

Demographic Aspect of Family Planning⁽¹⁾

«In studying a population increase, the rule is to regularly follow up the increase resulting from the excess of the number of births over that of deaths in a certain year and within a limited geographic area.»

In Lebanon, statistical and demographic data, which are a prerequisite for an accurate analysis and interpretation of any demographic aspect, are at present very inadequate. The last population census took place in 1932. The principal information available along this line consists in two recent studies. The first is a sample study of the labor force effected in 1970 by the «Statistical Center». The second, a study of the demographic situation in Lebanon made by Youssef Kirbage and Philippe Fargues in 1974.

According to a survey made in 1974, the ratio of annual population increase in Lebanon reaches 24 per thousand, while in developed countries it is 4 to 5 per thousand. The causes of this high proportion are: 1) The high annual birth rate of 33 per thousand; 2) the lower annual death rate (ca 9 per thousand) which is a result of recently improved medical treatment and sanitary conditions in the country. It is presumed that a persistence of this condition will lead to a duplication of the population within less than 30 years.

Lower Fertility Rate

In spite of the high birth rate, a gradual lowering of the fertility rate has been recorded during the last ten years⁽²⁾. The average number of children per single marriage has been 3.6. This condition is due to various factors such as the immigration from rural to urban areas, the high cost of living, the higher average age of women at marriage and the increasing number of women seeking higher education which imposes on them a postponed marriage.

Demographic Investments

Demographic investments include money invested with the purpose of facing rapid population increase which creates for the state a number of economic problems. Recent research has shown that a population increase reaching 2.3% per year permits only two thirds

of the percentage of savings available under a stable population policy where the annual increase is zero per cent.

A Family Planning Program

For many reasons, it is very difficult to carry out a family planning program and evaluate its results in Lebanon under the present conditions.

On the other hand, data obtained regarding fertility rates similar to ours in other countries, permit us to infer that fertility rates are lower in areas where the program was carried out and response to it was positive.

One basic demographic principle should be here emphasized. It is the importance of the woman's age at the birth of the first child and of the other children as well. It has been medically established that the ideal period of child-birth for a woman is between 20 and 30. Earlier than that, childbirth may carry a potential risk for her health. The same risk lies in unspaced births and in those occurring between 30 and 40. In the latter case, the quality of the offspring is apt to be impaired.

Recommendations

Two preliminary steps should prepare for a successful implementation of a family-planning program. First, an understanding of the distinguishing practices governing the general fertility of the Lebanese family. Second, an assimilation by the family of the basic demographic principles and the readiness of its members to apply the family-planning program.

A general census is necessary, accompanied by demographic studies regarding the fertility rate and a reorganization of the registers of the civil status.

Moreover, an extensive information campaign regarding family-planning must be carried out. It should mobilize all the available information media and take into consideration the social and cultural backgrounds of the Lebanese families. The information plan should be extended to the young generation which must be enlightened regarding its future role and the attitude it would adopt toward this question. The public should be convinced that any social program will remain defective if its demographic implications are not anticipated.

Finally, demographic thought cannot be improvised. It should rest on long term planning and on a vision inspired by an adequate knowledge of the positive and structural human experiences recently gained.

(1) Abstract of a lecture presented by Dr. Francois Farah at the Lebanon Family Planning Sixth Week, Beirut, 1-7 December, 1980.

(2) See *Al-Raida* Feb. 1980, vol. III, no. 11, p.5.