

RAPID POPULATION GROWTH AND HEALTH

PERSPECTIVE

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One of the important developmental goals of government is to provide adequate health care for the population through expanded primary health care. However, high population growth rate is likely to make the achievement of this goal difficult if not impossible. In general high fertility, which impacts on rapid population growth rate tends to be related to high rates of morbidity and mortality especially in a poorer economic setting[1].

The scope of public health programmes are necessarily influenced by the changing characteristics of the population because different age groups may require specialized health attention and services. Rapid population growth with its dynamic changing characteristics therefore necessitates consented and articulate long range planning of health care services [2].

Rapid population growth is commonly associated with high fertility which impacts on quality of the population's health conditions and attendant health services.

For example, African countries have the highest fertility rates in the world [3] and are prone to higher mortality rates. They also are affected by more diseases and chronic conditions than any other region [3]. This phenomenon, therefore, constrains improvements in health and the delivery of health services. For instance, owing to high birth rates many African countries have high proportions of young children in the population. This aspect has a negative bearing on the health situation and services in countries. A typical example, is the relatively large number of children in the age group 0-4 years which usually constitute the highest proportion. This age group experiences the highest illness and mortality rates, resulting in a greater need for health services. Additionally, high fertility and closely spaced children are associated with high rates of infant, child and maternal mortality [4]. In such situations the efficiency of health services are bound to be compromised because of rapid increase of population [5].

Zambia is not an exception to relatively high population growth rates and its apparent impact on constrained public health and resources. The population of Zambia in 2010 was about 13, 092,666 while it was 9,885, 591 in 2000 and projected to 17,067,592 in 2016 [6, 7]. The growth rate was estimated at 2.8 during the intercensal period between 2000 and 2010. The rate remained almost at the same level by 2016. The Total Fertility Rates (TFRs) were estimated at 6.7, 6.0, 5.9 and 5.3 in 1990, 2000, 2010 and 2016 respectively. Although the TFR progressively declined from 2000 to 2016 it was still relatively high compared to most developed countries such as Spain and Taiwan, with TFRs of 1.3 and 1.2 respectively [7]. Owing to the high population growth rate the Zambian young population provides an in-built potential for continued population growth into the future (6). In this regard the number of health care facilities and resources may not grow at the pace of the ever-growing population [8].

Table 1: Zambian Population and Total Fertility Rates

Year	Number	Total Fertility Rate
1990	7,860,000	6.7
2000	9,885,591	6.0
2010	13,092,666	5.9
2016	17,885,422	5.3 (projected)

Table. 2: Life expectancy at birth for selected countries

Country	Male	Female
Country	Male	Female
Benin	59	62
Niger	59	61
Nigeria	53	54
Zambia	51	56
Canada	80	84
Italy	81	85
Switzerland	82	85
USA	76	81

Source: i) Central Statistical office, Zambian Population and Demographic projections (2011-2035) ii) Population Reference Bureau, World Population Data Sheet 2018
 In the urban areas high population growth, without matching special development efforts, for instance, would constitute a

barrier to socio-economic development that includes the health sector where the expansion of health facilities would not match the available resources [10]. Siwale, as early as 1984 observed that the National Primary Health Programme which had been implemented for quite a

long time was expected to achieve a goal for health for all by the year 2000 [8] This was not attained among other reasons, because of the persistent high birth rates in the country. In conclusion we reiterate that rapid population growth, has a depressing effect on health services.

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