

Attitudes and Motivations Underlying Large Families in the Philippines (Abstract)

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The population of the Philippines is one of the fastest growing in the world. A realization of this situation has brought some recognition of the need to lower the birth rate. The task of preparing the population which traditionally has favored high fertility levels for acceptance and practice of family regulations is a difficult one. A first step toward this goal is to know how Filipinos feel about family size and modern methods to actively regulate it.

Data gathered in Cagayan de Oro City in 1963 confirm what surveys in other areas of the country have indicated before:¹ that most couples, even though they cite four to five children as 'ideal' for a family, still continue to want six or more children for themselves, provided a favorable family income and decent housing conditions.

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¹ Mercedes B. Concepcion, "Fertility Differences Among Married Women in the Philippines." (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of Sociology, University of Chicago, 1963); Ramon Corrales, "Families in the Victorias Milling District, Negros Occidental." (Unpublished Paper, Xavier University, Cagayan de Oro); Nena A. Bustrillos, "Patterns of Fertility Behavior of Couples in Rural Laguna." (Paper read at the Philippine Sociological Convention, May 12-15, 1966, Manila).

One reason for this desire to have large families is that couples often look at children as economic assets rather than liabilities, who can provide additional income for the family, make possible a greater division of labor in the household, and guarantee support for their parents in times of old age, sickness, or other crises. Education appears to be a motivational factor of ambiguous nature: While some of the women interviewed in Cagayan argued that it is easier to provide quality education for their children when the family is small, others preferred large families "because it is nice to see many of the children finish education." Husbands, especially in the lower social classes, often welcome children as signs of virility. For the hypothesis proposed by Lapuz, that women who suspect their husbands of unfaithfulness often-times want many children as sources of emotional security, no evidence could be discovered in the Cagayan data.²

Attitudes toward the use of family limitation methods seem to be widely influenced by religious factors. Many women consider any act of birth control as 'sinful'. 50.7 per cent of Cagayan women

² Francis C. Madigan, (ed.), *Human Factors in Economic Development*. (Pasay City: Modern Press, 1967), p. 158.

questioned gave religious-moral reasons as motives against the restriction of births. The decision not to engage in family planning activities, however, is not always based in enthusiasm for large families, but many times in a kind of fatalism. A good number of women, when asked how many children they would like to have, replied: "As many as my nature can bear", or "as many as God gives me". When questioned about how they would feel if the number of their expected children should be exceeded, many answered with an expression of resignation. The large proportion of Cagayan women, who is opposed to family planning in any form, including rythm, certainly reflects the general public's inadequate knowledge of the teaching of the Catholic Church in its entirety.

Despite the still wide-spread objection to rational family limitation due to either fatalism or lacking familiarity with Catholic doctrine, there are signs that the economic pressure exerted on families by the present situation of the country seems to impress some factions of the population. Among the women in Cagayan who favored birth regulation, 81.4 per cent cited various economic reasons as main factors for their attitudes: cost of housing, food, and education. Corrales in his study in Negros found that 56.7 per cent of all persons asked were in favor of taking some action to limit the number of births in their families for economic reasons. To draw general conclusions from this figure for the country concerning actual or anticipated practice of family limitation methods, however, would be premature.