

HUMAN FERTILITY IN LATIN AMERICA
Sociological Perspectives

J. MAYONE STYCOS

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J. Mayone Stycos' name is associated with an important part of the research that has been done in the field of fertility in Latin America in the past 15 years. Whether participating directly in this research or contributing to its promotion, his work is reflected in several books and in a large number of articles. He now presents, in his direct and amusing style, a book that adapts and systemizes his principal articles on the subject, and adds three chapters not previously edited.

The book is divided into four parts. The first part, "A general view," is a review of population control in world perspective, population problems in Latin America and the intellectuals' position toward this problem. It begins by pointing out two important aspects of the population problem: one is the level the rate of population growth has reached, which has no precedent, and the other is the governments' growing willingness to act upon this rate. Repeatedly it has been said that economic development automatically causes a decline in fertility; therefore, emphasis has been on development without taking much account of the population growth problem. Stycos shows that no such magic relation exists between development and fertility decline.

The second part of the book gives a series of examples on "attitudes toward family size and family planning" as obtained from

surveys done in different Latin American countries. The surveys were promoted by Cornell University and United Nations Demographic Center, in Chile, among others.

These surveys helped to demonstrate that, in spite of a general contrary opinion, it was possible to obtain psychologic and sociologic information. The surveys also showed that a demand exists for birth control, contrary to the belief spread among the elite of most societies that people have many children because they want it that way. Another way in which the surveys are valuable is for programming because they give ideas concerning the content these programs should have, taking account of the differences from country to country. Finally it is important to mark that, even though Stycos does not say so expressly, this research is extremely valuable for demographers preoccupied with a more profound knowledge of fertility and improvement of techniques for more adjusted estimates and projections on the probable future fertility behavior.

An entire chapter (more space than is necessary) is dedicated to a political torment broken loose in 1960 by the Catholic clergy in Puerto Rico. Though the political party backed by the clergy did not succeed in the elections, birth control instruction and control, which was legalized by a law in 1937, was seriously threatened for several years. This is an example of the political weight that the Catholic Church may have as an institution, in a certain moment.

Part three of the book refers to the "social and demographic contexts of fertility." Jamaica and Puerto Rico are the given examples for the analysis, the first concerning norms and sexual relations and both concerning consensual unions and fertility. The topic of cultural and differential fertility is analyzed with 1940 census information of Peru. Variables given great importance in differential fertility analysis are dealt with. These are: employment, education and urbanization.

A hypothesis stating that the fertility of women employed in non-agricultural activities tends to decrease, has been formed. Stycos elaborates a penetrating analysis based on dates from registered births in Lima in 1959, and those obtained from a survey carried out during 1960-1961 in this same city. This indicates that if any

relation exists between the number of children and employment, it is not because of a conscious fertility control. The author also believes that women with two or less children probably do not practice birth control. If this were true, he says, it would suggest that low fertility permits or stimulates a woman to work.

Stycos verifies the relations between education and fertility in three ways: using international, intranational and interpersonal comparisons. Based on a correlation analysis of education and different fertility measurements he finds that fertility variations among countries is better explained by urbanization than by education. Taking different regions in each country into consideration, he notices that only in countries with high levels of education is the relation negative between literacy and fertility in predominately urban as well as rural provinces. In the rest of the countries this relation may either be negative or positive.

In various chapters the author has shown the role of urbanization in explaining differential levels of fertility. He relates this variable with education, social class, feminine employment, marital status and migration. He shows that all measures of urbanization used are negatively correlated with fertility, especially with the crude birth rate for which the correlation is higher.

The fourth and last part of the book is only one chapter referring to the "prospects for fertility control in Latin America." This subject, fertility control, underlies almost all the book. Stycos asks "Are the people ready, and will governments act?" The author seems optimistic about the last and points out changes of attitude and opinions to demonstrate it.

The book's reading suggests some general reflections. First it is necessary to point out that it is a very important contribution to the knowledge of fertility and its relationship with other variables even though the study is not as representative for Latin America as the book's title indicates. In few cases has information concerning a large number of countries been used. Puerto Rico is referred to because Stycos knows it thoroughly; but it is perhaps not the most adequate representative of Latin America. Seventy years of association with the United States must have influenced some of its norms,

attitudes and so forth enough for it to differ in this case from other countries. Haiti, at the extreme of the scale, and Jamaica, outside it, are not representative either. Peru is the only case in which a detailed analysis might fulfill this requirement. No doubt, because the book is rather a recollection of articles that have concerned specific cases Stycos has decided on this particular way of dealing with the subject. This last aspect at times has also influenced the lack of adequate generalizations of certain findings. Some repetition occurs in different chapters, which might have been avoided with a more careful adaptation. However there remains the positive balance of the author's having contributed a volume of valuable information analyzed with notable sharpness.

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