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THE DIMENSIONS OF VALUES OF CHILDREN

IN

SRI LANKA

A SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

BY

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I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being currently submitted for any other degree. I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis and all sources, used have been acknowledged in this thesis.

*S. R. M. Sandanayake.*  
7/1/81

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Sri Lanka has been much acclaimed by a number of international population organisations for the significant reduction of its birth rate among the developing countries. During a period when there is much concern about world population growth, this is indeed praiseworthy. In addition, Sri Lanka's birth rate is relatively low when compared with that of other South Asian countries.

This might be due to the high socio-economic level of Sri Lankan society; and these considerations urged us to administer a value of children project in order to inquire into the general background. It was important, to search for the Sri Lankan socio-economic attitudes and values held towards children held by their parents. Such an undertaking, we thought, would also lead to an understanding of our people's values toward their children.

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A B S T R A C T

The introduction deals with the scope and the limits of the subject of our research. The significance of children from the point of view of our traditional concepts is described in detail. Social Science Research in Sri Lanka is briefly mentioned. The concept of value is analysed and discussed. The objective and usefulness of the present study is briefly pointed out.

Chapter two is concerned with the methodology of the study in question. It also deals with the selection of sample (fifty four rural couples (husband and wife) and forty eight urban couples). The socio-economic background of the selected samples is also subject to discussion. The obtained data has been analysed.

In the next chapter we have discussed the dimensions of values. Satisfaction of children is examined from the point of view of two hypothesis. It is followed by an analysis of positive values and wanted-ideal number of children. Finally the cost of having children to Sri Lankan couples is also discussed.

Further dimensions of values are discussed in the fourth chapter. Social changes and fertility behaviour is explored. The general opinion about children in this country is also pointed out. In the other hand; the contribution from the children is also mentioned.

Chapter five deals with attitude towards family size. Decision making and family planning is evaluated.

Finally a summary of the study in the form of a concluding chapter is presented. Some methodological shortcomings of the present study are also discussed.

CHAPTER 1INTRODUCTION1.1 Orientations in the study of the value of children

The systematic study of the value of children from a psychological perspective is relatively new. Before the introduction of effective contraceptive measures, it was meaningless even to discuss the problem why people want and have children. People had children because they became pregnant, as a natural consequence of sexual intercourse. Couples had hardly any control over the size of their families. But with effective contraceptives frequently available, the situation has changed considerably. It is in this context that it becomes meaningful to ask why people want to and have children and make an inquiry into how these reasons are related to their family-size decisions. In asking such questions, we are dealing with people's perceptions of the values of children and the interplay of positive and negative values of children in relation to family-size decisions.

Before turning to a discussion on the values of children in Sri Lanka it is essential to consider and review the existing approaches to the question and the researches that have so far been done in this field.

Six basic types of positions image from reviews of the literature on the value of children (Fawcett, 1976; Callan, 1976; Fawcett, 1970) First there is an innate biological approach which focuses attention on the evolutionary and expressly biological and physiological aspects of human reproductive behaviour. Second there is the socio-demographic approach (which has become for more "socio" over the last decade) which tends to be concerned, broadly speaking, with the social concomitants to demographic transitions processes. Third, the distinctly sociological approach to fertility behaviour concerns itself with the social structural variables which relate to procreation in both macro context. Fourth, the micro-economic has emphasized the rupee value and exchange value of children in the "household economy", and examined questions of the marginal ability of the nth child and actual contributions to income. Fifth, the psycho-analytic approach to the study of the value of children has focussed attention to the conscious and unconscious motivational factors which affects human reproduction paying particular attention to deep psychological realities which associated with ego, supper-ego and id, control behaviour. Sixth, there is the (very recent) social-psychological approach which is focussed on the decision making process in the couple/fairly context as it relates to the individual, the family group and cultural context. The last approach has been fully developed in the course of the value of children project.

A salient feature of various approaches is that these not surprisingly, there are common themes and interests. Fawcett (1976) has identified explicitly the following:

- A. That people act in anticipation of future rewards and costs.
- B. That children provide an important satisfaction in life, but not without cost.
- C. That people differ with respect to types of satisfactions and costs that are important to them.
- D. That these differences are related to both internal psychological factors and external social and economic factors, which also affect the desirability and availability of alternatives to children.
- E. That balance of satisfactions and cost of children changes over the life cycle.
- F. That choices about children versus alternatives are made by most people at some point in the life cycle, although not necessarily for every birth.
- G. These choices can be better understood, if not fully predicted, through research that focuses on the value and cost of children.

It is our opinion that the two richest approaches to the study of the value of children are to be found in the socio-demographic and social psychological approaches. Because of this, diversity of interest and strategies and because, in principle, they subsume the other categories. The micro-economic and socio-psychological approaches are maximally complementary in general, but in the long run only the socio-demographic and socio-psychological approach seem to offer an organizing framework for the complex in which human behaviour systems are involved. We wish to suggest that the socio-psychological approach might also subsume the socio-demographic approach or, at the very least, the two approaches will become so similar as to be indistinguishable; and it is through this approach that the greatest contribution will be made to understanding and changing of fertility behaviour patterns. Ultimately human reproductive behaviour must be fitted back into the context of person, group, environment and time be both for satisfactory theorizing and for successful social policy development.

## 1.2 Areas of social-psychology

There are three basic areas into which the potential contributions might be divided: theoretical, substantive and methodological (Darroch 1976).

**Theoretical:** In the most general sense, one of the major complaints about much of contemporary social science research is that it has no unifying and