

SOME COMMENTS ON SOCIAL SECURITY ASPECTS OF "HIGHLIGHTS OF SOVIET HEALTH SERVICES"*

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DR. ROEMER has written an extremely interesting account of his observations on Soviet health services made during a 2-week study-tour. On the whole, his findings seem to be highly complimentary to Soviet medicine. Although I do not have the technical competence to comment on his discussion of the medical aspects of the Soviet health services, as a member of a 5-man team which visited the Soviet Union under the East-West Exchange Program to study its social security provisions in late 1958, I noticed several places in which Dr. Roemer discusses social security provisions and economic and demographic matters where he is considerably in error or else is not aware of the full facts.

Perhaps the most serious erroneous discussion occurs on page 397, where Dr. Roemer states that: "The whole social security system in the USSR is geared to an attitude of high respect for and faith in the worker." He justifies this sweeping statement—with which I disagree considerably, for reasons which are brought out in some detail in the report by our group¹—by pointing out that disability insurance systems in non-communist countries pay benefits that are less than the disabled worker's usual wage, whereas this is not so in the Soviet Union. Specifically, Dr. Roemer states:

In the Soviet Union, the integrity of the worker, on principle, seems to be more fully respected. Disability benefits, which cover all forms of industrial employment and all types of illness or injury, are equal to the usual full wages.—Page 397.

The foregoing statement is just not true. In actual fact, the Soviet social security system is very much like most other social insurance systems in regard to the amounts of disability

* Roemer, Milton I., M.D.: *Highlights of Soviet Health Services*, The Milbank Memorial Fund *Quarterly*, October, 1962, XL: 373-406.

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¹ U.S. Social Security Administration: *A REPORT ON SOCIAL SECURITY PROGRAMS IN THE SOVIET UNION*, prepared by the U.S. team that visited the USSR under the East-West Exchange Program in August-September 1958. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, September, 1960.

benefits. Moreover, the Soviet system of disability benefits has the great weakness that it applies to only 60 per cent of the workers in the country, since collective farmers are not covered.

As to the Soviet benefit amounts for short-term illness, the benefit rate is full pay only if the illness resulted from a work-connected cause. In all other cases, it is only 50 per cent of earnings for those with less than 3 continuous years of service with the particular enterprise, increasing to 90 per cent for those with 12 or more years of service. Moreover, these non-work-connected benefits are reduced by 50 per cent for persons who are not trade union members, and also are not payable at all to workers with less than 6 months of service if they have transferred from another enterprise without approval. It should be clear then that full wages are paid only if the illness resulted from a work-connected injury or disease.

For non-work-connected long-term disability, the individual must meet certain eligibility conditions as to length of service, varying from as little as one year for very young workers up to as much as 20 years for the oldest workers. The benefit rate depends upon the degree of disability, and except for very low-paid workers who are disabled by a work-connected cause, is well below full pay. For disability due to a general cause, when such disability is of a permanent and total nature, the benefit rate for a worker with average wages is only 40–50 per cent of his earnings, depending upon the number of his dependents (55–65 per cent of earnings if he is so disabled as to require constant attendance).

Higher pension rates are available for those with work-connected injuries or diseases. For workers whose earnings are half of the average wage that is generally applicable in the Soviet Union, the pension rate under such circumstances is as much as 100 per cent of pay for those who require constant attendance, and 90 per cent otherwise. For the worker with average wages, the pension rate for work-connected causes is only about 10 percentage points higher than for the individual who is disabled from general causes.

In summary then, it is clear that disability benefits in the Soviet Union are not equal to the usual full wages, except in

a few very unusual circumstances. In fact, the Soviet disability benefits are at rates that are about the same as those prevailing in other low-wage countries where the ratio of benefits to earnings must necessarily be relatively high in order to provide some form of minimum subsistence.

On page 399, Dr. Romer repeats the widespread, somewhat fallacious, propaganda that in the USSR "unemployment is virtually unknown" and that "people are free to leave for other jobs." In actual fact, there is a considerable amount of unemployment in the Soviet Union, which is of a frictional and seasonal nature (but the authorities simply refuse to recognize it). In large part, this is a matter of definition, since individuals in the USSR can generally always get low-paid manual labor. Nevertheless, there are many individuals who have significant periods of unemployment while they are in between jobs in the type of work that they are qualified for and desire. Similarly, people are not entirely free to leave for other jobs because of various economic, social, and political pressures (such as was mentioned above in regard to the non-eligibility for cash sickness benefits in the first 6 months of employment after an unauthorized quit).

On page 400, Dr. Roemer states that reports on the salaries of physicians are conflicting. Our group obtained excellent information on this matter, both by asking specific questions at hospitals and dispensaries which we visited, and by examination of pension records. In brief, we found that doctors had salaries about one and one-half times that of the average worker, which is a relatively low differential as compared with that prevailing in the United States, (where the ratio is probably about 3-6 times as much as the average worker). On the other hand, the salaries of engineers were considerably above this level, since the beginning salary was about one and one-half times the wage of the average worker, and the salary increased significantly with length of service and increased responsibility.

On page 403, Dr. Roemer refers to the health achievements of the Soviet Union reflected in a crude death rate of 7.6 per thousand, which is lower than that of the United States. Dr. Roemer recognizes that this rate has not been adjusted for age

—the Soviets, having a relatively young age distribution, accordingly tend to have a low crude death rate—but he did not do any research into this matter, which would have indicated the real reasons for the low rate. My most recent work in this field² indicates that on the basis of reported Soviet age-specific mortality rates their aggregate mortality is about the same as that in the United States. At the younger ages, the United States has considerably lower mortality than the USSR; Soviet mortality is as much as 50–100 per cent higher at ages below 35. The only reason that Soviet mortality in the aggregate is shown to be as low as that of the United States is because the reported Soviet rates for each age group beyond age 55 are about 15 per cent lower than those in the United States. Such a differential, particularly at ages 65 and over, seems unreasonable, especially since the Soviet rates for ages 70 and over are reported to be 5 per cent lower than those in Norway which is the country that, in general and at all ages, has the lowest mortality of any country.

Dr. Roemer's reply follows:

Mr. Robert J. Myers is right, and I regret my erroneous statement on page 397 about the rate of the Soviet disability insurance payments. I must have confused information given to me about cash benefits for work-connected injuries which, he points out, may be as much as 100 per cent of usual wages. My basic point, however, about the respect shown for the industrial worker in the Soviet health system would seem to be borne out by other features of the disability insurance program. I refer to the requirements on (a) waiting periods and (b) duration of benefits, which are summarized in a publication of Mr. Myers' agency.* In this tabulation one learns that the Soviet program has no waiting period at all for cash benefits and the duration of benefits is "until adjudged permanently disabled," at which point an invalidity insurance program takes over.

² Myers, Robert J.: Further Analysis of Soviet Data on Mortality and Fertility, *Public Health Reports*, February, 1962, 77: 177–182.

* U.S. Social Security Administration: SOCIAL SECURITY PROGRAMS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD, 1958. Washington, D. C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1958.

Among the provisions for disability insurance in the 58 countries listed, there were none other so broad as these, except for the provisions in three other communist nations (Bulgaria, Communist China and Yugoslavia). Among non-communist countries, Guatemala seems to come closest to the Soviet pattern, with duration of benefits "until recovery" and a waiting period of only one day. Regarding industrial injury compensation, moreover, there would seem to be only a few other countries that provide for 100 per cent wage benefits even under limited circumstances.

Regarding Mr. Myers' comments about unemployment, doctors' salaries, and the crude death rates in the Soviet Union, I appreciate the additional information and interpretations, which seem to me to be quite valid. The unemployment question, as he says, may be largely a matter of definition of seasonal and frictional effects. As for Soviet doctors' salaries, they are certainly lower than their counterparts in the United States (relative to workers' wages), although I did not make such a comparison because, with the totally different value assumptions of Soviet society, I felt a comparison with the earnings of engineers or teachers in that society was more significant. Elevation of salaries with seniority, we were told, applies to doctors as well as engineers, especially if post-graduate study is undertaken. Soviet medical school professors, incidentally, seem to earn relatively more than their American colleagues.

A satisfactory comparison of death-rates between the USSR and the United States requires, of course, age-adjustment. It was for this reason that I took pains to indicate that the figures were not age-adjusted and also to report the higher infant mortality (which is, of course, age-specific) in the Soviet Union. I am grateful for Mr. Myers' study, published in February, 1962, which unfortunately escaped my attention (perhaps because this was after my paper had been submitted for publication).

In evaluating the Soviet health services, I believe it is wise to compare them with the achievements of other countries which like Russia, were quite underdeveloped 40 years ago. In so doing, the accomplishments seem remarkable despite the many weaknesses, especially in the technical quality of service, dis-

cussed in my article. Most medical observers from Europe, the United States, and the World Health Organization seem to share these general impressions.

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DIFFERENTIAL FERTILITY IN AN ARAB COUNTRY*

OUR knowledge of the extent and nature of differential fertility in Arab countries has been greatly extended by the recently published book, *FERTILITY DIFFERENCES IN A MODERNIZING COUNTRY* by David Yaukey, as well as by a still unpublished and companion study, *FERTILITY PATTERNS IN SELECTED AREAS OF EGYPT* by Hanna Rizk¹. Rizk's study, completed in early 1958, served both as an incentive and a model for Yaukey's analysis carried out in Lebanon during 1959. This is, perhaps, the first time that a detailed reproductive history and information on fertility control practices and attitudes were obtained for a fairly large sample of Moslem and Christian Arab women. The low refusal rate in both studies attests to the care with which Yaukey and Rizk trained and selected their interviewers and to their abilities in securing proper and adequate community support.

The basic assumption underlying the sample design of Yaukey's Lebanese study is that the measurement of the extent and timing of exposure to the urban environment is of strategic importance in the study of differential fertility in modernizing countries. Consequently Yaukey selected, at one extreme, two isolated villages presumably as far removed from urban influences as possible, and at the other extreme, an area near the center of Beirut, a large port and cosmopolitan metropolis of 500,000 population. Also, data were secured on rural-urban

* Yaukey, David: *FERTILITY DIFFERENCES IN A MODERNIZING COUNTRY: A SURVEY OF LEBANESE COUPLES*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1961. 204 pp.

¹ Rizk, Hanna: *FERTILITY PATTERNS IN SELECTED AREAS OF EGYPT*. (Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University, 1959.) Ann Arbor, University Microfilms, Inc., Mic 60-5042.

residence during the five years prior to marriage and the first five years after marriage. Since religious membership is an important facet of Lebanese society and could be assumed to have an impact on fertility, one of the villages selected was all Christian and the other all Moslem, and the urban sample was about equally divided between Christians and Moslems.

The women eligible to be interviewed had the following characteristics: they were (1) Lebanese nationals, (2) married only once, and (3) married for more than five years. All eligible women in the two villages were selected for interviewing. The selection of the sample of eligible women in Beirut was in two stages: (1) "four of the forty-odd administrative districts in Beirut were selected, mapped, and divided into blocks," and (2) "each interviewer was assigned one block at a time, with specific orders to proceed from a given starting point and in a given direction." (p. 23) Altogether, 909 women were interviewed, 296 in the two villages and 613 in Beirut. The size of the Beirut sample suggests that either the districts selected were relatively small or that only a small sample of all the blocks was chosen. One would wish for a more explicit description of the sampling procedure, even though the design was purposeful rather than random. On what basis were the two villages selected? No *evidence* is presented for their "extreme isolation." How were the four Beirut districts selected? How many blocks were surveyed and included in the sample? Since some information is available from an earlier survey of Beirut by Churchill² in 1954, it is surprising that the author did not attempt to compare the characteristics of the areas selected with those of the city as a whole. A base map of Beirut showing the location of the four districts would have been helpful.

Two indexes of fertility are used by Yaukey. The fertility of the older generation (women married for over 30 years) is measured by the average number of children ever born alive per woman. The experience of the younger generation is summarized by an ingenious synthetic index of fertility. For each successive five-year period of marriage, duration-specific fertility rates are obtained by dividing the total number of live

² Churchill, Charles W.: THE CITY OF BEIRUT: A SOCIO-ECONOMIC SURVEY, Beirut, Dar El-Kitab, 1954.

births occurring in each of these periods by the total number of women who have completed each of these periods. These duration-specific rates are added together to yield a descriptive, though synthetic, average number of children ever born. As with the more conventional total fertility rates, this procedure assumes no generational trends in fertility. But even if there were no such trend, as the author suggests, this measure of fertility assumes a fairly accurate allocation of births to periods of marriage. Such an allocation may be hard to achieve for a sample of illiterate women. This reviewer wishes that Yaukey had included in his appendix a set of more conventional rates of children ever born standardized for duration of marriage to facilitate comparisons with other studies.

One of the salient findings of the Lebanese study pertains to fertility differentials by religion and residence. A high level of fertility, about seven children ever born per woman, was observed for both Christians and Moslems in the two villages. By contrast, Christian women who resided in a city within the first five years after marriage had a much lower fertility than Moslem women with a similar residential history. For the Christian younger generation, the fertility of women with an urban residential history was about half that of rural women. Among Moslems there was a small urban-rural fertility differential in the expected direction, but this difference was not statistically significant. Similar findings are reported by Rizk for his Egyptian sample, with the only discrepancy being that the urban-rural differentials among Christians is less marked in Egypt than in Lebanon.

The Christian-Moslem fertility differentials in urban areas in Lebanon and Egypt is not a new finding since it was documented for Egypt some years ago by Clyde V. Kiser.³ What is new, however, in the material presented by Yaukey and Rizk is the specification of the nature of the complex interrelation between religion, residential history, and socio-economic status.

Additional data on literacy, rooms per capita after marriage, and occupation of husband after marriage reveal no fertility differentials by socio-economic status for either Moslems or

³ The Demographic Transition in Egypt, in *DEMOGRAPHIC STUDIES OF SELECTED AREAS OF RAPID GROWTH*, New York, Milbank Memorial Fund, 1944.

Christians residing in the two Lebanese villages at the time of the interview. Fertility levels were high for all groups irrespective of their characteristics. Similar results were obtained by Rizk for his Egyptian villages. If, however, the analysis is made in terms of rural residence in first five years after marriage, some fertility differentials appear among Christians. The lower fertility of higher status Christian villagers may be attributed to the inclusion of those villagers who migrated to the city after their first five years of marriage. Migrants to the city were all literate and had a much lower fertility than non-migrants with the same socio-economic status. For Moslems, there appears to be no difference in fertility between migrants to the city and non-migrants.

Among Moslem women who resided in a city in the first five years after marriage, there was, for the younger generation, a statistically significant and negative relationship between fertility and socio-economic status. While this fertility differential among urban Moslems was not great, it was more marked than among urban Christians. Surprisingly, among urban Christians the slight negative relationship between fertility and status was not significant. This finding should have been interpreted with greater caution by the author since it may be attributed, in part, to the unusual nature of the sample of lower-status urban Christians. A number of clues seem to indicate this possibility. First, in Rizk's sample of Cairo and Alexandria, the mean age at marriage for Christians varied from 20.7 years in the highest class to 17.5 in the lowest class. By contrast, in Yaukey's urban sample the mean age at marriage for educated Christians was almost identical to the mean age at marriage for uneducated Christians (21.1 as compared to 21.2). Second, the distribution of occupation of husband by educational level suggests that illiterate couples were the only ones to have a markedly lower status (as measured by the per cent with "unskilled work or servant") than other couples among city Christians. But the fertility level of illiterate city Christians is based on a sample of only twelve women and can hardly be used as indicative of this group in Beirut. It may well be that if a larger and city-wide sample of Christians in Beirut had been selected, fertility differentials among

city Christians in Lebanon would have been as large as that reported by Rizk for his urban sample.

The comparison between urban and rural fertility for a given socio-economic status is complicated by the fact that, particularly for Moslems, there is only a very small number of higher-status women who had resided in rural areas during the first five years of marriage. Nevertheless, the available data suggest the existence of an urban-rural fertility differential among Christians which is independent of socio-economic status. Among Moslems, the small urban-rural differential becomes even smaller when socio-economic status is controlled. As might be expected, the Christian-Moslem fertility differentials among couples with an urban background is not reduced when socio-economic status is taken into account.

After the analysis of fertility differentials, Yaukey turns to an assessment of the importance of various factors in accounting for the observed differences. For this aspect of his study, the author allocates 648 couples of his total sample into six "homogeneous social background types" in terms of residential background, education and religion. The rationale for this departure from the earlier mode of analysis is not explicitly stated, but it was presumably guided by the size of the sample and the need for a parsimonious classification that would facilitate the analysis of the determinants of fertility variation. Yaukey considers separately the effect on fertility of what he calls "involuntary" and "voluntary" factors; the former including age of woman at marriage, frequency of intercourse, prolonged separation from husband, and prolonged nursing of children, while the latter included induced abortions and conception control. The author assumes that there are no "appreciable" differences in fecundity between the various social types, and he presents some data in a technical note to support this assumption. The same note includes an evaluation of the number of reported abortions and a detailed analysis of coital frequency.

On the whole, the results obtained are somewhat disappointing mainly because of the difficulty of obtaining adequate data on such subjects as induced abortions, contraceptive practices, and coital frequency in an Arab population, particularly in

villages. Nevertheless, the data indicate that age of woman at marriage is the only "involuntary" factor that has any appreciable effect on fertility differences. With respect to the "voluntary" factors, the only clear-cut finding is the almost universal absence of induced abortions and contraceptive practices among villagers and the relatively high reported incidence of these practices among educated city Christians, the group with the lowest fertility. The effect of the same "voluntary" factors on the other fertility differences observed is more ambiguous.

While Yaukey included a number of attitudinal questions in his questionnaires, such as reasons for wanting to delay or not delay a pregnancy, he limits himself to a presentation of the results pertaining to size of family advised. His major finding is that the per cent of women who were willing to advise specific number of children to a "very close friend" was lowest among villagers and highest among city educated Moslems and Christians.

Yaukey is to be commended for devoting a large portion of his monograph to a detailed description of his survey procedure, to an evaluation of the data, and to a presentation of his interview schedule and instructions. This information will be helpful to other social scientists who might initiate fertility studies in Arab countries. It would have also been useful to have the proportion of women responding to each of the questions asked, and, wherever possible, a marginal tabulation of responses to a number of questions. The appendix on "Evaluation of Data" should have included more specific discussions of tests of reliability. For example, the author could have presented a cross-tabulation of his two separate questions on number of children living.

Considering the effort needed to carry out a detailed field study of fertility in a country such as Lebanon and the significance of Yaukey's findings, this reviewer is reluctantly led to express some reservations about the design of this study. In an introductory chapter, Yaukey sketches the possible effect on fertility of the two crucial variables of family structure and exposure to Western influence; but his data provide only an indirect test of this effect. Granted that one can infer, for

example, the extent of Western influence by considering the level of education, it is by far preferable to include additional and more specific questions on this dimension. In fact, Morroe Berger in his study of civil servants in Egypt constructed and administered a Guttman scale on "exposure to the West."⁴ Also similar types of questions were included in an investigation of mass communication in Lebanon and other Middle Eastern countries.⁵

Of course, one must admit that Yaukey's questionnaire was already too lengthy and complex; but, with the advantage of hindsight, one can say that some of the questions which yielded results of dubious value could have been sacrificed in favor of additional items on family structure, exposure to Western influence, and even, perhaps, on social mobility.

Yaukey's study, in addition to providing valuable insights into the reproductive behavior of an Arab population, has cleared much of the underbrush for the benefit of future investigators. Any new field study of fertility in the Middle East will have to take into account both the successes and the failures of Yaukey's pioneering investigation.

One final and short note: the author missed adding an exotic touch to his monograph by not reproducing the Arabic version of his questionnaire.

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BIRTH RATES OF THE WHITE POPULATION IN THE UNITED STATES, 1800-1860*

SEVERAL students coming under the influence of Professor Simon Kuznets for purposes of Ph.D. dissertations, concerned themselves with the series of historical data for the

⁴ BUREAUCRACY AND SOCIETY IN MODERN EGYPT, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1957, pp. 221-223.

⁵ Lerner, Daniel: THE PASSING OF TRADITIONAL SOCIETY: MODERNIZING THE MIDDLE EAST, Glencoe, Illinois, The Free Press, 1958.

* Yasuba, Yasukichi: BIRTH RATES OF THE WHITE POPULATION IN THE UNITED STATES, 1800-1860: AN ECONOMIC STUDY, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1962, 198 pp.

United States on fertility ratios in relation to different variables. Among the resulting studies have been one by H. Y. Tien¹ and one by Bernard Okun.²

The most recent study of this type is the one under review, Yasuba's BIRTH RATES OF THE WHITE POPULATION IN THE UNITED STATES, 1800-1860.

The first major objective of this study is to ascertain beyond a doubt whether the birth rate in the United States at the beginning of the nineteenth century was considerably higher than in Europe and whether the fall in the birth rate in the United States started earlier than in most European countries. (p. 18)

Older hands at the trade will recognize at once the desirability of more specificity in such an hypothesis since there doubtless was considerable difference between areas of Europe with respect to birth rates in 1800 and to the incipience of decline. In fact, in recording his findings the author stated, "It is also made clear that the birth rate in the United States in the period 1800-1860 was much higher than in *Western Europe*." (Reviewer's italics.) As for the United States, the author also found that there were marked differences between the *old* and *new* states with respect to levels and trends in fertility.

Despite these complexities the author appears to be satisfied about the validity of his first hypothesis:

These demographic facts established, our next task is to explain why, or how, the birth rate in the United States was higher than in Europe and why, or how, the birth rate in the United States started to fall earlier than in Europe. (p. 19)

In the pursuit of answers to these questions the author first gives some attention to "the effects of age distribution and marriage customs—the age at and the incidence of marriage." He finds, he says, "that much, though not all, of the difference between the refined birth rates of America and Europe in the

¹ Tien, H. Yuan: A Demographic Aspect of Interstate Variations in American Fertility, 1800-1860. The Milbank Memorial Fund *Quarterly*, January, 1959, xxxvii: 49-59.

² Okun, Bernard: TRENDS IN BIRTH RATES IN THE UNITED STATES SINCE 1870, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1958, 203 pp.

late eighteenth and early nineteenth century can be explained by a difference in marriage customs." (p. 20)

The author's use of the term "refined birth rate" is rather unconventional. Actually he deals mainly with ratios of children to women and by "refined birth rate" he means "number of white children under 10 years of age per 1,000 white women aged 16-44." (p. 18) Since this index depends upon mortality as well as fertility, the author devotes a chapter to trends and geographic differentials in mortality from 1800 to 1860. As expected, anything approaching hard data for this period are very meager and the author's conclusions are understandably indeterminate. "It is well known that mortality declined during the last half of the nineteenth century. What happened during the first half is much less certain." (p. 101) The analysis throws virtually no light on the question of impact of child and maternal mortality on levels and trends of fertility ratios during the first half of the nineteenth century.

In the last chapter the author is concerned with the relation of fertility ratios to certain broad economic variables such as industrialization, urbanization, availability of easily accessible land and density of population. In these analyses states or other geographical areas are used as units. Indices are based upon the (frequently unsatisfactory) quantitative data available such as the proportion of workers in nonagricultural pursuits and the proportion of the population that is urban.

As for general evaluation, the reviewer must first take off his hat to a student who undertakes a Ph.D. dissertation on a topic involving historical statistics in a country with which he is not familiar. The difficulties of this type doubtless are particularly encompassing when an oriental student attempts to fathom the statistics for our country during the period of its expanding frontier. The volume does not advance our knowledge of demographic history of the United States very much, but that is mainly because of deficiencies of the data rather than deficiencies of analysis. Under the doubtlessly rigorous but friendly tutelage of Kuznets the author has patently received good training in research on a problem involving economic and demographic relationships. Hopefully, we will hear from him again.

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