

EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN AND FERTILITY

A FIELD STUDY IN EL-WAILY DISTRICT, CAIRO

By

WEDAD MORCORS

(National Center of Social and Criminological Research)

Previous investigations in developed countries have proved that working women have less children than non-working women,⁽¹⁾ and that they also desire less children⁽²⁾. This latter finding suggests that working women have less children because they desire it so, and not because the proportion of sterile women entering the labor-force is greater.

As regard to developing countries, some field-studies have proved the existence of a relationship between the employment of women and fertility⁽³⁾, while others didn't find any relationship between both phenomena⁽⁴⁾. This latter finding must be due to the non-availability of the family Planning methods in the country investigated, at the time of the investigation, as well as to the family system prevailing in those countries, namely the extended family. This type of organization allows the mother to go to work while leaving her children to the care of a grand-mother, a sister or any available woman of her family.

Now turning to Egypt-a developing country-it would be interesting to find out if there is any relationship between the employment of women and fertility. The different censuses never took into account the relationship between the employment status of the wife and the number of her everborn children. Thus to investigate this relationship, several methods were possible :

1. See for example, Morsa, J., *Travail des Femmes et Natalité* Revue de l'Institut de Sociologie, Vol. II, 1959, p. 233—263.
2. Ridley, J. C., Number of Children expected in relation to non-familial activities of the wives, *Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly*, vol., 34, 1959, p. 277—296.
3. Weller, R. H., The Employment of Wives, dominance and Fertility, *Journal of marriage and the Family*, Vol; 30, 1968, p. 437—442.
4. Stycos, J. M., and Weller, R. H., Female working roles and fertility, *Demography*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1967, p. 120—217.

1. To find out if there is any correlation between the evolution of the percentage of working women and the evolution of the fertility level during a given period. This is what Eva Garzouzi has done in her research based on the 1960 census data and on other statistical sources. She found a correlation between the evolution of both phenomena, which suggest a relationship between the employment of women and fertility⁽¹⁾.

2. To take into account the geographical dimension and to study the problem on a horizontal basis. This method has been followed by Zachariah and others in their statistical research based on the 1960 census data for Cairo city. They took into account the proportion of working women and the level of fertility in the different districts of Cairo found out that the districts with the highest proportion of working women—such as Kasr El Nil district—were those with the lowest level of fertility. They also found a similar correlation between the fertility level on one hand and the percentage of illiterate women in the reproductive age, and the percentage of craftsman on the other hand⁽²⁾.

In both these researches, we cannot conclude that the employment of women is a cause of lower fertility, because both could be the result of another cause, say the educational level of the wife. Neither can we investigate the dynamics of the relationship between women employment and fertility, if any. So it is necessary to control the other variab affecting fertility, such as the education of the wife and the occupation of the husband, if we want to find out if there is any causal relationship between women employment and fertility. Also, it is only through a field research that we can investigate the attitudes and behavior influencing the fertility of the working women, which gives to the study an explanatory dimension. This is what we have tried to do in the present research.

We shall now examine successively the method followed, the characteristics of the sample and the analysis of the results.

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1. Garzouzi, E. «The demographic aspects of women's employment in the United Arab Republic», presented to IUSSP Conference, London, Sept. 1959.
 2. Zachariah, K., & others, «Geographic variations of fertility rates in Arab Countries», in fertility trends and differentials in arab countries, Cairo Demographic Centre, Research monograph, Series, No. 2, p. 206—207.

A. *The method*

Cairo city has been chosen because it is the most modernized Egyptian city and it has the highest proportion of women working outside agriculture. All Cairo districts are not similar as regard to the percentage of working women, the districts with the higher economic level having the highest percentage, and those with the lower economic level having the lowest percentage. This study has been limited to one district only, El-Wally district, which contains families of all economic levels, and hence it can be considered as representative of Cairo City.

As regard to the sample, the research has been limited to currently married working women, aged 20-45 years. By work we mean a job outside the home with a salary. This eliminates women working at home or within a family project without being paid. A frame has been prepared of all working wives aged 20—45 in the district, out of which a random sample of 100 women was drawn representing 5 % of all eligible women. A control group of 100 non-working women has been chosen very carefully, in order to be as similar as possible to the experimental group, as regard to the age of the wife, her educational level, the occupation of husband and the economic level of the family.

The data were collected by a questionnaire consisting of 80 questions, during May-June 1971.

B. *Characteristics of the sample.*

1. Age of the wife.

The average current age was 34,7 for working wives and 34,2 for non-working wives, which has been proved to be a non-significant difference.

2. Occupation of husband.

66% of the working wives husbands were white collars, for 68 % of the non-working wives husbands, which is a nonsignificant difference. All other husbands in both groups were blue-collar.

3. Educational level of the wife.

33 % of the working wives and 36 % of the non-working wives were uneducated, i.e. they did not receive any degree, while the others in both groups were educated, i.e. they have at least received the primary degree. The difference was proved to be non-significant.

4. Economic level of the family.

The average income per month was 51,9 pounds for the working wives' families and 44,2 pounds for the non-working wives' families. The difference is non-significant.

These data prove that the control group has been chosen as similar as possible to the experimental group, and that the effects of the current age of wife, her educational level, the occupation of the husband and the economic level of the family have been eliminated as much as possible. (Table 1).

TABLE 1
Characteristics of the sample

The ites	working wives	non-working wives.
Average current age of wife	34.7	34.2+
Percentage white-collar husbands.	68 %	68% +
Percentage educatesd wives	67 %	64 % +
Average income of family (Per month)	51,9	44,2 +

+ No significant differences.

C. *The Results :*

1. Some correlates of fertility.

A significant relationship has been found between the employment of women and fertility at the 0.01 level. The mean number of live births was 3,2 for working women and 4,3 for non-working women. Controlling for duration of marriage, it has been found that working women have on the average 0.28 live births per one year of marriage, while non-working women have on the average 0,35 live births, which is a significant difference at the 0,01 level.

As regard to the average number of living children, working women have on the average 2,6 living children at the time of the field study, and non-working women have, 3,6 living children, which is a significant difference at the 0,01 level.

But there was not a significant difference between the mean number of child deaths and the employment of women, the average being 0,6 for working women and 0,7 for non-working women. Neither was there a significant relationship between the average number of miscarriages and the employment of women. This latter result suggest that women's work is not so hard to provoke miscarriages.

TABLE II
Some correlates of fertility by
Employment of women.

Mean Number	working women	Non-working women
Live births	3,2	4,3
Living children	2,6	3,6
Child deaths	0,6	0,7 +
Miscarriages	0,5	0,5 +

+ No significant differences.

These results suggest that there is a relationship between the employment of women and fertility. But it is important to take into consideration that the sample contains different educational levels. By breaking the sample into two broad educational levels, the educated women and the un-educated ones, it has been found that the relationship stands for educated women only. This may be due to the fact that uneducated women have not usually a stable job, but they go out to work at time of family crisis, or when they have already a large family which would need the income of both spouses.

Thus, the relationship between the employment of women and fertility is significant only for educated women. But what are the dynamics of this relationship ? What are the underlying factors, or the intervening variables which stand between the employment of women and fertility ? We have investigated some variables related to attitudes and others related to behavior.

2. Some attitudes related to fertility :

(a) Attitudes related to the number and sex of children.

There was no significant difference between the mean number of children considered as ideal by working and non-working women, the general attitude being to favor small families (2,4 for the working women and 2,7 for the non-working women).

But as regards the husbands, there was a significant difference between the ideal number in the two groups, the working wives husbands preferring on the average 2,6 children, while the non-working wives' husbands prefer on the average 3,4 children. Hence the husbands of non-working wives are more likely to prefer large families.

Now, if we compare the ideal number of children stated by the mothers, and the actual number in both groups, it appears that the working wives are more likely to have the number of children they want, while the non-working wives have much more large families than they would like (Table III). This may be due partly to the fact that the husbands of the latter prefer large families, the family size being affected by the attitudes of both spouses.

TABLE III
Ideal and Actual Family Size
by employment of women.

Mean	Working women	Non-working women.
Ideal Family Size	2,4	2,7 +
Actual Family Size	2,6	3,6

+ Non-significant difference.

As regards to the attitudes towards the preference of boys or girls, no significant difference was found between the two groups, the majority in both groups thinking that girls are as well as boys.

(b) Attitudes related to Family Planning.

A number of questions was asked about knowledge of and attitudes toward Family Planning, the right of women to plan their family even without the approval of the husband, and the attitude toward spacing.

No significant differences were found between working and non-working wives as regard to knowledge of Family Planning methods, all of them having heard about the pills and about 80 % in both groups having heard about the I.U.D. In both groups too, about 94 % of the women approve Family Planning.

As regard to the right of women to plan their family even without the approval of the husband, about half of the sample in both groups gives this right to the women, and as regard the attitude toward the timing of the first child birth, about half of the working wives and 33 % of the non-working wives prefer to have their first child immediately after marriage. (Table 4). This last finding may be due to the later age at marriage of working wives.

TABLE IV.
Attitudes related to fertility
by employment of women.

The attitude	working women	non-working women.
Ideal number of children (wives)	2,4	2,7 +
Ideal number of children (husbands)	2,6	3,4
Knowledge of pills	100 %	100 % +
Knowledge of I. U. D.	82 %	81 % +
Approve Family Planning (wives)	94 %	93 % +
Approve Family Planning (husbands)	94.1 %	86.5 %
Do not prefer boys	83 %	78% +
Approve women's right to F.P.	54 %	55 % +
First child right after marriage	51 %	33 % +

+ The difference is non-significant.

In summary, we can say that there is no significant difference between working and non-working women as regard to attitudes to ward fertility, although there is a significant difference between the attitudes of husbands toward the ideal number of children.

(c) Some behavioral variables related to fertility.

In this part we investigate the age at marriage, the practice of Family Planning and the incidence of abortion in both groups.

It has been found that the mean age at marriage was 22,3 years for the working wives and 20,05 years for the nonworking wives. This difference was proved to be significant at the 0.01 level.

As regard to the practice of Family Planning, no significant difference was found between the percentage of users and non-users in both groups. But a significant difference appears between the average parity after which the wife began to use Family Planning methods, this average being 2,2 for working wives and 3,7 for non-working wives. This finding suggest that working wives begin to plan their family earlier in their married Life.

But the use of Family Planning methods reduces fertility only if it is effective, hence it is important to find out the rate of success or failure in family Planning in both groups. It has been found that the rate of failure was higher for non-working wives than for working wives (39,3% of the non-working women had at least unwanted pregnancy, for only 20,2 % of the working women).

The third intermediate variable we have investigated here is abortion. Abortion is forbidden by the law, though it seems to be widely practiced, especially in the cities. In the present research, it has been found that 27 % of the working women and 21 % of the non-working women had at least one experience with abortion. This difference was proved to be significant. This means that the working women are less ready to accept an unwanted pregnancy than non-working women. This can be explained in terms of the strength of the motives of the working wife, as sometimes an additional child might mean the necessity of leaving her job.

1. The rate of failure is the percentage of the incidence of unwanted pregnancies, i.e. pregnancies which occurred in spite of the use of a family planning method.

In summary, we can say that there is some difference between the working and the non-working regarding the behavioral variables related to fertility. These differences are significant for the age at marriage, the success in Family Planning and the incidence of abortion (Table V).

TABLE V.
Some behavioral variables related to fertility
by employment of women.

the variable	working women	non-working women.
age at marriage	22,2	20.05
Use of a F.P. method	84 %	79 % +
The parity after which began use.	2,2	3,7
Success in F.P.	20,2	39,3
Incidence of Abortion	27 %	21 %

+ Non-significan difference.

In conclusion, we can say that there was no significant differences between working and non-working wives as regard to attitudes related to fertility, although there was a significant difference between the attitudes of husbands toward the ideal number of children. But on the behavioral level, many significant differences were found, especially for the age at marriage, the success in Family Planning and the incidence of abortion.

We may conclude that the working wife is more likely to realize her aims, because she has stronger motives to limit her family. Having a job allows a woman to acquire a new social status based on her social achievement, rather than on the number of her children, as it is in some traditional societies and in rural areas of Egypt. Hence a social policy aiming to give a new social status to women will help to reduce fertility.

1. Note : detailed tables are available in Wedad Soliman Morcos, «Social factors affecting the fertility of working women». M.A. thesis (not printed), Cairo University, Faculty of Arts, 1973.