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THE VALUE OF CHILDREN: A MULTIVARIATE COMPARISON OF
RURAL AND URBAN PARENTS

The University of Nebraska - Lincoln

PH.D. 1981

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PREVIEW

THE VALUE OF CHILDREN:
A MULTIVARIATE COMPARISON OF RURAL AND URBAN PARENTS

By

Judith Ann Miller

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the
The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Human Development and Family

Under the Supervision of Dr. Howard Eckel and Dr. Nick Stinnett

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1981

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BY

Judith Ann Miller

APPROVED

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PREVIEW

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

THE VALUE OF CHILDREN AND THE CHANGING AMERICAN FAMILY STRUCTURE

The value of children and the American family structure has seen striking changes since the advent of effective contraceptive technology. Perhaps the most notable consequence of controlled conception is the freedom of choice Americans have in regard to family planning. Today fertility and childbearing can become completely subject to rational control and a decision-making couple can choose to not have or have a child or an additional child. Joseph Spengler (1965:146) suggests that couples will choose to have children "if the value placed on the anticipated stream of utility flowing from the child seemed likely to balance or outweigh the anticipated stream of costs of the reproduction and rearing of this child". Thus costs and benefits of children regulate the choice of childbearing.

Kingsley Davis (1973:vi) reports that statistics on prices and costs of lambs and automobiles are excellent but for children are practically nonexistent. He intimates that neither parents nor society can ignore the costs of children and states:

If economic factors were decisive, no one in modern societies would have any children. Not only are the direct costs high but the opportunity costs may even be higher, and subsequent returns are notoriously slight or even negative. Perhaps, therefore, a way to lower the birth rate would be to induce people to evaluate children in economic terms".

A great contribution in this direction is presented by Thomas Espenshade (1973) in The Cost of Children in Urban United States.

Despite the high cost of childrearing Americans continue to have children. Why? Sociologist Geoffrey Hawthorne (1970:67) proposes that

"If you want to know why people do what they do, why not first ask them. - - - Since human fertility is not entirely determined by social factors of which the actors are aware this will of course not provide all the answers." However, Ann Cartwright (1976:95) agrees that asking people why they have children "would be a sensible starting point in the search for the elusive demographer's stone which will explain why people have the number of children they do."

This is a study of why people have children. The following discussion will point out the major demographic changes and the status of the American Family as well as introduce the Value of Children (VOC) as an intervening variable in the family fertility decision-making process.

Major Demographic Changes

Demographer Charles Westoff (1978) reports a significant constellation of social and demographic changes in marriage and the family in the United States and two Scandinavian countries: 1) the drastic decrease in marriage is both the cause and consequence of lower fertility. 2) a very high divorce rate has its effect on fertility and a higher proportion of remarriages are not only limiting childbirth but are headed for divorce. 3) cohabitation today is not entirely limited to the young premarital state; many middle-age and older persons are living together without the formality of marriage; 4) illegitimate birth rates reached a record high proportion in the United States in 1975, doubled in a decade in Denmark and tripled in Sweden. These factors, Westoff suggests, are tied to a growing independence of women and the diminishing influence of religion. Thus the institution of marriage as discussed by Westoff (1978) is facing a loss of its sociological foundation, i.e., the financial and social security formerly provided by men's income

from employment in exchange for the sexual compassionate and maternal services of women will no longer be motivations for marriage as men and women become economically equal and independent.

Another noteworthy change pointed out by Paul Glick (1977) of the Census Bureau is the continuing postponement of marriage. Women entering marriage during the 1970s are expected to have between one and two fewer children, to end childbearing three years sooner, and to have eleven more years of married life after the last child marries than women who married during the first decade of the century. Other changes reported by Glick (1975,1976) as contributing to the decline in birth rates are: Increase in number of women in college and the labor force, a revival of the women's movement and an increase in singleness. He also documents some substantial changes in living arrangements of children and young adults and cites that the incidence of single-parent families has doubled since 1960. Both Glick (1976) and Kobrin (1976) state that the nuclear family is becoming a less central social institution with less than a majority of adults living in a nuclear family, i.e., father/mother/children.

Fertility levels have reflected a continuous decline since the late 1950's and have reached an historic low (Rindfuss & Sweet, 1975).

FAMILIAL AND STRUCTURAL CORRELATES OF FERTILITY

There seems to be differences in opinion among demographers in labelling the most important correlate (independent variable) of fertility (dependent variable). Garcia and Rosenfeld (1977) state age as the most important demographic correlate of fertility with women's educational level as a second major factor. Rather than age, it may be the span of fertility and control of unwanted births that is the most im-

portant correlate of fertility (Bumpass & Westoff, 1970). Other family sociologists consider family structure as the major determining factor of fertility and have constructed a cost/benefit framework for the study of parenthood (Hawthorne, 1970; Holter, 1970; Fawcett, 1972; Parelius, 1974 and Scanzoni, 1975, 1976 & 1976). Since the costs and benefits of motherhood differ greatly among women of different cultures, races, religions, educational backgrounds, employment and marital structure it is important to present a brief statement about the relationship of the major family variables to fertility.

Nature of Relationship Between Family Variables and Fertility

This section will contain a brief presentation of relationships of the major family variables (independent variables) to fertility (dependent variable) as reported by demographers and family sociologists.

Age. The younger a woman is when she bears her first child, the more she can be expected to bear (Rindfuss & Sweet, 1975). Couples who delay having children until relatively late in life generally have fewer children (Rindfuss & Bumpass, 1976).

Education. The wife's education is inversely related to fertility (Rindfuss & Sweet, 1975, 1977). Spillane and Ryser (1975) report for married men, higher education is associated with lower parity.

Marital Structure. Modern egalitarian sex roles and life styles lead to lower fertility while traditional, patriarchal counterparts have higher fertility rates (Clifford & Ford, 1974; Scanzoni, 1976).

Wife's Employment. A wife's labor participation is negatively related to fertility (Clifford & Tobin, 1977; Cochrane & Bean, 1976). "The greater the woman's potential wage rate the greater the cost of children relative to alternative goods, and hence the fewer children chosen" (Mason, 1974:13).

These and other family variables relating to fertility are more fully discussed in Chapter Two. Since generally all studies conclude that overall fertility is higher in rural than urban populations (Veevers, 1971) it may also prove interesting to determine if rural and urban parents hold differing values for children.

RURAL-URBAN FERTILITY DIFFERENTIALS: A CLOSING GAP?

Rural fertility is of great interest for historically high rates of fertility. Most interesting is that fact that older, less-educated rural women were the only sub-group in the United States that did not participate in the 1950s baby boom and their fertility declined in the 1960s. As a result, the traditional urban-rural fertility gap disappeared by the end of a decade among older women, but for women under 25 the gap remains substantial (Rindfuss & Sweet, 1975, 1977). Due to increased awareness and utilization of contraception, the fertility rate of rural farm population has continued to fall at about the same pace as that of non-farm populations (Rindfuss & Sweet, 1975).

England, et al., (1979) suggest that rurality and social stratification need to be interpreted into a theory of values. These values should of course include the value of children. Veevers (1971) states that rural areas are characterized by the desire for children while urban areas appear to have a decreased desire for children and a greater proficiency at fertility control.

Do rural people have different values for children than urban people, as Sanders (1977:57) suggests? "On a family farm there is a common preoccupation with the agricultural enterprise, supported in many countries by the folk belief that security lies in a large number of children who can help with the farm work and also take care of parents

in old age." Hoffman and Hoffman (1973) discuss the possibility that the farm family continuity today is economically based on passing on the farm ownership and the value of fertility as it pertains to the lifestyle. For example, the farm family may equate childbirth to the value of live-stock production.

The 1970 National Fertility Study shows that even after controlling for education, race and income farmers still exhibit higher fertility than nonfarmers. Kowalski and Roberts (1977) state that farm fertility lasts two generations and there is some indication that farm background affects the fertility of wife more than husband. The slightly higher fertility of current farm women appears to be mainly a function of more births wanted than of any failure to control conception (Westoff & Ryder, 1977). However, Westoff and Ryder (1977) suggest that with the continuing depletion of the farm population and the increasing "urbanization" of rural culture this variable is likely to soon be of historic interest.

Macro versus Micro Correlates of Fertility

Joseph Spengler (1965:145) announced: "If we are concerned with motivation to child bearing, a subjective view of costs is indicated. If our concern is with the impact of population growth on man's environment, an objective view of costs is indicated." Richard Easterlin (1968) presented an analytical model that addresses the current fertility decline based on national economic conditions (Macro-level) as well as the economic situations of an individual family (micro-level). The historical patterns Easterlin presents reveal the nature of the demographic swings and their causal interrelations with economic swings.

Several macro studies have been undertaken to examine the question of whether high fertility and rapid population growth helped or hindered

the economic development process in traditional societies. General conclusion was that development was hindered. Robinson and Horlacher (1971) present a review and comment on these studies.

Although macro studies suggest that it is beneficial from a national viewpoint to reduce fertility, Ruprecht and Jewett (1975:2) state: "The effect of fertility reduction at the family level - - the level at which decisions regarding reproduction occur - - have received little attention." Their specific point is: "Because of the existence of externalities on the production and consumption of children's services, the private costs and benefits to parents of children are not identical to the costs and benefits of children to the economy or society as a whole." Thus results obtained from macro studies cannot necessarily be assumed to apply at the micro levels. However, studies at both levels have importance in understanding fertility functions. While this study is at the micro-level current macro-economic conditions and political policies will be considered and discussed in terms of their relationship to family fertility. It seems that the present inflation - - rising cost of living - - would play a significant role in both rural and urban fertility. Discussion on these factors will be presented in Chapter Five. The intervening variable in the study - - The Value of Children - - is discussed in the following section.

THE VALUE OF CHILDREN

Fundamentally the analysis above describes childbirth as a series of relationships existing between major background factors (e.g., age, education) and actual fertility - - number of children born per family. However, several researchers in the past two decades have investigated what may be referred to as an intervening variable - - reasons people

give for desiring children. For example, individuals with wide educational differences may also express diverse opinions on desirability of children. More generally, the number of children born is likely to be less a function of age and education and more the result of number of children desired in relation to desired societal role. The value of children to parents can be referred to as the function they serve or the needs they fulfill for parents (Hoffman & Hoffman, 1973). Children have a variety of values to parents which is influenced by social structure and cultural variation. A list of nine values of children were presented by Hoffman and Hoffman (1973). The nine values (1. Adult Status and social identity, 2. Expansion of self, 3. Morality, 4. Primary group ties, 5. Stimulation, 6. Creativity, 7. Power, 8. Social comparison and 9. Economic Utility) are presented with a brief review of literature relevant to each value in Chapter Two.

The Hoffmans' (1973) work on the value of children had a major influence on the development of a comprehensive cross-national study on the value of children by the East-West Population Institute at the East-West Center in Honolulu, Hawaii. The introduction and comparative analysis is reported by Arnold et al., (1975), specifically for Hawaii by Arnold and Fawcett (1975), for the Phillipines by Bulatao (1975), for Thailand by Buripakdi (1977), for Taiwan by Wu (1975) and for the United States by Hoffman et al., (1978). Portions of the study are currently being replicated in six western states including Hawaii by the Western Regional Experiment Station of the United States Department of Agriculture. The Colorado portion section of the study is presently underway in the Human Development and Family Studies Department at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado (Bigner, et al., 1979). Some findings of these

studies are presented below and will serve as a theoretical and empirical base to explain the relationships of family variables to the intervening variable - - the value of children.

Nature of Relationships between Family Variables and Value of Children

Each family variable creates differential importance and salience for child values that may be the result of socialization for adult roles in our society (Fawcett & Arnold, 1973).

Age. The values most salient for older respondents of the Phillipine study (Bulatao, 1975) were self-fulfillment through children and extension of self. Also the age at first marriage affects three values in ways that can be interpreted with reference to the life cycle: 1) maturity, 2) learning from children and 3) incentive to succeed increase in salience as the life cycle progresses (Arnold & Fawcett, 1975).

Education. Among the family background variables education appears to be the best predictor of the value of children. In the Thailand study (Burpakdi, 1977) the more highly educated respondents, those residing in cities longest and those with more modern values tended to be less concerned with the traditional values of children than other respondents. For example, they de-emphasized the importance of children for providing continuity, tradition, security, role motivations and social status. Also, less importance was attached to children as a source of happiness and affection and were less influenced by normative pressure to have children.

For the value of children to parents in the United States (Hoffman, et al., 1978) a moderately negative relationship between education and values was found, i.e., those with greater educational attainment gave each of the values a less important rating than those of lower education.

The strongest inverse correlation was between education and "natural adult role." Arnold and Fawcett (1975) reported the Hawaii study revealed that the highly educated and city people de-emphasized the importance of children for providing continuity, tradition, security, parenthood satisfactions and success incentives. However, most important was the idea that children can provide acceptance and status for their importance in the community.

Marital Structure. The United States study (Hoffman, et al., 1978) found that women with traditional sex-role definitions rated reasons for having children as more important than those of non-traditional views. The highest correlation was between traditional marital structure and the value "adult status".

Wife's Employment. A multivariate analysis of the United States study (Hoffman, et al., 1978) revealed working had no influence above that of education and sex-role definition (marital structure). However, one variable, "children provide fun and stimulation" was indicated more by women who were not working. The Phillipine study (Bulatao, 1975) reported that the working wife was related more to the greater salience of fulfillment and less of aspirations through children. This was explained by the notion that the highly educated woman may have higher needs for achievement.

Family Income. The Value of Children study reported by Bulatao (1975) on Phillipine families found that higher social status (as reflected by income, education, level of living, urban experience and media exposure) is related to increased salience of the contribution of children to the bond between spouses, to the parent's becoming more mature and as incentives to succeed. However, for each value the correlation was highest