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Women's Attitude to Fertility in Iran: A Case Study in Isfahan, Iran

Mojdeh Kiani
Department of Social Sceince, Payam e Noor University, Isfahan, Iran

Abstract: The studies show that the fertility rate has recently changed from natural level to controlled level in Iran in 1990s. Because women's attitude are one of the important factors on this decline, the main objective of this study is recognition of women's attitude to fertility. The main question is what factors affect women's attitude. Fertility is not just a demographic variable but it is an important variable that has several aspect including cultural and socio-economic. Every change in fertility depends on changing in attitude of human. This investigation has been performed by using the survey method and 300 people were studied. To analyze the data, the multi-variable regression has been used. The results from the multi-variable regression statistical analysis of the factors affecting on women's attitude equal $R^2 = 0.62$. It can be concluded that the duration of marriage life, age, man's age of marriage, occupation and education have affected the women's attitude.

Key words: Fertility behavior, ideal number of children, women's attitud, demographic variable, objective, Iran

INTRODUCTION

Iran has one of the most successful family planning programs in the developing world with 64% decline in fertility rate between 1986 and 2000. Recent family changes developments in Iran and its contribution to explain lower fertility have been studied a little and some questions still remain unanswered; in recent years, how have the various aspects of family changed their restructures under the pressure of cultural traditions and social change force? In other words to what extent the family changes indicate the fertility differences and changes in Iran? If one can feature a relation between family different fertility desires and attitudes in Iran, how these relations are according to the general trend experienced in other societies?

In the last three decades, Iran has experienced some dramatic demographic changes. Studies on the fertility trend in the country indicate that the fertility began to decrease from the year, 1984 onwards and from late 1980s observed a remarkable speed (Abassi-Shavazi and McDonald, 2006; Abbasi-Shavazi *et al*., 2007). Since, women are exposed to fertility, studying their fertility behavior as well as their attitudes towards fertility, the value of having a baby are considered as the most important issues of this research. It is one of the purposes of this study.

It is believed that woman's views on various social issues and their attitudes to individual, family and social values can affect their fertility behavior. In this study, it is assumed that women who have been more independent in family decision-making have the possibility of greater involvement to limit fertility and a child. Recent research shows the relationship between women's independence and having a low fertility. The understanding of the relative importance of each of the influencing factors of fertility decline would be related to women's attitudes.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Based on the research question, the method selected in the present research is survey. This investigation has been performed by using the survey method and 300 people were studied. The statistical population is married Isfahanian women who have been married for >2 years. According to available statistics, the sample volume has been estimated around 300 people. The data have been collected via using questionnaires. This study investigates the effects of some factors on Isfahanian 20-49 women's attitudes about fertility.

There can consider some statements and recognize the women's attitude toward them. Each statements represents a particular hypothesis which studies the women's point of view from a different aspect. Their disagreement or agreement with any statements shows their modern or traditional opinion toward fertility and having children. For example, the women's agreement on some statements indicates that they pay less attention to the traditional values in having a baby and mostly have a modern point of view. To analyze the data, the multi-variable regression has been used.

Theoretical framework: Economists stress the role of demand for children and hence factors that determine it such as infant mortality and education as more important than provision of family planning services (Schultz, 2007).

Hotz *et al.* (1997) summarize the micro-economic theory of fertility decline as being the result of variations in family incomes and the prices or opportunity costs of children. Becker (1981) was probably the first to doubt, the Malthusian claim that the passion between the sexes has appeared in every age to be so nearly the same that it may always be considered in algebraic language as a given quantity and his ideas have influenced many economic theories and more notably, the growth theory of Barro and Becker (1989) semi-endogenous growth theories as well Becker's theory of fertility assumes that people have children so as to contemplate and bask in the thought of their children's happiness.

The more parents relish their children's happiness, the more altruistic Becker declares them to be. Outside the current mainstream economic, debate is an alternative explanation offered by Easterlin (1976). His theory of the conflict between aspirations and resources predicts that if women or families experience a conflict between the level of resources at their disposal and the level to which they are accustomed they cease to expand their family. Easterlin's aspirations and conflict theory is similar to Becker's theory on the direct costs of children with regard to the direction of the proposed relationship; childbearing ceases if the cost outweighs the perceived benefits of the child. Caldwell (1976)'s wealth flows theory proposes a direct link between family structure and fertility. According to the theory, there are only two major forms of family structure, differing principally in the direction of wealth flows among generations.

In primitive and traditional societies net wealth flows are primarily upward from younger to older generations and individual interests are subjugated to corporate interests.

In developed nations, family structure is organized in terms of downward wealth flows where parents are expected to provide for children's economic well-being. This change in family structure was due to the spread of new values that placed a premium on individual satisfaction and achievement (Caldwell, 1980). Those values emanated from the educated, middle-class in the West and are now being exported to the developing world through mass formal education. Implicit in the educational materials and expectations of schools is the individualistic value system that produces downward wealth flows.

Labor markets make the adoption of these individualistic values which are adversative to the family or group production characteristic of pretransition societies, economically feasible. The transition from traditional to modern family structure occurs when a critical mass of individuals adopt the new values and respond with low fertility.

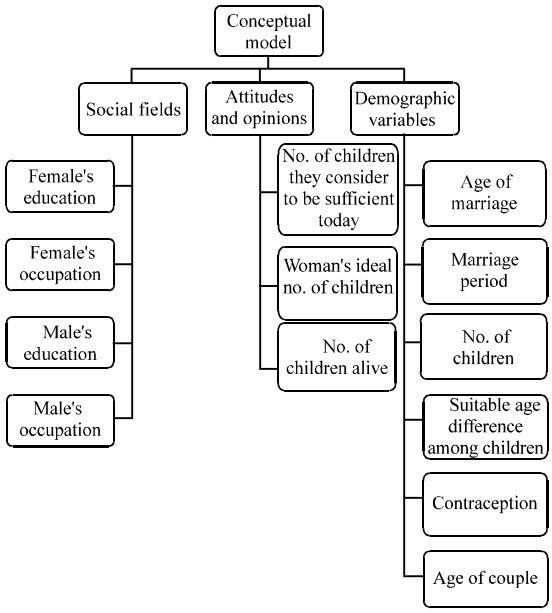

Fig. 1: Conceptual model of research

The attainment of mass education in a country should therefore precipitate and predict the fertility transition. The most serious challenge to the wealth flows theory has come from evolutionary biologists. The argument that prior to modernization, upward wealth flows characterized human family structures is inherently antithetical to theory in evolutionary biology (Turke, 1989). In a detailed literature review, Jones *et al.* (2011) discuss how these models often need to assume some restrictive conditions (e.g., curvature and/or functional forms) to generate a negative relationship between income and fertility. The Conceptual Model of research is shown in Fig. 1.

Literature review: So far several studies have investigated the trend of fertility changes and its influencing factors in Iran (Ladier-Fouladi, 1997; Hoodfar and Assadpour, 2000; Abbasi *et al.*, 2002; Abbasi-Shavazi *et al.*, 2003; Mehryar *et al.*, 1999). The findings of these studies have emphasized on the role of some factors such as modernization (Paydarfar and Moini, 1995), the type of religious scholars opinion towards family planning programs (Hoodfar and Assadpour, 2000) and attitude changes after revolution. Although, these studies are a major attempt to understand some causes of fertility change in Iran till now the relative role of infrastructural factors of reduced fertility in Iran has been less questioned and even less a clear and convincing data have answered to these questions. Liyod argued that while these surveys such WFS and DHS offer important

descriptive evidence of differing relationship between fertility and women's work these cross-sectional fertility and family planning surveys have taught us very little about the causal mechanisms underlying work-fertility relationship.

The challenges and frustration of working with these data have sharpened the understanding of the strengths and limitations of large-scale cross-national surveys. In a review of findings, seven major links between women's position and fertility were hypothesized (Mason, 1993). These include the ways that women's economic and social independence might delay age at marriage and how women's access to knowledge and technology can influence women's fertility.

Women will be less interested in limiting the number of children when their role status and respect derive particularly from their position as mothers and when they are dependent on males. Blooms *et al.* (2001) have suggested that family structures patriarchal, patrilocal and/or patrilineal and the kind of contact women have with their natal family will also affect fertility. In such situation where women do not often have as much voice in child bearing decisions, family patriarchs do not support fertility limitation (Caldwell, 1982; Folbere, 1994). Martin and Juarez (1995) had used DHS data for 26 countries to demonstrate both the connections between women's education and fertility and the complexities and variability in this relationship. Her findings are consistent with previous studies (Cochrane, 1979; Cleland and Rodriguez, 1988) that found that while education had a generally negative relationship with fertility, the magnitude and direction of the effect of education also different depending on the economic development of the country. Castro Martin found that in virtually all societies, women with the most formal education have the lowest levels of fertility. However, the magnitude of difference between those with the last and most education varied widely across societies. The largest differences were found in Latin America. She related this gap to a highly polarized social structure in which the living standards of the upper social strata contrast, sharply with those of the lower strata (Martin and Juarez, 1995). In sub-Saharan Africa in contrast education has a weaker effect on fertility in some countries in the region, fertility is actually higher among women with some schooling than among those with no schooling although, Jejeebhoy (1995) has observed that in most places this pattern does not hold true for more highly educated women.

Researchers have pointed to the ways that education might effect fertility; delayed marriage, changed fertility preference and increasing contraceptive (particularly modern) use all are potential results of women's education (Martin and Juarez, 1995; Jejeebhoy, 1995; Cleland and Rodriguez, 1988; Sathar and Durrant, 2000). In the study of Nepal, Morgan and Niraula (1995) found that women do not want more children than men and in a study of five Asian countries, Mason and Smith (2000) found no evidence that gender stratification influences spouses agreement about whether to stop having children.

RESULTS

There are two variables in behavioral aspect involving the number of children born alive and using the prevention equipment before first pregnancy and two variables in attitude aspect involving the number of women ideal children during marriage and the number of children who are supposed today enough for each couple. These are selected as independent variables.

Characteristic variables: The highest age percent belongs to the group of 34-30 years old with 25.9% and the minimum percentage belongs to the age group of 19-15 years. The highest percentage of spouse age belongs to group of 34-30 years with 26.2% and the minimum percentage belongs to 24-20 years group. The highest percentage belongs to the women with diplomas 36.2% and the minimum percent belongs to the students and illiterate. MA and PhD is about 10%. The highest percentage belongs to the wives with diploma 36.2% and minimum percent belongs to illiterate and high school. MA and PhD are 10.7%. Age difference with the lowest percentage belongs to the wives who are older than their husbands. The most percentage belongs to the housewives with 68.6% and the minimum percentage belongs to the professors, doctors and the retired. The highest percentage belongs to the wives who are self-employed with 48.6% and the minimum percent belongs to the unemployed with 2.8%. About 25.5% of espondents have had consanguineous marriage and 74.1% non con-sanguineous marriage. About 86% of respondents have been born in the city and 14% in the village. The highest percentage belongs to the respondents who (95.5) were opposed to this idea that having lots of children is a good help to increase family income in the future. About 52 people with educational level of illiterate, elementary and guidance school, 117 ones with high school and diploma and 103 ones with higher considered having 2-1 children to be ideal. Literacy and education of women has a pivotal and determining role in their fertility behavior and ideals so that the appropriate behavior and attitudes toward a lower fertility is prominent and visible with increase in the women's education.

Table 1: Persentage of women's attitudes

Agree	Disagree	Statements
15.9	83.8	Parents must have a lot of children for old age
82.4	16.2	Having a lot of children, deters the parents from doing what they like
3.8	95.5	Having a lot of children helps to increase the income
15.2	84.8	Having a lot of children helps to carry out household chores
91.7	7.6	Having a lot of children, causes mental pressure and stress
77.9	21.7	Having a lot of children makes the parents not be ableto educate them properly
92.8	6.6	Having a lot of children causes financial pressure
15.9	83.8	If people are well off, they will have more children
10.3	87.6	The more children couples have the more dependent they become on each other
16.9	82.1	Contraception is interfering in God's will
13.1	85.2	With having a lot of children, parents feel to be alive even after their death
7.9	90.7	The families must have a lot of children in order to increase their tribe's power

The majority of the respondents, 254 people who were born in the cities, supposed 1-2 children as an ideal number. The majority of the urban and rural respondents (270) believed having 1-2 children is ideal. Based on Table 1, the highest percentage of the respondents (about 95.5%) disagreed on having a lot of children help increase the income. After these respondents, the highest percentage (92.8%) belongs to women who believed that having a lot of children causes financial pressure on the family and 91.7% believed having a lot of children causes mental pressure and stress for the parents.

Testing hypothesis: Regression analysis of the effects of independent variables on attitudes about women's fertility; a multiple regression analysis stepwise method has been used in order to study the effects of simultaneous variables for the women's attitudes about fertility and to determine the impact of them. Independent variables were the male and female education, place of birth, sex and income of male and female, male and female occupation, age, sex and age at marriage, sex and type of marriage, residence and duration of marriage. The result of multiple regression analysis shows that among all the variables in the equation some variables including the husband's age, age difference, his career, marriage duration and place of birth (city or village) were the most effective on women's fertility attitude have the most effect on the women's attitude to fertility, respectively.

DISCUSSION

During 1980-2000, Iran experienced some basic demographic changes. In the 1990s, fertility in Iran declined sharply. Women's fertility behaviors have altered recently. Since, women are exposed to fertility and fertility behaviors are influenced by the kind of attitude toward fertility, the most important issue in this study is the recognition of the effective factors on women's attitude. To answer this question, Isfahanian women's attitudes toward fertility and childbearing were investigated. A theoretical framework has been described for organizing the women's attitude to fertility. It is concluded that women's education has a prominent role in their fertility behaviors. The higher a women's education is the less fertility behaviors are observed. Women with higher educational levels are more likely to use contraceptive devices before their first pregnancy. The results of multivariable regression analysis indicate that among all the variables entering the equation, the husband's age, age difference, his career, marriage duration and place of birth (city or village) have highly influenced women's attitudes about fertility, respectively. Global observations state the change of fertility behaviors around the world.

Fertility rate, influenced by socio-economical conditions after the fluctuations of the decade past the revolution has reduced in Iran which indicates fertility behavior alteration. One of the under development and developing countries cultural conflicts in demography is fertility behavior and sexual preference. Recent studies in less developed countries (Bankole and Singh, 1998; Dodoo, 1998; Wolf *et al*., 2000) also support this conclusion.

The results of the multivariable analysis of the present study confirm this theoretical expectation that education has a determining role on Isfahanian women's fertility behavior. This finding is consistent with that of other studies.

Similarly, women's access to work is not universally interpretable as representing increased status or power. While in some cases, women's access to labor force participation may increase their independence from family resource, it is also true that labor force participation and education no matter how strongly linked to fertility or morality outcomes do not in themselves capture the role of gender. Folbere (2002) argued that this influence has contributed to the low fertility trends seen across the western world. How these differences might or might not be related to gender or differential power is a separate question. In different contexts, education and work have different meaning and different uses. It is the meaning of the behavior, meaning that arises from the social economic and culture context that is likely to give us clues to genders influence (Kishor, 1993). Martin and Juarez (1995) has argued that the overall level of education in a community may have a larger effect on fertility levels than does average length of schooling among individuals who

have attended school. While community educational resources are related to overall community resource there can expect gender to play a role in the differential access of women and men which result in different result in deferent levels of school attendance and graduation rates. Results from DHS surveys show that across many societies, women who work for cash have lower fertility rates than those who do not work for cash. This relationship is evident in places as diverse as Botswana, Bolivia and Kenya (Blanc, 2001; Rutstein, 1994). But the consecutions between fertility and women's work are complex.

One of the major difficulties in understanding the relationship between work and fertility is connected to the problems of measurement of women's work (Oppong, 1984). When women work full-time throughout the year, information on their participation in the paid labor force is relatively easy to gather.

CONCLUSION

Women's agency is one of the basic factors of socio-economic changes. So, the rate ofwomen's agency effects the fertility's behavior. Women's agency is shown by increasing education in declining fertility. Since, education is related to the increase in marriage age, change in women's attitude toward fertility and costs of having a child and the age difference among children; it is considered to be one of the most important factors in fertility. The other studies (Mason, 1993; Abbasi-Shavazi and McDonald, 2006; Wolf *et al*., 2000) also support this conclusion. The results of this study show that women who are born in city because having higher level of education they will marry later at time of marriage have lower child ideal number and they have fewer children.

The results of the present study confirm about attitude changes after revolution in Iran (Mehryar *et al*., 1999; Abbasi-Shavazi and McDonald, 2006). In despite of basic role of men and patriarchal structure in family decision making in Iran, changing women's attitude with increase in higher education contribute to control fertility. It is predicted that based on trend of increase in entering girls to universities of Iran in future these changes with declining fertility will cause other changes in family.

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