

Fertility expectations of the women of Tehran-Do values of children still matter?

By

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Extended Abstract.

Introduction:

The Iranian culture strongly promotes family values and emphasises the role of parenthood in society. Parenthood is also considered by most Iranian couples to be one of the main aims of marriage. Despite the fact a number of studies have been conducted to investigate the value of children in Iran there are very few empirical attempts to examine the relationship between women's values of children and their fertility intentions, especially in a situation where below replacement fertility has been persistent for more than a decade. This paper examines whether women's values of children influence their fertility intentions as measured by 'expected family size', which is defined in this study as: *'the sum of the number of children a woman has already had at the time of the survey and the number of additional children she still plan[s] to have'*.

Data and method:

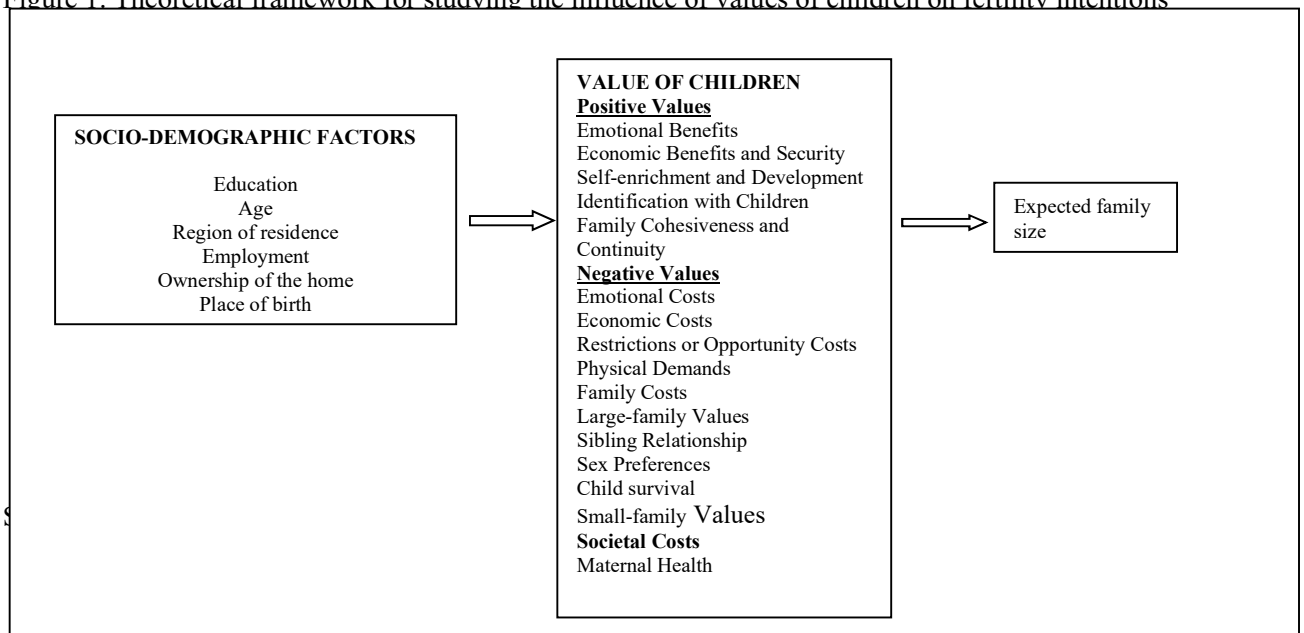
This study has used data from a 2015 cross-sectional survey of 400 married women of reproductive ages (15-49 years in Tehran, the capital city of Iran. Tehran consists of 22 regions which are classified into five zones according to level of development, known as 'zoning development'. Thus, each zone consists of approximately 4 to 5 regions. For this study, one region is chosen from each of the five zones by random sampling, giving a total of five randomly selected regions. These selected regions comprise the primary sampling units (PSU). The dependent variable in this study is 'expected family size'. The independent variable in this study is the parents' value of children which, according to Fawcett (1983), is classified into costs of children and benefits from children, interpreted as negative and positive values of children respectively. This study aims to show how the combination of the negative and positive values of children and the prevailing socio-economic factors, including age, level of education, place of residence, ownership of residential home and place of birth influence women's fertility intentions.

From the theoretical framework (Hoffman & Hoffman, 1973) used in this study (shown in Figure 1), six components of value of children (three benefits and three costs) have been selected by factor analysis. These are categorised as: (i) Benefits of having children, consisting of economic benefits, fulfilment of large

family values and psychological benefits; and (ii) Costs of having children comprising economic costs, fulfilment of small-family values, and psychological costs.

Using multiple regression analysis, the direction and strength of influence of each of the explanatory variables on expected family size is determined. The multiple regression analysis is supplemented by a test of the theoretical model (Figure 1), by using ‘Path Analysis’, to measure the direct effect of each independent variable (socio-demographic factors) and indirect effect of each independent variable via the intermediate variables (values of children), on expected family size

Figure 1. Theoretical framework for studying the influence of values of children on fertility intentions



Source: Adapted from Hoffman and Hoffman (1973)

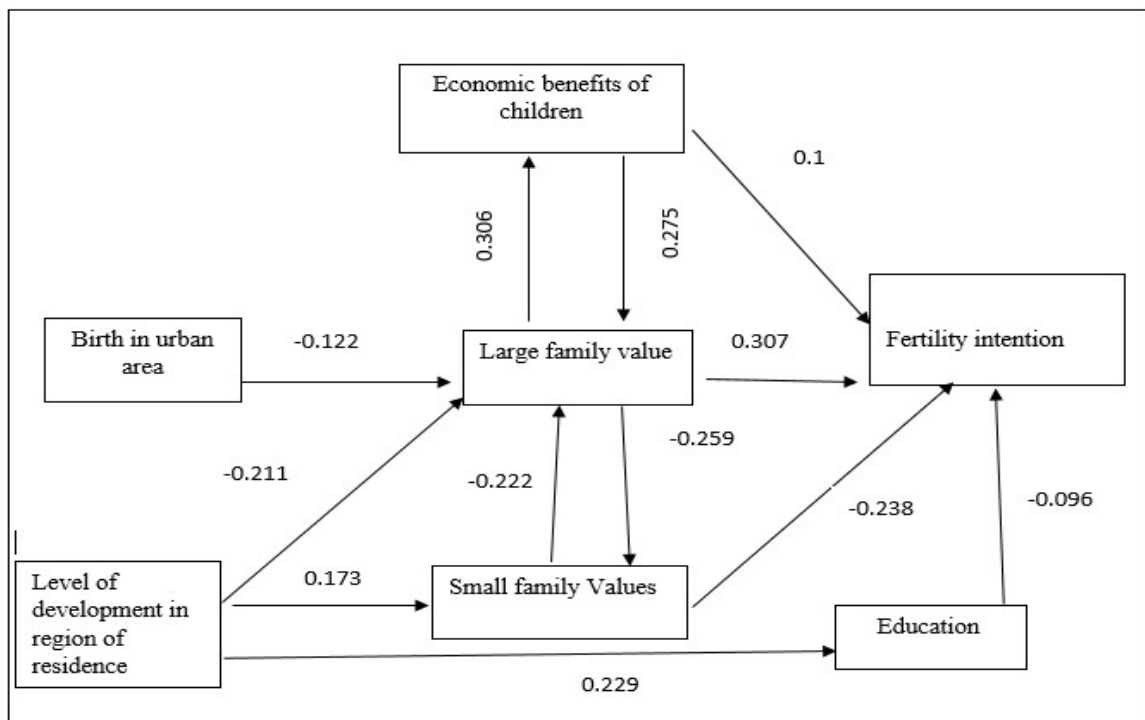
Empirical findings:

The findings of this study show that more than 50% of the surveyed women agree with the benefits of children in terms of supporting elderly parents and 40% agree with children’s economic help. The women’s attitudes toward large family values show that a vast majority of women agree with having a child of each sex and a significant proportion of the women are worried about having only one child, because they believe that children need siblings. Although child mortality is low in Tehran city (and Iran in general), around 44% of the surveyed women are of the opinion that one should give birth to many children in order to ensure the survival of their desired number of children. More than two-thirds of the surveyed women agree that having children is psychologically beneficial. In terms of small-family values, most of the surveyed women agree that many pregnancies are not good for the mother’s health. Interestingly, only a third of the women disagree with the fact that too many children would be a burden on the society.

Almost all respondents have expressed concerns about economic costs of children. Moreover, a large proportion of women agree with the items relevant to psychological costs of having children.

The findings of path analysis in Figure 2 show that the birth in urban area has an indirect effect of expected family size via large family values. The correlation between birth in urban area and large family values is (-0.122), and the correlation between large family values and fertility intention is (0.307), therefore, the total effect (correlation) of birth in urban area and fertility intentions equals 0.185 (-0.122+0.307). As it's shown in Figure 2, the level of development in region of residence has indirect effects on women's expected family size via small family value and large family values. Therefore, the total effect of level of development in region of residence on fertility intentions via large family values is positive and equals 0.100 (-0.211 +0.307). However, this effect via small family values is negative and equals -0.06 (0.173-0.238). Figure 2 also shows that women's level of education has a direct and negative effect on women's expected family size.

Figure 2. Path Analysis of the direct and indirect effects of socio-economic factors on fertility intentions via values of children, Tehran city, 2015



Source: (Hosseini 2015)

Conclusion:

To examine why the women in a low fertility context of Tehran choose to have more children than they have or expect to have and whether their values of children still matter in their fertility decision making, we found that large family values, and economic benefits of children have a direct and positive influence on women's expected family size in Tehran city.

Since 2010, the Iranian government's approach to population has been pro-natalist, although this has not become the official population policy of the country. As such, the government is explicitly encouraging women to have more children. According to the findings of the latest population census of Iran (2016), the total fertility rate in Tehran city has slightly increased from 1.3 in 2011 to 1.5 in 2016. This slight increase in total fertility probably relates to the preference for large family sizes by the surveyed women of Tehran city, which in turn might be a result of the government's new pro-natalist population approach.

This study also shows that women of Tehran city, who are highly educated, have concerns about the negative consequences of population growth for the future of the country and on mothers' health. However it seems the influence of small family values in this study is not strong enough to outweigh the influence of the large family values to decrease their expected family size.

References:

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