

# Values About Children And Fertility<sup>(1)</sup>

In the traditional context, male children are predominantly preferred to female children. In the VOC (Value of Children) survey presented by C. Kagitcibasi at the Second Turkish Demography Conference of the Institute of Population Studies, Izmir, 1975, boy preference reaches 71 percent as contrasted with a mere 23 percent for girls. Reasons for this preference: a son is a source of social prestige and recognition, together with old age security and material well-being. A son also enhances his mother's status in the family and community; he is the carrier of the family name through whom it continues.

Female children are mainly valued for their personal qualities such as submissiveness, politeness, being close to the mother, being well-mannered, etc. As a rule, boys are socialized by their fathers, and girls by their mothers, and they learn sex-specific behavior mainly through imitation and identification with the parent of the same sex (Kagitcibasi, pp. 62-63).

Respect and deference to parents and, as a result, identification with them, are the rule for both girls and boys. "From a psycho-dynamic perspective, this respect and deference has been interpreted as the inhibition of initiative and thus being detrimental to autonomous ego development." (Kagitcibasi, p.64). Application of rules without logical explanation serves to further subdue the child and produce a partly unconscious and arbitrarily punitive superego.

## The Value of Children (VOC) Study

In the Turkish VOC study conducted in 1975, "A sample of 2317 respondents were used, comprising 1767 women and 550 men. Multi-stage stratified random sampling was used, where stratification was done in terms of the levels of development." (Kagitcibasi, p. 75). The values were presented in terms of advantages and disadvantages of children.

In the category of advantages, "the primary group ties, affection and love," form a most salient value of children for parents. According to a previously conducted pilot study, the child brings the spouses closer together. Other advantages: security in old age, stimulation and activity, the pleasure from watching them grow, help in household chores, general economic help, family continuity, meaning to life, having someone to leave your property to, satisfying the parental instinct, fulfilling a religious duty, moral improvement, creativity.

The disadvantages of children, though less numerous than advantages, are nevertheless many and highly varied. "Concern about the child mainly in the form of fear of doing a bad job seems to be a prevalent worry, followed

by economic burden of children." (Kagitcibasi, p. 87). Economic disadvantages, mentioned very frequently by both sexes in all educated groups, decrease in salience as education increases. On the other hand, both concern about the child and the restriction on parents freedom increase at higher levels of education. Responses concerning the financial and emotional cost of children indicate the greater financial and emotional cost of sons, yet "the before mentioned son preference in spite of this awareness, reflects strong traditional norms and sons instrumental values." (Kagitcibasi, p. 96).

Desirable qualities in both sons and daughters are mainly "being educated and being moral." It should be possible to comment here that the truthfulness of such a response is debatable because, in fact, the prevalence of dishonest dealing in Eastern society offers evidence of the bad example presented by parents to their children.

## Number of Children

According to the survey already mentioned, almost half of the respondents (42.4 percent) said that two is the ideal number of children. However, the mean for the ideal number of children is 3.4. This is considerably larger than the mean parity of 2.7 and may be due partly to the young age level of the respondents. Having a single child is mostly disapproved (70.8 percent). Among reasons for not wanting a single child, specific worry about child death is highly salient (43 percent). Most respondents affirm that a child brings positive changes into the life of man and woman. It gives them adult status in society, reflected in greater maturity, responsibility and role changes.

## Decision Making in the Family

Predominant male decision making in the family is a sign of traditional sex-role relations. The VOC study found male decision making to be the rule in the majority of the families in Turkey. Predominantly male decision making seems to correlate to other traditional forms of behavior such as lack of communication between the spouses, role differentiation in the family, boy preference and high parity. On the other hand, media exposure correlates quite strongly with modernity variables such as communication between spouses, decision mindedness and concern with overpopulation. Those who experience more media exposure have fewer children and tend not to emphasize traditional reasons for wanting another child. Early use of birth control may be considered a modernity variable since it implies a systematic planning of the number of children from the very beginning instead of waiting till a desired number is reached.

(1) Second part of the report prepared by Cigdem Kagitcibasi for UNESCO, October 1977, on "Cultural Values & Population Action Programs in Turkey, condensed in *Al-Raida* 10, p. 3.

## Implications for Population Action Programs

Knowledge of cultural values including the value of children is a preliminary step toward the adoption of a population action program based on the special conditions and needs of every country. Where family-planning is considered a necessity for stemming the menace of overpopulation, as is the case with developing countries, an explicit population policy could be used in such a way as to reduce fertility.

Values connected with children could be reconsidered in the light of modern needs and of social changes brought about by modern culture and technology.

1) While emphasizing, for example the psychological values of children, it could be argued that psychological satisfaction could be obtained from one or two children just as effectively, or even better, than many children. Furthermore, it could even be argued that utilitarian values could be better realized by few rather than many children. For example, to provide old-age security, a well educated child is more valuable than many uneducated children who are all needy.

2) The utilitarian values of children could further be deemphasized by pointing out that, with compulsory education, child labor laws and industrialization, child labor is decreasing and its economic contribution is becoming negligible.

3) Emotional and social benefits such as self-enrichment, self-fulfillment, being accepted as an adult, etc., could possibly be achieved by the creation of job opportunities for both men and women or through creative, occupational achievement.

4) The love and companionship that the children provide could be provided to some extent by the close family, kinship and community ties.

5) The concern about child mortality which is found to be so important in the VOC study can be met by providing better public health services.

6) The costs of children should be clearly associated with large numbers. Health problems obviously increase, as does noise, disorder, and stress, while discipline problems become more acute.

7) Of great practical importance is the awareness of the above disadvantages at earlier stages.

Educational programs and communications in general should reach young couples, or even better, young people before marriage, in order to be effective. Schools, adult education, advice and orientation centers are all effective tools for such information.

## Persuasive Communication

In order to penetrate to the audience and break down its various defense mechanisms, the communication should be highly persuasive, hence based on social psychological research. It should take into consideration four basic components:

1) Credible, trustworthy sources.

2) A content joining emotional appeal to specific instruction and concrete information regarding the use of contraceptives.

3) A knowledge of the audience, their own views, and their level of education, is important as a preliminary guide to the ways of affecting them.

4) The context in which persuasive communication takes place is a factor in determining its effectiveness. It has been found that "face-to-face" communication can be more effective than impersonal mass media.

## Socio-Economic Development

Improvement of communication techniques, in order to be of widespread and long lasting effectiveness, should be accompanied with socio-economic structural change and development. One of the most important developmental changes is industrialization which opens up job opportunities for both women and men and, by increasing over-all-material costs of children, favors the decrease of fertility. Another factor is education, whose fertility depressing effect seems to be most pronounced at lower levels.

The liberation of women from rigid roles and the opening and equalization of job opportunities for them is of utmost significance in depressing fertility. Improving women's life conditions and raising their status are bound to decrease son preference and fertility.

However, socio-economic development, if left to occur at its own pace, is a slow process and needs to be supplemented with specific population policy focusing on fertility decline and utilizing effective population action programs, such as those that have been adopted in Egypt and other developing countries.

## PEOPLE'S HEALTH IN PEOPLE'S HANDS

As a result of the Uppsala Seminar of 1977, the political leaders of India decided that the community should become conscious of what it can do itself and when to call for assistance. Moved by the slogan, "People's Health in People's Hands," they recognized that health improvement can not be brought about merely by increasing the number of doctors or the output of medicine. A new program was adopted by which a community health worker, chosen by and coming from the community, is given training, then sent back to the community with the equipment needed for his work. It is proposed to eventually cover the entire rural population of the country's over 480 million, living in some 560,000 villages, at the rate of one community health worker for each 1000 persons.

A campaign has been launched, mobilizing the political will to overcome the obstacles represented by the prevailing social power structure and administrative machinery.

The Indian rural health scheme is still in its initial stages and it will be some time before one can say how far it will fulfill the requirements of "Another Development in Health."<sup>(1)</sup>

(1) Health and Another Development: Editorial, *Development Dialogue Op. Cit.* pp. 2-3.