

A NOTE ON FAMILY SIZE PREFERENCE AND ASPIRATIONS AMONG THE MARANAOS

Doris M. Dinoro and F. V. Magdalena

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES
MINDANAO STATE UNIVERSITY
AGA KHAN MUSEUM
MARAWI CITY
P.O. BOX NO. 5594 ILIGAN CITY

Children are cherished in many homes. Socially, they give prestige to the family and insure its continuity through generations. On the economic side, children are desired because they lend a helping hand in the farm as well as in household chores, and more. Reasons such as these vary in number as well as in quality from one society to another. Among the Maranao, largest Muslim group in the Southern Philippines, the child is Allah's (God's) blessing, a source of joy and happiness in the home, and purveyor of economic security and insurance during old age on the part of the parents. Thus it comes as no surprise why the Maranao family desires many children.

This study is one among the few attempts to inquire into the motivations that sustain preference for large family size among the Maranao. It will investigate the relationship between certain psychological factors and family size preference, in particular the link between aspirations and the desire for more children.

Why Children? A Conceptual Framework

Research into the reproductive capacity among women, technically called fertility behavior, has come of age. Demographers have become interested in knowing why societies want more, or less, children. But more than the interest of the demographer, the consequences of having many children have caused alarm, ringing to send the message that rapid population growth precedes the attendant decline of economic and social well-being of families and brings about a diminution of opportunities for children. The growing recognition, therefore, of the

MSRC
LIBRARY

link between population growth and economic stability has sparked the need for demographic studies.

According to Stanford (1972), changes in status and role of women are paramount considerations in the decline of family size, particularly in the West. Educated and increasingly liberated from the burden of household work the modern woman has now realized that child-bearing absorbs time and effort, not to mention the more difficult task of providing amenities to the child. She knows, reflecting upon her experience and that of others, that she can help improve the position of her family by having a limited number of children.

In the traditional society, however, favorable attitudes for large family size seem to die hard. Studies (Guerrero, 1976; Balacuit, 1979; Tolentino, 1979) of one such society, the Maranao Muslims, have shown this to be the case. Family planning is generally opposed because of the belief that it runs counter to the teaching of the Qur'an. Many children are desired by Maranao parents because of social, cultural and political reasons. To the Maranao, plenty of children means more power, more money, higher prestige, and larger kinship network. Summed up, they also mean the potential failure of family planning efforts and continuing pessimism about the prospects of slowing population growth in the near future.

Cognizant of the influences of sweeping social change, one may wonder about the effect of modernization among the Maranao. What role do "modern" Maranao play in the possibility of limiting family size? Do the youth, especially the educated who are exposed to modernity, see in their society a demographic change conforming with the trends observed the world over? The contention of this study is simple. It assumes that modern man, Maranao or not, is planful, forward looking, manipulative and a controller of his destiny.

This study has chosen the educated Maranao youth in line with above premise, and in view of their forthcoming participation in demographic affairs. They are just about to enter into marital life, where their decisions and expectations now will shape up that kind of life.

The characteristics of modern man are translated, although by no means completely, in terms of some measures of mobility aspirations—that is, expectancy of a bright future. To be able to indicate aspirations,

we attempted to ask our Maranao respondents, who are college students at Mindanao State University,¹ to tell us relative to their parents how much education they wish to attain further, and how "good" is the economic life they want to have for themselves.²

Family size preference, or the number of children they expect they will have when they get married, is the variable against which indicators of aspirations will be compared. The hypothesis to be tested here is that mobility aspirations will be positively related with family size preference. Small family size will be preferred by the more aspiring Maranao students. The variables have been reduced into dichotomies for purposes of cross-tabulation and to allow us to calculate a measure of correlation called gamma coefficient.³

Results

On the average, there is truth in claiming that the Maranao college students we interviewed show signs of modern outlook. Majority (73.5%) of them expressed a keen desire to improve their living conditions. In the same vein, more than three-fourths (77%) were of the opinion that their occupational achievements should be higher than those of their parents, and that they expect (89.5%) more than their parents do to seek further education.

A glance at their expectations of number of children suggests that their preference is quite far from prevailing norms. A "small" family to the educated Maranao is nonetheless large by conventional standard, although departing somewhat from their parents' expectations,⁴ or from what is current in Maranao society. Table 1 shows the disparity between the male and the female respondents as well as between them and their parents, when asked how many children they wish to have. The males' desire for a larger number of children may be attributed to the popular belief among men that more children symbolizes their potency (machismo). On the average, the respondents disclosed a preference for six children, while their parents expect them to have seven children.

These findings stand in stark contrast with those of other studies. Laing (1974), citing data from Philippine National Demographic Surveys, noted that the median desired number of children was five in

1968 and four in 1973, which norm was pretty much the same (3 to 4 children) as the 1978 figure based on the Republic of the Philippines World Fertility Survey. Another study (Cheng, 1978) conducted in 1976 among 62 male and 71 female students at Mountain State Agricultural College in Benguet Province, the Philippines, indicated that the modal preference of family size was three to four children. Still another

TABLE 1: "How many children do you wish to have when you marry?"

| As viewed by students | Male | Female | Total* |
|-------------------------------|------|--------|--------|
| 9 & over | 37% | 16% | 26.5% |
| 8 | 4 | 8 | 6.0 |
| 7 | 6 | 5 | 5.5 |
| 6 | 11 | 10 | 10.5 |
| 5 | 16 | 23 | 19.5 |
| 4 | 15 | 21 | 18.0 |
| 3 | 6 | 11 | 8.5 |
| 2 or less | 5 | 6 | 5.5 |
| TOTAL | 100% | 100% | 100.0% |
| As viewed by their parents | | | |
| 9 & over | 40% | 25% | 32.5% |
| 8 | 8 | 8 | 8.0 |
| 7 | 10 | 6 | 8.0 |
| 6 | 12 | 10 | 11.0 |
| 5 | 12 | 18 | 15.0 |
| 4 | 9 | 17 | 13.0 |
| 3 | 4 | 10 | 7.0 |
| 2 or less | 5 | 6 | 5.5 |
| TOTAL | 100% | 100% | 100.0% |

*The number of cases is 200 (100 females, 100 males).

Table 2. Relationship between Mobility Aspirations and Family Size Preference (n=200)

| | Mobility Aspiration* | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|------|
| | Low | High |
| % who preferred few children (1-4) | 26.5 | 40.5 |
| Number | 68 | 132 |
| Gamma | .30 | |

*Respondents with aggregate scores of 3-11 are classified under "low" aspiration; those with scores of 12 and above, under "high" aspiration.

Table 3. Relationship between Mobility Aspirations and Family Size Preference, by Sex (n=200)

| | M a l e | | F e m a l e | |
|------------------------------------|----------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
| | Low Asp. | High Asp. | Low Asp. | High Asp. |
| % who preferred few children (1-4) | 27.5 | 26.5 | 25.0 | 51.4 |
| Number | 40 | 60 | 28 | 72 |
| Gamma | .02 | | .52 | |

study (Dohm, 1978) on college students, in Greater Manila, revealed a pattern approximating the national norm. In an interview of over 4,000 such students, he found that the median number of desired children was three (mode is four).

Above comparison yields a conclusion that the Maranao attitude towards family size is way behind that of other Filipinos. It is tempting to argue that such attitude has yet to undergo radical changes, which may take a long time, before it will ever conform to the small family size norm as it is advocated by family planners.

We now turn to the hypothesized relationship between aspirations and family size preference. Reducing the data into a fourfold contingency table, one discerns a correlation, although moderate between the variables. As expected, preference for a few number of children (one to four) is associated with "high" mobility aspirations, where the latter is an aggregate measure of expectancy for better education, better occupation and higher living conditions than their parents (See Table 2). Suspecting that an intermediate variable has affected the observed correlation, a re-analysis of the table was performed by inserting the variable "sex." This means that mobility aspirations and family size preference will be cross-tabulated anew according to the responses given by male and female Maranao students. Sex is here considered important since a differential in family size preference had been noted between males and females.

Table 3 presents the results of our re-analysis. As we have suspected, mobility aspirations as a variable is only associated with family size preference for the females, but not for the males. The findings still remain important for policy considerations since the family planner will now know that higher aspirations may affect family size preference only in the case of female students. We would like to venture an explanation that the difference may lie in the changes in status and role of Maranao women. Where tradition ties their hands around housekeeping and makes the woman subservient to their men, they now enjoy considerable freedom in decision making, are free to move about and study as far as Manila, and are accorded a great degree of participation in civil as well as in public affairs. These changes in the role of Maranao women may become the key in unlocking other erstwhile unknown behaviors

in this society.

Conclusion

In this preliminary study, we have seen that large families (at least six children) tend to be desired by a sample of Maranao students, in comparison with the small family size norm (three to four children) obtained at the national level. Having come from large families themselves and relative to their parents' expectations, however, they preferred lesser number of children. The desire for small family size norm among the Maranao is in part accounted for by sex and by hypothesized effect of mobility aspirations or increasing modernity among the educated Maranaos. Female Maranao students, as well as those with higher expectancy for mobility aspirations, are found to display favorable attitudes towards small family size.

While the time has not come to change the outlook towards large family size, some Maranaos are now beginning to do so. The change may require a drastic revision of values and orientations and probably will come from the modern members of the society, the educated Maranao youth. They are the new breed of Maranao who will spread the gospel that number is no longer power and wealth, the belief that their traditional counterparts have tenaciously clung to. They will then regard large family size as a liability and as an impediment to social and economic progress.

NOTES

¹Data presented in this study are drawn from responses to a questionnaire distributed to and completed by 200 Maranao college students at MSU, Marawi City, during the months of January and February 1979. The distribution of the subjects are as follows: freshmen, 21%; sophomores, 31%; juniors, 19%; senior and fifth year students, 29%. Their age ranges from 17-26 suggesting that the respondents as a group are relatively homogeneous.

²Attitude scales were developed to measure aspirations. In each scale, statements were asked whether the respondents strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree,

disagree, or are undecided. Favorable responses are assigned scores of 5 and 4, unfavorable responses, 2 and 1, and undecided, 3, according to the Likert Scheme. Then, scores, were summated and dichotomized into "high" and "low," as were the family size preference scale. The questions asked were whether the informants agree or disagree with the following: (1) One's educational achievement should be higher than his parents, (2) One's occupational achievement should be higher than his parents, (3) One's living condition should be higher than his parents.

³Because the sample cannot be claimed to be representative, testing the significance of correlation (gamma) was not done in this exploratory exercise. Validity of the hypothesis, however, is judged on the basis of the magnitude of gamma coefficients. The closer the coefficients approach the value of 1.0 the stronger is the correlation between two variables, hence lending support to the hypothesis.

⁴Parental expectations were taken from an assessment of the Maranao students' perception.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Balacuit, Jimmy Y. 1979. "Factors Affecting the Attitude of the Maranaos Towards Family Planning." *A Report Submitted to Southeast Asia Population Research Awards Program*, supported by the International Development Research Centre, Canada.
- Cheng, C. L. 1978. "Knowledge, Attitude and Practice on Family Planning Among the Mountain State Agricultural College Students" (Unpublished, 36pp.)
- Dinoro, Doris M. 1979. "Family Size Preference as a Function of Aspiration among the Maranao," Undergraduate Thesis, Mindanao State University.
- Dohm, Thomas E. 1978. "Preferred Family Size Among Filipino Adolescents," *Options for Policy and Practice*. 4 (3) May-June, pp. 14-20.
- Guerrero, A.M. 1976. "Family Planning Among the Maranaos," *Initiatives in Population*, 2(4):2-6.
- Laing, J. E., Phillips, J. F. 1974. "Survey Findings in Family Planning Effects in the Philippines, 1968-73" (Mimeo, Oct., 19 pp.)
- Stanford, Quentin H. 1972. *The World Population*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tolentino, Vickie F. 1979. "The Family Planning Attitudes of the Maranao Leadership," Newly completed research report for the International Development Research Centre/Southeast Asia Population Awards Programs.