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A sociological field study of fertility in Puerto Rico

Millard Hansen (Puerto Rico)

Summary

The Family Life Project in the Social Science Research Center, University of Puerto Rico, is a field study of the social and economic factors affecting fertility in families of limited income and education. The staff has consisted of Reuben Hill of the University of North Carolina, J. Mayone Stycos and Kurt Back of the Social Science Research Center, research assistants, and two interview staffs: one of six in 1951-1952 and one of about fifteen in 1953-54. The study has been designed to answer these questions: why do families of the low income classes with expressed ideals of few children nevertheless have a great many children? What are the implications for public policy in a dense, rapidly increasing population with scarce economic resources? The Social Science Research Center has provided more than half the cost and facility for the research, but indispensable help has come from the Population Council of New York, the Puerto Rico Department of Health, and the School of Medicine of the University of Puerto Rico. Two samples have been used: 75 families to find hypotheses about fertility and 900 families to verify, quantify, and revise these hypotheses. The larger sample was taken from lists of patients using free public health services, which was a great economy of time and money in the research. Interviewers were university graduates who received two weeks training to provide necessary motivation and skill for the work.

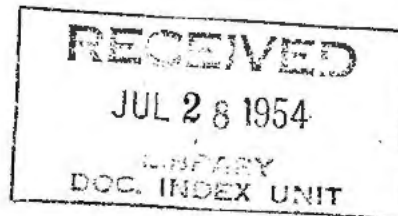
* General distribution of this document is limited to the introductory summary. Participants who have been invited to take part in the meeting referred to above will receive also the full text of the paper. Other participants in the Conference will receive the full text upon request.

Pour la traduction française voir au verso.

Enquête sociologique sur la fécondité à Porto Rico
par Millard Hansen (Porto Rico)

Résumé. L'Institut des sciences sociales de l'Université de Porto Rico a entrepris, sous le nom de Family Life Project, une enquête portant sur l'influence des facteurs économiques et sociaux sur la fécondité dans les familles à faible revenu et à faible niveau d'instruction. Cette enquête a été confiée à M. Reuben Hill de l'Université de la Caroline du Nord et à MM. Mayone Stykos et Kurt Back de l'Institut des sciences sociales, assistants de recherches; deux équipes, l'une de 6 et l'autre d'environ 15 personnes ont été chargées, respectivement, des interrogatoires en 1951-1952 et en 1953-1954. L'objet de cette étude était d'obtenir des réponses aux questions suivantes: Pourquoi les familles des classes à faible revenu, dont l'idéal avoué est d'avoir peu d'enfants, en ont-elles néanmoins un grand nombre? Quelles en sont les conséquences pour les pouvoirs publics lorsqu'il s'agit d'une population dense qui augmente rapidement et dont les ressources économiques sont insuffisantes? L'Institut des sciences sociales a fourni plus de la moitié des fonds ainsi que les facilités nécessaires pour ces recherches; il a bénéficié d'un appui indispensable de la part du Population Council de New-York, du Département de la santé publique de Porto Rico et de l'Ecole de médecine de l'Université de Porto Rico. Deux échantillons ont été utilisés; le premier, de 75 familles, pour établir des hypothèses sur la fécondité et le second, de 900 familles, pour vérifier, chiffrer et reviser ces hypothèses. Ce deuxième échantillon a été prélevé d'après les listes des patients bénéficiant des services médicaux gratuits, ce qui a représenté une économie et un gain de temps considérables. Les enquêteurs étaient de formation universitaire; ils ont suivi un stage de 2 semaines leur permettant de se familiariser avec l'objet de l'étude et les techniques devant être utilisées.

² Seule la présente analyse d'introduction fait l'objet d'une distribution générale. Les participants qui ont été invités à assister à la séance mentionnée ci-dessus recevront en outre le texte intégral du document. Les autres participants au Congrès recevront le texte intégral sur leur demande.



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ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

A SOCIOLOGICAL FIELD STUDY OF FERTILITY IN PUERTO RICO

by Millard Hansen
Director, Social Science Research Center
University of Puerto Rico

The Social Science Research Center of the College of Social Sciences established the Family Life Project in 1951 to study those factors in families of low income and education which influence fertility and its control. Professor Heuben Hill of the Institute for Research in Social Science, University of North Carolina, is the director of the project's four year research operation. Resident one year in Puerto Rico, his supervision in other years was by frequent visits and correspondence. He has had the principal responsibility for design, staff selection, and the supervision of the work.

Other principal members of the staff are J. Mayone Stycos, Kurt Back, David Landy, and Mary Stycos. J. Mayone Stycos, Ph. D. Columbia University, came to the project in 1951 from the Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia, and earlier was an interview supervisor in Puerto Rico for the population study by Paul Hatt. Kurt Back, Ph. D. Columbia University, came to the project in 1953 from the Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia, and is study director of the fourth year of the Family Life Project. David Landy is a doctoral candidate in cultural anthropology at Harvard University and studied the parental practices in the rearing of children among 20 families of a sugar cane village during 1951-53. Mary Stycos, trained at Edinburgh and Columbia Universities, has been research associate on the project since 1951.

There have been two interview staffs: six in 1951-52 for the study of 75-families and about fifteen in 1953-54 for the study of 1900 families. Nearly all have been graduates of the University of Puerto Rico. Other research assistants have done coding, IBM manipulations, and other tasks. The staff of the Fourth Year, a study of communication and fertility of 480 families, will be Reuben Hill, Director, Kurt Back, Study Director, Howard Stanton, Assistant Director, about twelve discussion leaders selected from the masters candidates in Health Education of the School of Medicine, and about five interviewers. My own role in the project has been minor, and most of the following statement about the project is derived from papers and reports written by the members of the project staff, although of course I, and not they, am responsible for what is written here.

The research was initiated in 1951 for two reasons. The density and rate of natural increase of the population of Puerto Rico are so great, especially in contrast with the meagreness of capital and income here, that fertility is one of the crucial issues of this society. The Social Science Research Center is responsible for research on basic social questions. The second reason was to answer a question arising from earlier population research by Paul Hatt (Backgrounds of Human Fertility in Puerto Rico, 1952, Princeton University Press.) This research, done in 1947-48 in cooperation with the Office of Population Research, Princeton, with the assistance of Frank W. Notestein and Kingsley Davis, and of Clarence Senior, then Director of the Social Science Research Center, used an island wide sample of 13,000 persons. It revealed a pattern of high fertility among families of low income, few years of education, and inexpensive housing. A surprising finding in view of the high proportion of catholics in Puerto Rico was the expressed attitude of these people favoring fertility control and showing a minimum of religious objections to birth control. If Puerto Ricans preferred small families and had no objections to birth control, why then did they persist in having large families?

The project has four divisions. The first two years were exploratory. A study

of 75 families was designed upon which to base hypotheses about variations in fertility among low-income families. The third year is a study of 900 families to verify and quantify, and to modify, these hypotheses. The fourth year now beginning is an educational experiment with 480 families to determine what stimuli, based on information of earlier research, will have most influence on attitudes and practices concerning birth control.

The study of 75 families will be published in the near future by Columbia University Press in a book by J. Mayone Stycos. The manuscript of David Landy's study of child rearing has been completed. The major book of the study, by the staff, should be ready for publication about September, 1955.

Of the cost of the project, over \$100,000, the Social Science Research Center has covered more than half. The Population Council of New York has provided the balance of the funds to date. Great assistance has been provided by the Puerto Rico Department of Health, especially the public health clinics, which provided lists of patients from which the sample was drawn for the third year operations and which provided space for interviewing. This assistance has been essential for economy and efficiency. In the fourth year, the department of preventive medicine and public health of the School of Medicine, University of Puerto Rico, is cooperating in the educational aspects of the research. The cost and complexity of this research makes the assistance of these other agencies essential.

Funds and authority for the research, as well as indispensable advice and encouragement, have been generously and continuously provided by the University of Puerto Rico and by its principal officers - Jaime Benítez, Chancellor, Ramón Mellado, Dean of Administration, and Pedro Muñoz Amato, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences. The premise of this action is the role research plays in the public policy of Puerto Rico. Since 1940, the Government has undertaken an intensive program of economic development and social improvement whose effectiveness may be suggested by the doubling of the Island income from 1940 to 1950. (For information

about this program, see The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, "Puerto Rico: A Study in Democratic Development," January 1953). The Government has actively sought scientific information about the society of Puerto Rico and about its tensions and maladjustments from scientific research workers. It welcomes the contributions of such research to wise public policy. The public university of a Government bent only upon power, or of a government so committed to tradition as to fear research as a disturbance, would probably not be able to undertake the research being described here. Perhaps the continued support of this research has also been made easier by confining the work strictly to impartial, scientific research which avoids propaganda or polemics.

This in brief scope has been the natural history of the research in fertility in Puerto Rico. We have identified the crucial issues to be researched, have assembled a staff of scholars and research assistants, have obtained the necessary funds and facilities (which are extensive and require the approval of political and educational leaders), and have obtained the cooperation of other agencies. These actions cannot assure good results, but they are indispensable for a field study of the social and economic factors affecting fertility.

A primary question in such research is the sample. We used 75 families for the initial two-year research operation to find hypotheses about the disjunction between small family ideals and large family practices. A third was drawn from the country, a third from a village, and a third from a metropolitan slum. These places were selected because of convenience and on the judgment of informed persons that they were, if not representative, at least not known to be atypical. Within each place, 25 families were chosen at random for the probing, open-end question type interview of about six hours for wives and two hours for husbands.

The third year operation of verification, quantification, and revision, used a sample of 900 families and an interview, largely pre-coded, of about one to two hours length. The sample families were selected from a list of 5,700 families,

2,700 using the free medical care services of the outpatient clinics of municipal hospitals and rural health centers, and 3,000 using prematernal clinics of the public health service. The 5,700 families were believed to represent the low-income, low-education (less than six years) segment in which high fertility is characteristic. The random, stratified sample included families with both spouses present, married 5-20 years, with at least one child, and the spouse interviewed having less than six years education. Based on information on the family card in the health service and upon brief screening interviews, the selected families also met the following criteria: 300 had never used birth control (Never Users), 300 have used one or more methods since 1950 but have stopped (Quitters), 300 families currently used birth control (Active Users), and 200 families in which the wife has been sterilized. Furthermore, the sample included a sufficient number of couples married various lengths of time to permit correlations between length of marriage and information about birth control attitude and practice.

The 75-family sample is not known to be representative, nor is it known to be atypical, and it served well for the development of hypotheses. The 900-family sample is not strictly representative of the low-income group, but as a random sample of those using free medical facilities it probably represents it well. The adequacy of this assumption is being tested by comparing the sample with census data for the entire Island, and with a random sample drawn for the Social Stratification Project of the Social Science Research Center. The 900-family sample was drawn from the public health files, of course, because of the great economy of time and money in locating low-income families meeting the criteria for inclusion in the study, and also because great savings resulted from interviewing in the health service clinics.

Of equal importance with the sample is the interview staff. University graduates, both men and women, were selected on the basis of their university record and a conference with the study director to ascertain personality and motivation. The standards were intelligence, knowledge of social science, command of both English and

Spanish, capacity for rapport with respondents, honesty and loyalty to the project despite hard, sometimes unpleasant work, and attitude and character not hostile to asking intimate questions.

Interviewers were trained for two weeks to provide good motivation for the work and adequate skills for getting accurate information promptly. Nine training methods were used:

1. Readings about the project and the general problem.
2. Round-table discussions by local experts.
3. Group discussions with the director.
4. Demonstration interviews by the director.
5. Group discussions without the director.
6. Small group practice.
7. Practice interviews in front of the group.
8. Trial interviews in the field.
9. Private discussions with the director.

At the end of the training, a test interview was recorded and analyzed for accuracy; the first ten field interviews were carefully checked for errors; and editors thereafter read all interviews to ascertain errors.

Good motivation was encouraged by explaining the value of the research not only for science but also practically for the Island and for other places facing problems of population growth amidst scarce economic resources. The directors also tried to show that they were not meddlesome, foreign experts intent upon telling local people what they should do. They were, instead, scientists whose findings would be available to local people to judge for themselves.

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