



## Caribbean Studies Association Abstract

### *Is the quiver full? Fertility in Religious sub-populations of Trinidad and Tobago*

Historically religious denominations espouse pro-natalists values and maintain above average fertility rates. Multi-religious Trinidad and Tobago has had sub replacement fertility rates for more than 20 years. Despite the growing body of literature on fertility preferences, globally, limited research has specifically explored the role of religion in shaping these preferences within the Caribbean context. This study investigates fertility and fertility preferences among individuals with strong religious affiliations in Trinidad and Tobago. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study combines quantitative data gathered from a survey on fertility outcomes and religious affiliations and qualitative insights from interviews with individuals across various religious denominations, to construct the fertility profile for 10 religious denominations.

The research aims to evaluate the religiosity of regular congregation members of all denominations using a multi-dimensional model and identify differences in fertility preferences and outcomes. Additionally, by using secondary national data the study will examine the broader implications of these preferences on national demographic trends.

The expected results will highlight significant differences in fertility preferences across religious denominations, providing a nuanced understanding of how religion intersects with demographic trends. The findings will have implications for policy and social services, particularly in the areas of family planning, healthcare, and community support. This research will expand knowledge on the demographic impact of religious affiliation in Trinidad and Tobago and offer valuable insights for future demographic studies in the Caribbean.

## Introduction

Fertility preferences and behaviors are key determinants of population dynamics, influencing both the size and structure of a population. In Trinidad and Tobago, a culturally diverse society with a strong presence of various religious communities, the interplay between religious beliefs and fertility decisions presents a unique area of study. Religion often plays a pivotal role in shaping the values, norms, and behaviors of its adherents, including their attitudes toward marriage, childbearing, and family planning. However, while there is a global body of research examining the relationship between religion and fertility, there is a notable gap in localized studies that focus on this phenomenon within the specific cultural context of Trinidad and Tobago. This research seeks to explore the fertility preferences of individuals with strong religious affiliations in Trinidad and Tobago, examining how these preferences may be associated with religious beliefs and practices.

The Caribbean, including Trinidad and Tobago, has a rich tapestry of religious diversity, with significant populations of Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and other religious groups. Each of these religious communities holds distinct views on family life, gender roles, and the value of children, which in turn may influence fertility behaviors. Understanding these influences is crucial, not only for demographic analysis but also for informing policy-making in areas such as family planning, healthcare, and social services.

The study is particularly relevant in the context of Trinidad and Tobago, where recent trends show declining fertility rates across different demographic groups. With a sub replacement fertility rate, it becomes important to understand the underlying factors that contribute to childbearing. By focusing on religious communities, this research aims to shed light on whether deeply ingrained religious beliefs and practices are affecting decisions about childbearing. Moreover, it will contribute to the broader discourse on how religion intersects with social and demographic factors in the Caribbean.

Through this study, the researcher's goal is to provide insights that can help policymakers, religious leaders, and community organizations to better understand and address the needs and preferences of their populations, thereby contributing to more effective and culturally sensitive interventions to family and childbearing.

## Research Objectives

- To examine the sociological degree of religiosity among various religious groups in Trinidad and Tobago.
- To measure the fertility outcomes and nuptiality of persons self-identifying as religious
- To identify differences in fertility preferences across various religious denominations.
- To contribute to the understanding of how religious affiliation influences demographic patterns in Trinidad and Tobago.

## Defining the Variables of Interest

In every study there are variables (the phenomena to be measured), that are the primary interest to the researcher. For this study there are 6 variables of interest and below are their working definitions.

### **Fertility**

Fertility refers to the actual reproductive behavior of individuals or populations, typically measured by the number of live births women have over a specific period of time, often expressed as the total fertility rate (TFR). It is an indicator of the capacity for reproduction within a population.

### **Fertility Preference**

Fertility preference refers to the ideal or desired number of children an individual or couple wishes to have, often influenced by personal, cultural, and social factors. It can be distinct from actual fertility behavior, as it represents individuals' aspirations or intentions regarding family size.

### **Religious Affiliation**

Religious affiliation refers to an individual's identification with or membership in a particular religious group or denomination, such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, or others. It reflects the religious community to which a person belongs, and often includes shared beliefs, practices, and traditions.

### **Religiosity/Religiousness**

Religiosity refers to the degree of religious commitment or involvement that an individual demonstrates. This can include practices such as attending religious services, prayer frequency, adherence to religious teachings, and the importance of religion in everyday life.

### **Marital Status**

Marital status refers to an individual's legal relationship status, typically categorized as single, married, divorced, widowed, or separated. It reflects the individual's formal relationship status in relation to marriage or partnership.

### **Union Status**

Union status refers to an individual's current living arrangement or partnership status, which may include cohabitation, marriage, or being in a domestic partnership. It focuses on the presence or absence of a partner, regardless of legal formalities like marriage.

## Research Questions

- What are the fertility preferences and outcomes among religious individuals in Trinidad and Tobago?
- Are there significant differences in fertility preferences and outcomes across different religious groups?

## Methodology

The variable previous listed have established means of measurement. With respect to religiosity there are over 100 self-reporting scales. The researcher has chosen to use the Centrality of Religiosity Scale by Huber because is has been adapted and its reliability tested on Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic religions. Fertility is measured with questions on the number of children biologically born men or women. Fertility preferences are explored with questions on the previous and present desire for children, ideal family size and desire to limit childbearing. Family planning is also an aspect of fertility preference, but **it is not included in this study.**

This study will employ a non-probabilistic survey research design, utilizing an online questionnaire disseminated among male and female members of participating religious denominations in Trinidad and Tobago. This sampling approach will be used as the study population calls for the identification of persons self-identifying as highly religious and high levels of religiosity is determined to be predicated on regular participation in religious practice. This method is ideal for this study as the ability to access participants who are readily available and willing to provide responses and there is no singular available database/register of the religious among the various denominations.

The survey will be administered in March 2025. The criterion for inclusion is, adults' members, 18-60 years of any religious group attending religious services in keeping with standard religious practice according to the religion. As a general standard this equates to participation in religious activities once weekly.

Leaders of denominations will be provided with the online survey and can assign a focal point that will share the information across geographic communities using the denominations communication networks.

The table below represents the number of responds desired from reach religious denomination, based on the estimated relative size of each religious denomination in Trinidad and Tobago. Religious denominations that are less than 5% of the national population require the participation of 100 adults.

Demographic rates, descriptive analysis and non-parametric statistical tests will be used to analyze the data collected from by the survey.

Each participant will be required to provide informed consent before participating in the study. The online survey will include an introductory section explaining the purpose of the study, its goals, and

the nature of the questions being asked. The consent form will clearly state that participation is voluntary, and participants can withdraw at any time without any consequences.

Participants are assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Only respondents wishing to participate in a post survey, inter-religious focus group, will be asked for personal contact information. Attendance in the focus group will not be shared with any religious leader. All data will be anonymized, ensuring that no individual can be identified in the research findings. Data will be securely stored and accessible only to authorized members of the research team.

At the end leaders will be informed of the number of participants, and any inter-religious or faith-based organizations that facilitated the data collection will be provided with a link to a website, to view aggregated statistics. This link can be shared with your respective congregations but not with or for journalistic purposes or reporting to public audiences, in person or online.

## Significance of Study

This study holds significant value as it addresses a notable gap in research on the intersection of religiosity and fertility preferences in the Caribbean, particularly in Trinidad and Tobago. While global research has extensively explored how religious beliefs influence fertility behavior, there is a scarcity of studies focused specifically on the Caribbean region. The unique religious and cultural diversity of Trinidad and Tobago presents a valuable opportunity to investigate how various religious groups—such as Hindus, Muslims, Pentecostals and Roman Catholics—shape attitudes towards family size, contraception, and fertility outcomes.

Understanding these dynamics is critical in a context where religious beliefs play a profound role in shaping social norms and individual behaviors. With declining fertility rates observed across the region, it is important to understand how religious communities are responding to demographic changes. This study will provide insights into how deeply ingrained religious beliefs influence fertility decisions, contributing to the broader field of demographic research.

Moreover, the findings of this study will be valuable for policymakers, healthcare providers, and religious organizations seeking to develop culturally sensitive programs related to family planning, reproductive health, and population growth. By filling the research gap, this study will add to the understanding of how religion impacts fertility in the Caribbean context, where such issues have been understudied.

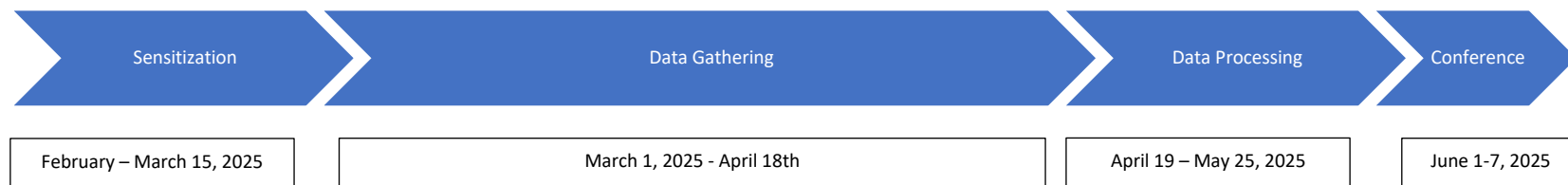
The results of the survey will be presented and discussed at the Caribbean Studies Association Conference in St. Marten in 2025. Based on the quality of the data collected and feedback at the conference, the researcher will consider submission of the study to peer reviewed academic journals. At that time leadership of each participating religious denomination will be re-engaged to discussion.

Table 1: Sampling of Religious Denomination for Study

Religion	Anglican	Spiritual/Shouter Baptist	Hinduism	Islam	Jehovah Witness	Pentecostal	Orisha	Presbyterian	Roman Catholic	Seventh day Adventist
Proportion of National Population	5.5%	6.5%	19.8%	5.5%	1.7%	19.4%	1.1%	2.6%	23.6%	4.9%
Minimum Number of participants required for the study.	70	82	251	70	50*	246	50*	50*	299	62
Preferred sample size	<b>140</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>502</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>100*</b>	<b>492</b>	<b>100*</b>	<b>100*</b>	<b>598</b>	<b>124</b>

\*denotes a sample size larger than the minimum proportional sample sized estimated to ensure statistical analysis

Graph 1: Timeline of Study



## Access and Collaboration

This study aims to engage individuals with strong religious affiliations across various denominations in Trinidad and Tobago and can only be facilitated by the leaders of religious denomination. The researcher is committed to working closely with all levels of faith leaders to ensure they fully understand the nature, scope, and methodology of the research. Meetings will be arranged to provide a thorough explanation of the study, address any questions or concerns, and clarify how their communities will be involved.

Religious leaders are asked to support the research project in the following ways:

- **Provide Guidance on Ethical Considerations:** Ensure the study is conducted in a manner that is respectful of religious practices and cultural norms.
- **Endorse the Study:** Offer a formal endorsement to demonstrate the community's support and legitimacy of the research.
- **Facilitate Access to Congregants:** Assist in communicating the study's purpose and importance to congregants and encourage their participation.
- **Participate in Study Promotion:** Announce the study during services or other community events to increase awareness and engagement.
- **Encourage Voluntary Participation:** Help reassure congregants of the voluntary nature of participation and the confidential handling of all data.
- **Provide Feedback on Study Design:** Offer insights into how the study can be adapted to align with the community's values, ensuring cultural sensitivity.

By working together, religious leaders and the researcher can ensure the study is conducted with cultural sensitivity and respect, yielding meaningful insights while supporting both academic and community interests.

The researcher will provide print and digital resources that be used to promote voluntary participation in the survey.

All religious leaders participating in the survey will have access to the aggregated data, data for their denomination and the Caribbean Studies Association Conference presentation, by June 18<sup>th</sup> 2025.

## Expected Outcomes

To give some context to the possible outcomes of the study, an extended quote from Eric Kaufmann's book, *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth* is provided.

Taking a step back from it all, one might ask: what does the demographic rise of religious fundamentalism tell us about our cultural condition at the dawn of the third millennium? Some might conclude that we are seeing evolution playing out before our very eyes. Evolution works through fertility and mortality differences. Given certain environmental pressures, those with adaptive traits are naturally selected to have more surviving children than those without them. Religious belief could be one such trait. It might operate at the level of our genes. A number of twin studies suggest that, regardless of upbringing, twins



tend to strongly resemble each other in their religious behaviour. The conclusion is that religiosity is partly inherited. The problem with genetic theories of religion, however, is that they have a hard time explaining changes in religiosity over time and place. Unless, that is, we presume that Danes lack religious genes or somehow have undergone mutation since 1850!

Another possibility is that religion is a self-replicating cultural trait, or meme, which helps individuals to compete in the game of cultural evolution. Its DNA is encoded in its holy texts, priesthoods and rituals. Those possessing the religious meme will gradually displace seculars the way monotheists replaced animists. Throughout human history, people have been almost universally religious, unlike our closest relatives, the chimpanzees. Some argue that religious rituals and a belief in the supernatural helped humans to cooperate. We thereby gained the upper hand over other species and humans who did not adopt religion. Talcott Parsons adds that religion is an 'evolutionary universal' of human progress –a stage all developing societies must pass through –because it legitimates power and the social order. Without it, anarchy ensues. Like our other emotions, existential curiosity and a desire for meaning, transcendence and community may be an evolved part of human nature. Cognitive neuroscience may one day identify the precise mechanisms in the brain that produce a state of nirvana or intensity when stimulated by religious thoughts and rituals.

The Caribbean has focused heavily on exploring fertility outcomes from two corollaries First, fertility is a function of the nation's socio-economic positioning. Herein our countries have had a less than favourable view of large family sizes, mainly associating larger numbers of children with the uneducated and persons from low socio-economic backgrounds. This has been made manifest through sixty years of State supported Family Planning interventions. From the accepted secular development perspective, the rational human prioritizes economic outcomes over all other outcomes and their behaviours will align in this way. Academic Caribbean literature is silent on the role of religion despite high religious affiliation and religiosity being a prominent characteristic of Trinidad and Tobago and the wider Caribbean.

This is unlike the depth of research undertaken in Europe and North American, that has identified religious fundamentalism, a strong adherence to pro natalist religions, as highly correlated to fertility intentions and outcomes, including sexual and reproductive health behaviours.

At the macro level, the effect of religiosity on fertility remains important (Pew Research Center, 2015). However, the association between religiosity and fertility is complex, as many EU countries with high religiosity have very low birth rates (e.g. Poland, Italy, Greece and Romania). For this reason, researchers have focused mostly on the effects of religiosity at the micro level. Previous literature shows that at the individual level, religious practice exerts a strong and positive effect on fertility (Buber-Ennsner & Berghammer, 2021; Bein et al., 2020; Peri-Rotem, 2020; Bein et al., 2017; Peri-Rotem, 2016; Baudin, 2015; Régnier-Loillier & Prioux, 2015; Berghammer, 2012 and 2009; Régnier-Loillier & Prioux, 2008; Adsera, 2006).

For Trinidad and Tobago, there is, evidence of fertility differentials between religious denominations and there is an overall decline in fertility across each denomination. Census data from 2000 and 2011 identifies differences in the number of children ever born for women across religion. A better understanding of the impact of religious values on a population begins with measuring its rate of reproduction – through conversion and pro-creation.

## Timeline

The researcher proposes the project timeline on page 7. Changes to the timeline subject to researcher and are possible working in collaboration with the religious leaders however all survey data collection must be completed by April 18<sup>th</sup> 2025.

## Budget & Resource Mobilization.

There is no financial cost to any religious denomination to participate in the survey, however a denomination's participation in the study will require less than 3 hours over a 6-month period for the sensitization of religious leaders or community representative and an estimated 15 mins per participant to complete the questionnaire.

## Researcher Bio (Short Form)

Taresa Best Downes is a graduate of the Masters in Development Statistics Programme, from the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus. Formerly, a National United Nations Volunteer attached to the UNFPA and the Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development, Trinidad and Tobago (2013-2015). Taresa specialises in the retrieval and mining for decision-making and the production of socio-demographic indicators for the monitoring and evaluation of sustainable development policies. She has a personal interest in continuing the tradition of intersectional Caribbean scholarship on the topics of religion and race and the demographic processes of fertility and migration.

A member of a Population and Development Research Cluster of the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus, she is a former adjunct lecturer in the Department of Geography of the St. Augustine Campus and is currently the Demographer attached to the Census Planning and Management Division of the Ministry of Planning and Development.

Taresa Best Downes is the Episcopal Delegate for Youth for the Archdiocese of Port of Spain and has 15 years of experience working in youth and young adult ministry. Like a true Trini, she loves saheena, mangoes and David Rudder.