



Psychosocial Dimensions of Reproductive Motivations

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Introduction

The study of reproductive motivations occupies a central position for understanding fertility behaviour. Fertility theories show that in modern societies observed fertility is determined more by the demand for children than by the biological capacity to reproduce. Therefore, for both theoreticians and planners it is important to study reproductive motivations, i.e., the reasons behind the choice for number of children (Davis, K 1948). Needless to say, the reproductive motivations are not universal. Even when couples are guided largely by economic considerations, roles that children play and their utilities vary greatly across cultures. Thus there are many social, cultural, psychological and economic factors, which decide reproductive motivations. These factors have important mediating roles in the progress of fertility transition, via. Material fertility change.

Value of children:

The desire and need to have children is a universal phenomenon. Population scientists have paid a great deal of attention to explain the levels and differentials in fertility and their researches are based on some understanding of the reproductive motivations. Can you think: why do people produce children? Can there be a simple answer to this question? But before that, we should ask: is it true that children are always produced consciously and people always weigh the advantages and disadvantages of having children before producing them? Is reproduction a rational act? Studies conducted to answer these questions are broadly classified as Value of children (VOC) studies. Most of the studies conducted so far on the value of children are of two types: studies related to the economic value of children and those on non-economic value of children.

Economists say that couples produce children because there are certain economic advantages (reason) to do so. One economist, Leibenstein (1975), has suggested out that there are six utilities (or advantages) of children.

- Consumption utility
- Work-income utility
- Economic risk utility
- Old age security utility
- Long run status maintenance utility
- Contribution to extended family utility.

First of all, there is a consumption utility. People derive some direct psychological satisfaction from children in the same way as they derive satisfaction from other consumer goods. Parents spend time with children, play with them and feel happy. It satisfies their emotional and expressive needs. Secondly, children are instruments (or source) of some other requirements. In peasant societies, children work on family farms. In transitional societies, i.e., societies moving from the primitive stage to the developed stage, when children go out to work and earn money, they send some part of their income to their parents. Thirdly, even if no constant income from children is expected, they should be of help to their parents in crisis. This is a common expectation in many societies. Fourthly, in poor societies, children are often the only source of old age secu-

ry. Also children contribute to family status maintenance in the long run and contribute to the extended family wherever the extended family system exists. It may be noted that utility of any type depends on the nature of social formation, status of family and order of child (i.e. whether it is first, second, third, fourth, etc.)

Economists often talk in terms of marginal utilities. Marginal utility of a child may be defined as an additional utility of a child over and above the utilities of previous children that the parents have already had. Leibenstein says that out of the six utilities, marginal utility is higher for the second type (work-income utility). The decline of marginal utility is greater for children of higher order i.e. 3 and above.

The mode of production, family type, political factors also determine the advantages of having children. Caldwell (1981) said that peasant societies have high fertility because of the familial mode of production where the net flow of wealth is from the side of children to the side of parents. On the other hand, the net flow of wealth in modern societies is from the side of parents to the side of children and therefore, they have low fertility. Westernization, communication, urbanization, etc. may change the direction of flow of wealth between parents and children and change the fertility behaviour as well. Caldwell (1978) studied differences in the VOC in three economically-contrasting regions of Ghana. His findings showed that with the increased industrialization and urbanization, the rise of cash in place of subsistence farming increased pressure on parents to send children to school and increase the educational level. Consequently, the economic value of children declined.

The second domain is costs of bringing up children. Children are not free gifts. They have some costs also. There are two types of costs, direct costs and indirect (or opportunity) costs. Direct costs are costs of bearing and rearing of children. Indirect costs, mostly borne by mothers, refer to income foregone during the time, which is spent with children. Suppose a woman does not produce a child, she can get a job and earn. If she decides to produce a child, she may have to abandon activities other than home making. So the possible income is foregone. Also, employed mothers suffer important opportunity costs (career interruption) and psychological costs (strains resulting from roles of employment and child and family care). This is the indirect cost (Sorokin, 1959). Keeping in view the above utilities and costs, the couple decides the number of children to produce. Can we say something about VOC from the societal point of view? Yes. Let us imagine that a child (if born) contributes to society by a quantity K_a at the age a . Also let us assume that at age a he (or she) will consume R_a resources of society. Then the value (i.e., the benefit) of child at age a will be $K_a - R_a$. The total lifetime benefit from the children will be –

$$\sum_{a=0}^w (K_a - R_a)$$

Where w is the upper limit of life. Since economists always discount benefits expected in the future by a proper discount rate, the net present value of child will be—

$$NPV = \sum_{a=0}^w \frac{K_a - R_a}{(1+r)^a}$$

Where r is the rate of discount. You may use the market rate of interest for discounting.

Unfortunately, this approach to study VOC has certain serious limitations. If you look at the value of children in this way, it will always be negative because up to the age of 15, K_a is normally zero and after that it is heavily discounted. Does this mean that children are consumer durable? You may talk to some couples and ask whether before producing children, they had calculated their costs and benefits.

Given such limitations, many studies have looked at the VOC from social and psychological perspectives. These studies have given rise to what may be called the socio-psychological framework of value of children. In this perspective the value of children refers to the functions they (children) serve and the needs they fulfill for parents. Hoffman and Hoffman had conceptualized nine psychological dimensions of VOC. On the basis of these nine dimensions, Arnold and his colleagues developed the VOC scale which include following dimensions:

- (i) **Tradition, continuity and security:** Children are seen as means of transmitting the family name and tradition, as being loyal to their parents and providing a sense of immortality and a source of help in old age. In the Indian family set up "carrying on the family name" or "continuation of the family" has specific importance among individuals life.
- (ii) **Parenthood Satisfaction:** Te sense of achievement from being a good parent, the satisfaction of providing guidance to children, and feeling of being needed.
- (iii) **Role Motivation:** this encompasses the 'naturalness' of wanting children, the connection between parenthood and adulthood and the responsibility and maturity that comes with being a parent.
- (iv) **Happiness and Affection:** this dimension includes the parent's expression of love for the child and general sense of happiness associated with raising children and family life.
- (v) **Goals and Incentives:** This refers to the ideal of serving a higher purpose in life by having children and to the more concrete notions of children binding the spouses together and providing an incentive for accomplishment in life.
- (vi) **Social Status:** This refers to the acceptance and respect that couples obtain from the community by having children.
- (vii) **External Control:** This consists of two dimensions: pressure from others for child bearing and a moralistic or fatalistic view against birth limitations.
- (viii) **Cost of Children:** This includes opportunity cost, financial cost and emotional cost to the marital relationship.

You may note that psychological perspective stresses that attention be shifted from "objective factors" or facts to "perceptions of facts". According to Hoffman and Hoffman (1973) a psychological model of fertility behaviour contains 5 variables as follows:

A. The value of children:

1. Adult status and social identity
2. Expansion of the self-tie to a larger entity "immortality"
3. Morality, religion, altruism, norms regarding sexuality, impulsivity, virtue.
4. Primary group ties, affiliation.
5. Stimulation, novelty, and fun
6. Creativity, accomplishment, competence.
7. Power, influence, reflectance.
8. Social comparisons, competition
9. Economic utility.
 - B. Alternative source of value
 - C. Costs
 - D. Barriers
 - E. Facilitators



Socio-psychological and non-economic factors have been found to be of great importance in the explanation of falling levels of fertility even in many less developed countries where the fertility decline is seen either as response to human development or institutional changes.

There have been ample field survey studies, which have attempted to calculate the utilities and disutilities of the children, in other words positive and negative values of the children, and how they are different in traditional and modern societies. An important aspect is to understand how fertility transition is accompanied by transition in value of children. The united Nation has suggested the causes of fertility decline in three stages as follows:

Stage 1. Uses an immediate variable approach to decompose the variate duration of the use of contraception' (b) duration of first marriage (c) length of first child interval (i.e. time gap between the age at marriage and the age of first birth), (d) length of second child birth interval (i.e. time gap between the age at first birth and the age of second birth), (e) secondary Sterility, (f) duration of breast feeding, (g) pregnancy wastage and (h) infant and child deaths.

Stage second focus attention on the explanation of the duration of use of contraception with the help of (a) cost of fertility regulation (b) number of surviving children desired by the respondents and (c) the number of surviving children the couples would have if they did not regulate fertility

Finally Stage three deals with the determinants of a child supply and cost of fertility regulation

Summary and conclusion- This discussion shows that there are important social cultural, psychological and economic determinants if the fertility. The social scientists should look into these determinants as much approximate determinants to examine and understand the fertility behavior. This approach is also useful to understand the fertility change under different social, cultural and economic context.

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