

# **FAMILY PLANNING KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES : A RESTUDY IN AN EGYPTIAN VILLAGE**

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This report attempts to present a comparison of the findings of two studies with respect to knowledge of, attitudes towards, and practices of family planning. Both studies were conducted on the same sample of women in the village of Geziret-al-Mussaada in Beni-Suef governorate. The first study was conducted by the Social Research Center of the American University in Cairo, in the summer of 1963. It included in interview of a random sample of one-fourth of the community households. One section of the interview schedule dealt with knowledge, attitudes, and practices of family planning. The second study was conducted by the writer of the report, five years later, in the summer of 1968. The same wordings of the questions were used to allow the writer to trace the changes that might have taken place over this five-year period. It is important to mention that during this five year period the Egyptian National Family Planning Program was launched and publicized.

Before going into the details of comparing the findings of the two studies, a very brief description of the village is essential : It is 91 km. south of Cairo. It belongs to Markaz el Wasta and Beni-Suef Governorate. According to the 1960 population census, the population of the village was 5076 people. Agriculture is the major economic activity in the village.

The comparison of the two studies will be divided into three sections :

1. Changes in the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents.

2. Changes in the reproductive behavior of the respondents.

3. Changes in knowledge, attitudes and practices of family planning.

First : *Changes in socio-economic characteristics :*

1. Size of the household : by comparing the findings of the two studies it was found that the average size of the households increased from 6 persons to about 6.2 persons. The majority of households did not change in size (40 percent). Of course this increase is too small to be of significance.

2. Household composition : almost 70 percent of the households maintained the same composition over the 5 year period. Most of these households (that had maintained the same composition) were of the nuclear type, indicating the prevalence of this type in both studies.

3. Wives occupation : in the earlier study all respondents reported that they were not employed except for one case who said that she is a dress-maker. This same respondent reported the same occupation in the latter study plus two other respondents who said that they sell vegetables.

4. Husbands' occupation : the findings indicated that the occupation of almost 83 percent of the husbands remained unchanged. Among those whose occupations changed 9 percent were farmers and changed to non-farm laborers while only 2 percent were laborers and changed to farmers ; which shows a higher tendency towards non-agricultural activities.

5. Area of land owned : about 76 percent of the sample remained landless over the five years period. About 7 percent maintained the same land holding. The average acreage of land ownership per household increased only from 0.42 feddans (10 kirats) to 0.46 feddans (11 kirats) in the 5 year period.

6. Area of land cultivated : about 34 percent did not cultivate land in both studies while 27 percent cultivated the same area of land. The average cultivated area per household increased only from 1.8 feddans (43 kirats) to 1.86 feddans (45 kirats).

From the foregoing data it can be generalized that no major changes in the socio-economic characteristics of the sample has occurred during the 5 year period elapsing between the two studies.

**Second : *Changes in the reproductive behavior :***

The reproductive behavior is compared here in terms of the number of pregnancies, livebirths, and parity.

1. Number of pregnancies—A large proportion of the cases indicated an increase in the number of pregnancies over the 5 year period (64.5 percent). The increased number of pregnancies reported ranged from 1 to 9. The average number of pregnancies reported in the first study was 6.3 while this average increased to 8.2 in the latter study.

2. Number of livebirths—The majority of cases (62 percent) reported a larger number of livebirths in the latter survey than they did in the earlier study. The increased number of livebirths reported range from 1-5 livebirths during the five year period. The average number of livebirths per respondent as reported in the first study was 5.4, this average increased to 6.5 in the latter study.

3. Parity—Almost equal proportions of respondents had maintained and had increased their parity over the 5 year period. In other words, about 46 percent had the same number of living children in both studies, while 47 percent had more living children in the latter study. The increased parity ranged only from 1 to 3 children. The average number of living children increased over the five year period from almost 3.6 to 4.4. However, the average number of living sons increased from 1.9 to 2.2.

The overall change in the reproductive behavior of the respondents during the 5 year period shows an average increase of 1.9 pregnancies, 1.1 livebirths, 0.8 living children and 0.3 living sons.

**Third : *Change in knowledge, attitudes and practices :***

*Knowledge of family planning :*

Knowledge has been compared with respect to whether they have heard about family planning and whether they know of any contraceptive methods. Further probing was made to reveal the particular contraceptives they know about.

1. *Awareness of family planning :* Here two questions were asked :

١ - انتى سمعت حاجة عن موضوع منع الحمل وتحديد النسل ؟

٢ - طيب تعرفى ان فيه حاجات بيمنعوا بيها الحمل ؟

Comparing the findings of the two studies it was found that there was a large increase in the percentage of respondents knowing of family planning and contraceptive methods. This percentage increased from 41 percent to 90 percent. The percentage of those who had never heard of family planning or knew its methods declined from 59 percent to only 9.5 percent.

This change in the knowledge of family planning may be a clear indication of the effectiveness of the National Family Planning Program which was implemented in February 1966 to carry its news to a large majority of the people in this area.

2. *Knowledge of contraceptive methods* : Here the questions was :

إيه هي الحاجات اللى الناس بتمنع بيها الحمل ؟

In response to that question 10 percent of the cases in the latter study indicated ignorance of any contraceptive methods. At the time of the earlier study this percentage was 63 percent. On the other hand 37 percent in the first study as compared to 90 percent in the second one mentioned at least one contraceptive method.

As to the variety of methods known by the respondents in the two studies they were : In the first one, *pills* and *injections* were the only 2 methods mentioned. In the second study, the variety consisted of pills, I.U.C.D's, vaginal methods, the injection, condom and coitus interruptus.

These findings illustrate very clearly the tremendous increase in the number of respondents knowing of contraceptive methods in the latter study as well as an increase in the variety of methods known.

*Attitudes* : This section deals with certain attitudes related to fertility such as preference of many or few children, ideal number of children, ideal age at first marriage and reason for giving this age. It also includes attitudes towards matters related to family planning.

1. Preference for having many or few children : Here the question was :

فى رأيك الست اللى عندها عيال كثير أحسن والا اللى عندها عيال قليلين ؟

The findings indicated that those who prefer few children increased from 23 percent to 56 percent (more than doubled), while those who prefer many children had declined from 68 percent to 42 percent, which is a significant difference according to the chi-square test.

2. Ideal number of children : They were then asked :

انتی فی رایک کده کام عیل یبقوا کویسین ؟  
ویکون کام منهم صبیان وکام بنات ؟

About 31 percent of the cases had maintained the same ideal number of children in both studies. However, the average ideal number of children had declined from 6.6 to 4.7. This decrease in the ideal number of children which occurred over the 5 year period is another indication of the change of attitude in favor of a relatively fewer number of children.

As to the sex preference of the ideal number of children, the findings indicate almost no change. In general, about half of the cases in both studies preferred to have the majority of the children be boys, while less than half of the cases in both studies preferred half girls-half boys and very few cases in both studies also preferred to have a majority of girls.

3. Ideal age of marriage for girls and reason : Here the question in both studies were :

لو کان عندک بنت "صغيرة"، تحبى تجوزها وهى عندها کام سنة ؟ ولیه وهى فی السن ده بالذات ؟

The average ideal age of marriage in the first study was 15.5 years compared to 15.6 years in the latter one. This increase in the average ideal age is very negligible and does not indicate any significant change between the two studies. This average also reveals a general attitude in favor of early marriage for girls in both studies.

The various reasons given to support the ideal age for marriage were grouped and it was found that those giving traditional reasons such as customs and beliefs, conduct and religious purposes, reproducing many children etc. had declined from 72 percent to 63 percent ; while those saying that girls should not marry at a very early age but rather wait until they are physically and intellectually mature and gain experience and complete their education had increased from 24 percent to 32 percent.

From what was said, it can be seen that although the average ideal age of marriage for girls did not change significantly, yet there is a slight decline in the traditional reasons given favoring early marriage and a slight increase in the proportion of cases favoring that girls should wait until they are mature.

4. Then the respondents were given 2 hypothetical situations and were asked to express their attitudes. The first one was :

لو واحدة متجوزة وعندها أولاد وتخاف لو خلفت أولاد تانيين رابحة تشقى هي وجوزها في تربيتهم وتعليمهم ويفضلوا حاملين هم مصاريهم ومطالبهم ، تفكرى انه في الحالة دى يصح ان الواحدة تعمل حاجة علشان ما تخلفش عيال تانيين ؟

The proportion of those saying «yes» has increased from 28 percent to 75 percent, and the proportion saying «no» has decreased from 72 percent to 24 percent. About 70 percent of those who said «no» in the community study said «yes» when asked the same question five years later.

5. The other hypothetical situation was :

لو واحدة متجوزة وعندها أولاد وتخاف انها لو خلفت أولاد تانيين حتتعيب وصحتها تسؤ من كثر الحمل والولادة ، تفكرى انه في الحالة دى يصح ان الواحدة تعمل حاجة علشان ما تخلفش عيال تانيين ؟

The findings reveal that those saying «yes» has increased from 47 percent to 82 percent, while those saying «no» has decreased from 53 percent to 17 percent. About 78 percent of those who said «no» in the first study said «yes» 5 years later.

It can be concluded from what was said with respect to attitudes that there was a significant change in favor of preference of few children. Changes in the ideal number of children was also observed it has declined from 6.6 to 4.7. There was also a significant change of attitude in the specific cases mentioned. On the other hand, no significant change of attitude was observed with respect to the sex preference of the ideal number of children which could be due to the importance of having male children in village communities. The ideal age for marriage has not shown a significant change nor the type of reasons given for the ideal age of marriage.

3. *Practice* : Here the respondents were asked to whether they have ever used contraceptive methods and if they have, what methods were used.

1. Ever used a contraceptive method : It was found from the two studies that while 1.3 percent of the sample in the first study have ever used contraceptives, 8.3 percent in the latter one have used them. This proportion might seem small, however, according to the chi square test, it was found that it is significantly higher and it is not

a chance difference (At the 1 percent level, the value of chi-square is 6.635 and the computed value is 7.492).

Of course this is mainly due to the increased knowledge of contraceptives, and the change in attitudes in favor of fewer children ; and of equal importance is the availability of services in near-by family planning centers.

2. Contraceptive methods used : All three respondents in the first study that had ever used contraceptives said that they used pills. In the latter survey the majority of respondents have used the pills ; however vaginal contraceptives as well as the condom were also used.

Thus we see that in addition to the fact that the practice of contraceptive methods have increased significantly during the 5 year period, there was also a bigger variety of methods used. This is due again to the greater knowledge of the various contraceptives and the availability of these methods in the nearby centers.

The comparative findings of this study show us that there was change in the knowledge and awareness of family planning. Change had also occurred in the attitudes of people in favor of family planning. However, change in the practice of family planning had lagged behind. This is only in accordance with the normal reaction to the introduction of new ideas and practices. The adoption of new practices usually require more time and effort and in general it requires contact. The emphasis on personal contact in the educational approach has so far been lacking in the National Family Planning Program during the period 1966-1970. It is therefore recommended that potential clients of family planning be reached through personal contact.

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This study is based on the author's M.A. thesis : Family Planning Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices : A Restudy in an Egyptian Village (Geziret-al-Musaada). American University in Cairo, 1970.