

SOCIAL STATUS AND FAMILY SIZE OF IRANIAN INDUSTRIAL EMPLOYEES

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INTRODUCTION

In a recent analysis of the social structure of pre-industrial cities, Sjoberg has suggested that in these cities "parents in the urban upper class have more offspring who reach adulthood than do the lower strata."¹ He argues that this difference is brought about by the lower mortality of the upper classes rather than by any social class differences in fertility.

In view of the increasing number of pre-industrial cities which are exposed to the process of modernization and industrialization, one pertinent question is the effect of this process on the relationship described by Sjoberg. If it is the upper classes who benefit most from this process, there might be an accentuation in the class differential in family size brought about by the further reduction in the mortality of the upper classes. But the new economic and social conditions may bring about an initial decrease in fertility which would offset the decline in mortality.

On the other hand, if the improvements in health conditions and levels of living have their greatest impact on the lower classes, the gap in family size between the higher and lower strata might be sharply reduced.

This paper will present data that will indicate the nature of class differences in family size in a recently industrialized segment of a predominantly agricultural country. But since this evidence is for Moslem and Christian employees of an oil company in Iran, it will also throw light on the relationship between family size, social status, and religion within a predominantly Moslem milieu.

METHOD

In November and December 1955, a census of all 18,739 Iranian employees of the Iranian Oil Exploration and Producing Company was carried out. Iranian employees from each of the company fields and areas were used as census interviewers. The census items used are: estimated age, grade in company, number of living children (family size), and religion. These variables are defined as follows:

(1) *Estimated Age*: this is the interviewer's estimate of the employee's age after having seen his government-issued identification card and heard the age claimed by the employee.

(2) *Grade in Company*: this is the company classification of status of jobs. Four grades were distinguished: staff or employees who do primarily white-collar work; *Ostadkar* or foremen; skilled labor or manual laborers doing skilled work; and unskilled or manual laborers doing unspecialized jobs. These four grades differ greatly in income, prestige, and educational job requirements.

(3) *Number of Living Children (Family Size)*: number of living offspring of the employee.

And (4) *Religion*: this is the avowed adherence to the Moslem or Christian religion. The few Jews or Zoroastrians were excluded from analysis. In the company, the largest religious

minority is Christian Armenian, most of whom are culturally unassimilated descendents of the group brought to Iran 3,000 years ago to stimulate commerce.²

A measure of the reliability of the reported number of children, religion, and grade in the company is available from repeated interviews with 250 employees. There was a 2.4 per cent disagreement between the number of children reported on the first and second interviews. For grade there was a 3.6 per cent disagreement, and there was no disagreement for religion.

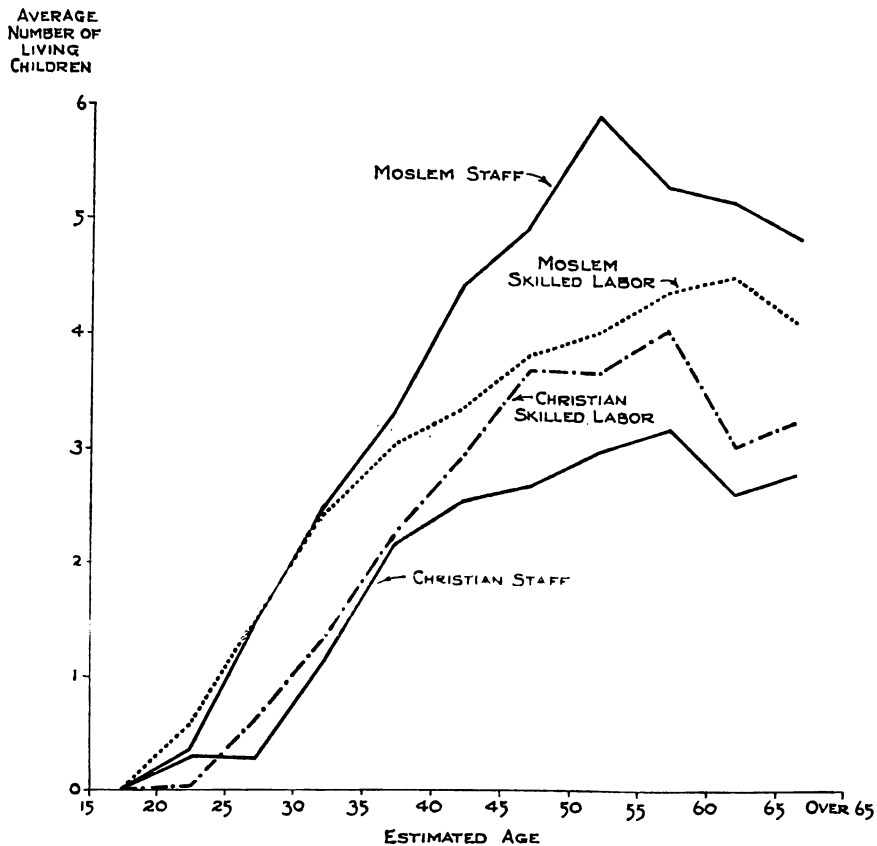
RESULTS

Family Size and Socio-economic Status. Grade within the company is a highly accurate measure of socio-economic status. But since differences in religion and age may mask differences in family size between grades, it is necessary to consider Moslems and Christians separately and to standardize for age.³ The data on standardized number of living children are given separately for all males and married males in Table 1. For both Moslems and Christians there is a reverse-U-shaped relationship between grade and average number of living children. Family size is highest among the middle level group of Ostadkar (foremen), with a systematic increase from unskilled labor to Ostadkar and a decrease from Ostadkar to staff. Controlling for marital status does not alter this general pattern.

If we consider the data for staff and skilled labor, an interesting difference appears between Moslems and Christians. Among the former, staff has more living children than skilled labor, while among Christians the reverse is true. As Fig. 1 indicates, this differential for each religion is noticeable only for the older men. (See also Table 2.)

It is also clear, from the material given in Table 1, that the differences between staff and unskilled labor are negligible among Christians. By contrast the average family size of Mos-

FIGURE 1. AVERAGE NUMBER OF LIVING CHILDREN OF TOTAL MALE MOSLEM AND CHRISTIAN STAFF AND SKILLED LABOR, BY AGE.



lem staff is definitely higher than that of Moslem unskilled labor.

Religious Differentials. As Table 1 indicates, Moslems have considerably more living children than Christians, a finding which is consistent with the lower fertility of Christians in the Middle East documented by other studies.⁴ This difference is greatest for staff, but consistent for all grades, suggesting further that it is the lower fertility of Christians which accounts for their lower family size. It reflects, in part, differences in age at marriage. While there are no data on the age at marriage of the

TABLE 1. NUMBER OF LIVING CHILDREN PER MALE EMPLOYEE AND MARRIED MALE EMPLOYEE, BY RELIGION AND GRADE, STANDARDIZED FOR AGE AS IN THE ENTIRE COMPANY

Grade	Children per Male			
	Married Males		Total Males	
	Moslem	Christians	Moslem	Christian
Staff	3.55	1.99	3.36	1.74
Ostadkar	3.89	2.84	3.81	2.72
Skilled Labor	2.91	2.30	2.82	2.13
Unskilled Labor	2.63	1.91	2.53	1.90
Total (Weighting All Grades Equally)	3.24	2.26	3.13	2.12

	Number of Males*			
	Married Males		Total Males	
	Moslem	Christian	Moslem	Christian
Staff	1,000	300	1,136	394
Ostadakar	1,240	60	1,254	69
Skilled Labor	11,380	300	12,646	331
Unskilled Labor	2,500	15	2,653	18
Total	16,120	695	17,689	812

* The numbers of married males are approximate.

TABLE 2. AVERAGE NUMBER OF CHILDREN OF TOTAL MALE MOSLEM AND CHRISTIAN STAFF AND SKILLED LABOR, BY ESTIMATED AGE.

Estimated Age	Average Number of Children			
	Moslem		Christian	
	Staff	Skilled Labor	Staff	Skilled Labor
20-24	0.34	0.56	(*)	(*)
25-29	1.49	1.53	0.27	0.60
30-34	2.50	2.46	1.12	1.32
35-39	3.31	3.06	2.15	2.22
40-44	4.43	3.33	2.55	2.89
45-49	4.94	3.82	2.67	3.67
50-54	5.92	4.09	3.00	3.64
55-59	5.28	4.37	3.19	4.04
60-64	5.17	4.52	(*)	(*)
Total Number of Cases	(1136)	(12,646)	(394)	(331)

(*) Fewer than 20 cases.

men in this study, figures on proportions married at various ages suggest that Moslems marry at a much earlier age than Christians.⁵ One should also consider the traditional Moslem attitude toward children, picturesquely expressed by the reported statement of the Prophet: "Marry and beget children to your heart's content; at the last judgment my name will be exalted among the nations by your fecundity."⁶

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Data have been presented on the average number of living children of Moslem and Christian employees of an Iranian Oil Company by occupational grade. It was found that (1) Moslems have a markedly higher number of living children than Christians, (2) there is a reverse-U-shaped relationship between number of living children and occupational status with the highest number being observed for the next to the highest occupational grade, and (3) among Moslems, skilled laborers have fewer living children than staff, while the reverse is true for Christians.

The increase in the number of living children from unskilled labor to *Ostadkar* may represent, in part, a decrease in child and infant mortality with increasing financial status. It is possible that if we had figures on the average number of children ever born the differential would almost disappear.⁷ On the other hand and in spite of the effects of differential mortality, the staff has a markedly lower number of living children than *Ostadkar* for both Moslems and Christians. This difference may be explained by the later age at marriage and the greater exposure to Western values among staff. *Ostadkars* are usually skilled laborers who have been promoted and have retained the traditional values they had as laborers.⁸

While the findings of this study do not contradict Sjoberg's generalization, they suggest that it may no longer be sufficient to describe the situation when the pre-industrial city is begin-

ning to experience industrialization and modernization. One should consider the possible effect of this new process on the willingness or desire to adopt fertility control practices. A white-collar upper status class as well as a religious or cultural minority may be most ready to accept such practices. If they do, then this is likely to counteract the effect of declining infant and child mortality. Other classes and groups more imbued with tradition but benefiting also from the quickening tempo of economic growth may use their newly acquired wealth to *maximize* the size of their families. Studies of differential fertility and mortality in pre-industrial cities in transition are needed to unravel the complex effect of social and economic change on family size.

REFERENCES

¹ Sjoberg, Gideon: *THE PREINDUSTRIAL CITY: PAST AND PRESENT*. Glencoe, The Free Press, 1960, p. 173.

² Lockhart, L.: *FAMOUS CITIES OF IRAN*. Pearce, 1939.

³ This standardization was done on the basis of the age distribution for the company as a whole.

⁴ Kiser, C. V.: *The Demographic Position of Egypt*, in *DEMOGRAPHIC STUDIES OF SELECTED AREAS OF RAPID GROWTH*. New York, Milbank Memorial Fund, 1944, pp. 105-113; Yaukey, David: *FERTILITY DIFFERENCES IN A MODERNIZING COUNTRY: A SURVEY OF LEBANESE COUPLES*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1961.

⁵ The percent of Moslem and Christian male staff and skilled labor married in age groups 20-24 and 25-29 is as follows:

	Staff		Skilled Labor	
	Moslem	Christian	Moslem	Christian
20-24	46%	20%*	56%	10%
25-29	80%	47%	90%	63%

(* less than 20 persons)

⁶ Vesey-Fitzgerald, S.: MUHAMMADAN LAW. London, Oxford University Press, 1931. See also the discussion by Seklani, Mahmoud: La fécondité dans les pays arabes: données numériques, attitudes et comportements, *Population*, October-December 1960, 15, 5: 831-856.

⁷ This is suggested by the findings of Rizk and Yaukey on fertility differentials among Moslems in urban areas. See Yaukey, *op. cit.*, and Rizk, Hanna: FERTILITY PATTERNS IN SELECTED AREAS OF EGYPT. [Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University, 1959.] Ann Arbor, University Microfilms, Inc., Mic 60-5042.

⁸ Ostadkar show a greater preference for polygyny than staff. Polygyny may be considered as an index of adherence to traditional values among Moslems as well as a factor that may contribute to higher fertility. See Miller, Merle K., and Windle, Charles: Polygyny and Social Status in Iran, *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 1960, 51: 307-311.

The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and in no way represent the views of the Consortium.