being imperfect, they also need many children. My findings suggest that improving widows' inheritance rights might be an unexpected low-cost policy lever to tackle both high and early fertility.

In my last chapter, we study whether lowering the financial costs to secondary education might reduce child marriage in rural Niger, the country with the highest marriage rate globally. Using a large-scale randomized controlled trial, we find that a three-year scholarship halved both school dropout and marriage rates and boosted girls' and their parents' aspirations. Importantly, our design allows us to rule out any negative externalities on non-beneficiaries. We show that even in a country with strong conservative gender norms and low returns to education, lowering the financial barriers to secondary school may substantially reduce child marriage.

Keywords : Development, Gender, impact evaluation, fertility, child marriage, inheritance rights