

Socioeconomic Determinants and Drivers Life Expectancy in West Africa

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ABSTRACT

This study empirically analyses the socioeconomic determinants and drivers of life expectancy in West Africa. The study adopted a Panel Fixed Effect Least Square Dummy Variable Regression with data from World Development Indicators (WDI) spanning through the period 1985-2018. The result of the analysis shows that in West Africa, real per capita gross national income, old-age dependency ratio and child mortality rate significantly affect life expectancy. The study therefore, recommends that the governments in this sub-region should provide adequate social protection measures for the elderly so as to reduce the financial burden on the working population and adequately formulate and implement policy blueprints to improve health outcomes such life expectancy and others.

Keywords: Life Expectancy, health outcomes, infant and child mortality rates

JEL Classification: H51, I14, I15

1. INTRODUCTION

Life expectancy as a summary measure of population health (SMPH), is an important indicator of the economic and by extension, the social advancement of a nation because every country strives for economic and social development. All countries, wealthy or poor undertake tremendous efforts to make their citizens better off with respect to improvements in health outcomes such as increase life expectancy, reduction in infant mortality rate and under-five mortality rate or child mortality rates etc (Orji, Ogbuabor, Mba, and Anthony-Orji, 2021). Though these goals are laudable, the pace with which they are achieved and the magnitude varies from country to country. Empirical evaluations of health outcomes are among the primary concerns of academics, policy makers and medical researchers so as to facilitate

effective and efficient channeling of funds towards specific segments of the health sector in order improve citizen's health. Projections of health outcomes are a prerequisite in the formulation and implementation of policies needed to bring about the much needed improvement in population health (Orji, Ogbuabor, Anthony-Orji, Okoro and Aniorji, 2020). The institution of governance should be such that has a framework to cater to the peculiar health needs of its population. The fact of changing population structure will continually be at the front burner of policy makers. Population health is one of the most pressing national issues as it is often said that "health is wealth". The comprehensive evaluation of the drivers or determinants of population health based on current and future population structure as well as their anticipated ramifications is the bedrock of any sound and informed health policies geared towards achieving specific and broad socio-economic objectives. At the macro level of policy formulation, the sustenance, expansion and improvement of population health is one of the basis not of sustainable growth and development (Bayati, Akbarian, & Kavosi, 2013). Crude death rate does not accurately capture levels of mortality or general population health status and by extension standard of living attained by a country. Literatures on

population and demography and researchers have adopted the use of life expectancy at birth (LEB) in the empirical descriptions of mortality levels. Life expectancy (Rabbi Fazle, 2013) at birth is a conventional summary index of population health along with longevity. The definition of "good health" is predicated on improved socio-economic conditions such as a considerable reduction in social inequality (health inequality inclusive), unemployment, food security, access to quality and affordable health care and overall improvement in the well-being of the populace. Africa with all its wealth in human and natural resources have dismal health outcomes (Orji, Ogbuabor,, Nwanosike and Anthony-Orji, 2019). The average life expectancy in Africa is approximately 63 years (Statista, 2019) However, an indication of poor health outcomes as measured by very low life expectancy means gross socioeconomic underdevelopment which has bedeviled the African continent. Instructively, life expectancy at birth (LEB) in North Africa is much higher than what obtains in West Africa because the former is seriously contending with the challenges of high infant and child mortality rates as well poor standard of living, high level of social inequality, political instability, wars, low literacy rate and lack of access to quality