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Reasons for embracing a religion: The case of Brazilian women

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Abstract

The Economics of Religion is based on the model proposed by Azzi and Ehrenberg in 1975, which aimed to assess the religious frequency. Therefore, this article proposes to estimate the determinants of religious frequency of Brazilian women. To achieve this goal, information from the National Survey of Demography and Health of Children and Women as of 2006 (PNDS-2006) is employed and from an ordered logistic regression model, socioeconomic determinants, demographic, cultural and behavioral factors that may interfere in such demand are estimated. According to the results, it can be inferred that religious frequency of Brazilian women receive interposition of their demographic characteristics, in particular rises with age. In relation to income, it was not observed any correlation pattern, while higher level of education reduces the likelihood of the woman never go to church. Thus, we found no evidence that the level of occupation, marital status and death of children affect significantly the frequency to religious services of women surveyed. And finally, the main feature of women impacting the demand for religious activities and services stems from the inspiration that the woman had, that is, if she was raised in a religion, especially Catholic or evangelical.

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JEL classification: Z12; C25

Keywords: Frequency to religious activities; Women; Brazil; Ordered logit

Resumo

A Economia da Religião baseia-se no modelo proposto por Azzi e Ehrenberg em 1975, o qual objetivava aferir sobre a frequência a religiosa. Isto posto, o presente artigo se alvitra a estimar os determinantes da frequência religiosa da mulher brasileira. Para tanto, empregam-se as informações da Pesquisa Nacional de Demografia e Saúde da Criança e da Mulher de 2006 (PNDS-2006) e a partir de um modelo de regressão logística ordenada estimam-se os determinantes socioeconômicos, demográficos, culturais e comportamentais que possam interferir em tal demanda. De acordo com os resultados obtidos, pode-se inferir que a frequência religiosa das mulheres brasileiras recebe interposições de suas características demográficas, em especial, se eleva com a idade. Em relação à renda, não se observa nenhum padrão de correlação, ao passo que maior nível de escolaridade reduz a probabilidade de

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a mulher nunca ir à igreja. Destarte, não foram encontradas evidências de que o nível de ocupação, estado civil e morte de filhos afetem de modo significativo a frequência a serviços religiosos das mulheres pesquisadas. E, por fim, a principal característica da mulher que impacta a demanda por cultos e serviços religiosos decorre da inspiração que a mulher teve, isto é, se ela foi criada em alguma religião, principalmente, católica ou evangélica.

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Palavras-chave: Frequência a atividades religiosas; Mulheres; Brasil; Logit Ordenado

1. Introduction

Religion can have a healthy effect on civil society by encouraging its members to participate in worship, spend time with their families, as well as learning their own moral lessons of religious traditions (Wuthnow, 1999).

According to Azzi and Ehrenberg (1975), religious behavior of individuals stands out for greater participation of women and socioeconomic features such as income which presents a positive but weak correlation. On the other hand, demographic attributes such as skin color and age also show a positive correlation, with blacks attending church more than whites, and higher ages showing increase on the frequency in religious activities. However, the authors¹ argue that there is an exception for older people due to the possibility of health problems that may hinder mobility. Regional aspects also tend to have an impact on behavior, showing that people living in rural areas attend church more than the inhabitants from urban areas.

Based on these results measured by Azzi and Ehrenberg (1975) model's, this study aims to estimate the determinants of the religious attendance in Brazil. However, the stylized facts indicate that when studying the demand for religious services in any society, there is a greater female participation bias, since most of the members of different religions are women, especially concerning catholic and evangelical religions.

Therefore, we seek to assess the determinants of religious frequency considering only women between 15 and 49 years old.² This cut comes from the choice of database, since it was used information collected by the National Survey of Health and Women's Demography as of 2006 (PNDS) conducted by the Brazilian Center for Analysis and Planning (CEBRAP), ordered by Brazilian Ministry Health.

A critical feature of the PNDS for this study is the fact that the questionnaire includes an item that asks the religion in which the woman was created and what is her current religion. From this information, one can grasp the "religious migration," given that it can be controlled by some religions such as Catholic, Traditional Protestant, Pentecostal Protestant, Spiritualist, Afro-Brazilian religions and also other religions.

In Brazil, where Catholic Religion prevails, it has been seen a growth of Protestant members (here termed as evangelicals). According Narita and Anuatti (2004), any study of religions in Brazil must take into account the explosive growth of new Pentecostal institutions during the 1980s and open competition, especially in the 1990s, of the Catholic movement called charismatic renovation.

In addition, PNDS provides control for socioeconomic, demographic, behavioral and regional factors, which allows testing different assumptions of the model proposed by Azzi and Ehrenberg (1975), as well as by cultural features such as controlled by Featherman (1971). And so, it is also possible to address the issues of religious choice from the above characteristics and test the influence of religious choice in the accumulation of human capital, as done by Narita and Anuatti (2004) using the 1980 and 1991 population census as well as the special National Survey of Households (PNAD) questionnaire as of 1988, to explore some stylized facts of religious affiliation in Brazil.

Besides this information, this article also stands out for addressing other issues such as marital status, the situation of women in the labor market as well as by considering the event of losing a child, as factors that may influence the demand for religion.

Thus, it can be said that this study contributes to the research agenda on the field of Economics of Religion, related to the research on the determinants of religious frequency of women in childbearing age, taking into account

¹ View Azzi and Ehrenberg (1975), Narita and Anuatti (2004) and Morelli et al. (2013) among others.

² For being considered the fertile age according to the Ministry of Health.

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