

**FAMILY PLANNING IN TAIWAN**  
**An Experiment in Social Change**

**RONALD FREEDMAN AND JOHN Y. TAKESHITA**

Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1969  
501 pp. \$15.00.

The present volume represents a remarkable contribution to the knowledge and understanding of how much a family planning program can accomplish in a developing country. As is stated, at the time it was written a few years ago it was the only thorough, scientific documentation available of an effort to bring family planning practice to a large number of couples in a population. Even today, it still holds that reputation.

The present reviewer was impressed with the depth of analysis with which the subject was treated. It is a beautiful example of how sociologic analyses are to be applied to an action program. Also, the authors try to be as objective as possible in their accounts of the results obtained.

From the very beginning it is clearly stated that it attempts to depict what happened to the project undertaken in a country where fertility decline was already underway. It is not a description of a project in a country with practically no initial sign of declining fertility. A basic motivation for a smaller family exists in almost all developing countries. Yet, as is mentioned in the book, so often a gap is seen between what is wanted and what is done. However, the conditions under which the Taichung program proceeded were in general different from those obtaining in some more underdeveloped places: the gap was narrower in Taiwan as compared with certain other con-

ditions where the wish and the action still remain two remotely related ideas.

The book is of particular value in offering practical suggestions as to the strategy of family planning. Legitimation of family planning practice gives a powerful stimulus to switch from ambivalence to decision, relatively old, high-parity women are important notwithstanding their lower fecundability in general, systematic selection of focal points to attack a population is more effective with less expenditures—these and other related points are of essential significance for administrators.

The reviewer has taken all the more keen interest in reading this book because of his being a native from a country that has shared many traditional values with the country with which it deals. In going through its many pages, he was reminded of the past events and experiences observed in his own country, some taking place soon after the War and others even before the War. On the other hand, there some differences are noticed. The ideal family size of three or four children in Taichung contrasts with an even smaller number in Japan in the late 1940's. Also, the important role of primary groups as source of information in Taiwan is somewhat reduced in Japan by a pervasive influence of mass communications media. The most striking difference obviously is the fact that the IUD was given a high priority in Taiwan, whereas induced abortion played a significant role during the immediate postwar years in Japan.

A most interesting, and at the same time most crucial, part in this book is undoubtedly the one in which the authors discuss the possibility of transferring the Taichung or Taiwan experiences to other developing countries. Here and there, one meets cautiously phrased remarks in this connection. The authors take note of the importance of socioeconomic development for a successful "family planning take-off." But they seriously question the appropriateness of casting off a priori the Taichung experience as irrelevant to others and moving quickly into an unwarranted pessimism as to the future progress of family planning in the developing world. In essence, it is a

strong urge that one should base his arguments not on theory but on actual testings.

The present reviewer is impressed with this attitude of empiricism. Truly, in the field of science, no one can say he knows something before he has actually observed it. After reading this valuable opus, pessimistic views one has on this point can certainly be diluted.

Nevertheless, the reviewer feels somehow the dilution has not reached the complete melting away.

A series of recommendations for other family planning programs are listed in the latter half of the text. These are highly suggestive. If one is permitted to be rude in this kind of writing, however, a most fundamental question here is the feasibility of carrying out these recommendations in the way they are suggested here. Obviously, all the developing countries cannot be lumped together. There are differences in the stage of transition from one developing country to another. But if we take some of the difficult cases, it might be argued whether it is an easy task to perform these items with similar depth and accuracy as those found in Taichung and to produce similarly substantial results. Might it not be true that the very fact that a great amount of effort and system could be put in the Taichung study to the extent that made it possible to produce this kind of work is in itself illustrative of a favorable prospect with regard to the progress in family planning? In some other places family planning was taken up much earlier; the present publication could not come from those places but it was from Taiwan. In short, the reviewer, while agreeing fully with the importance of empirical approach, is wondering how feasible it is to test the suggested recommendations, which in turn is related to actual accomplishments in family planning.

In all likelihood, the authors probably will feel that they have already answered even these doubts. The only reason why such a rude question is presented here is because of the hope that soon in the future scientific works with this high authority will be forthcoming from many other places as well.

A few small points. (1) There is practically no mention of religious factors in the present analysis. Perhaps it means that religion was not a very influential element in Taiwan. But to those readers who are from religious-minded countries, this may be a serious concern, especially in relation to the use of IUDs and induced abortion. (2) Although the Taichung program was not given an outright positive support from the government, one may wonder to what extent the actual service rendered by such official personnel as health station staffs influenced the acceptance of contraception. In other words, was there some perception among the general masses that family planning, particularly through the use of IUD's, had now been sanctioned by official organizations? (3) There is an impression that the relatively wide use of the Ota ring had paved the way for ready acceptance of the loop. If this was true, then it might have created an atmosphere different from that usually seen in other countries.

All in all, this volume is rich in food for thought. To those holding a gloomy outlook on the family planning programs in developing countries, it certainly offers encouragement.

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