

**Explaining the Demographic Transition in Otavalo, Ecuador: A Comparison
of Three Models of the Demographic Transition**

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Abstract:

Over the last 60 years social scientists have debated the causes of the demographic transition with very little consensus about the ultimate cause of the transition. Various theories have attempted to explain the transition from high-mortality and high-fertility to low-mortality and low-fertility. Most of these theories have focused on changes in infant mortality and modernization as key factors. This dissertation provides a direct comparison of classic and contemporary theory of the demographic transition. The dissertation presents data on research that was designed to test these theories simultaneously. Specifically, the dissertation is a test of Human Capital (Kaplan and Lancaster 2001), Moral Economy of Childbearing (Handwerker 1989), Diffusion (Bongaarts and Cotts Watkins 1996), and Infant Mortality Rate Reductions (Palloni and Rafalimanana 1999) theories of the demographic transition.

Results are from a nine-month study in Otavalo, Ecuador and consist of data from 240 interviews. The Otavalo region is known for its indigenous handicraft market that generates around 9 million U.S. dollars annually. The handicraft market, however, is a new economic phenomenon, but has its roots in Otavaleño culture that predates the Spanish conquest of the Inca Empire.

In Ecuador fertility rates have steadily declined since about 1970. Prior to the 1970s, women expected to have around 6.1 children. During the 1970s and through today, this rate has reduced to around 2.7 children per woman. However, this reduction is not universal; those that live in rural areas retain the pre-transition rate of 6 children per woman. Utilizing the rural areas surrounding the town of Otavalo, I was able to create a pre-post test of theories of the demographic transition. Results indicate the