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DYNAMICS OF RURAL LAND UTILIZATION IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA: HIGHLIGHTS, CONSEQUENCES AND THE WAY FORWARD

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1. PREAMBLE:

In 1998 parts of Akwa Ibom State witnessed unusually heavy precipitation during the rainy months of between June and September. A total of 1159mm was recorded at the UNIUYO MET station out of the year's total 2033.4mm. The consequence of this phenomenon was flooding in different parts of the State, especially in parts of Obot Idim and Nung Udoe in Ibesipko/Asutan Local Government Area (L.G.A); Ituk Mbang and Ikot Esse in Uruan L.G.A. and in parts of Oruk Anam and Ukanafun L.G.A.s. While some communities consulted oracles and made sacrifices to appease the gods; many Christians attributed the unusual flooding to sins of the people and organised prayers to seek divine favour (Ituen, 1998:193).

When a team of geographers from the University of Uyo studied the phenomenon at some of the sties it was discovered that the water table was very high and that the ground was already overcharged with soil moisture. A likely consequence was flooding. Most importantly it was discovered that the flooding was cyclical; coming after every 17 years, that very one being the third in recent living memory of the local inhabitants. In the other L.G.As, the same trend was reported. The 1998 flooding became more spectacular due to undue interference on the land. Over the years population densities have gone up and the pressure on land had

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THE DYNAMICS OF CHILDBEARING AND CHILDREARING IN
NIGERIA: THE CASE OF ILOGBO COMMUNITY.

By

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the changes that have taken place in the study population in attitude towards childbearing and rearing. Based on a sample size of 150 respondents, quantilative and qualitative data were gathered. Data reveal that the awareness of the population is gradually being geared towards the gains in small family size. The attention is now being shifted from quantity to quality of children. Thus positive socio-cultural change is taking place to prepare the way for a sustainable fertility decline, perhaps to replacement level. However, the belief of seeing children as economic commodities in which case they have to contribute to family income as well as being responsible for parental up-keep at old age is still significant. Therefore, conscious effort must be made at drawing up a comprehensive social security policy in order to make way for the achievement of sustainable fertility decline.

Keywords: childbearing, childrearing, fertility.

INTRODUCTION

It is noteworthy that fertility decline eluded sub-Saharan African countries until recently (Caldwell, Orubuloye and Caldwell, 1992: 211 – 217). Indeed fertility transition emerged in Asian and Latin American countries as far back as 1970s. The situation in sub-Saharan Africa has been studied by various scholars who have unanimously submitted that high fertility persisted in the region until recently (Caldwell, 1991: 230 – 232). The situation in West Africa has been described as most critical where a number of traditional institutions have made fertility decline an awkward task.

Nigeria maintained her position as one of the countries in the region not participating in a sort of pervasive fertility transition until the last decade (Orubuloye, 1995:139 – 140). However, research reports recently have indicated the commencement of a delicate fertility transition in the southwestern part of the country (Garenne et al 2000). This suggests that there must have been some changes in the socio-cultural dispositions to childbearing and childrearing in this area. One could make this assertion considering the reasons put forward for the sustenance of high fertility in the country. Orubuloye (1995:139 – 140) rightly observed that high fertility persists in traditional and contemporary Nigerian society as a result of prevailing socio-cultural factors which have their roots in familial and social organisation. Childbearing and childrearing attitudes constitute two major conglomerates of socio-cultural factors. By attitudes toward childbearing and childrearing, we mean the cultural dispositions toward having children and the value placed on their training. It should be considered realistic that little modernization must have penetrated the wall of these socio-cultural factors. This is responsible for the level of fertility decline reported so far.

Moreover, over fifty percent of Nigerian population still resides in the rural areas (National population commission 1991). If the recently reported decline in fertility should be sustained the rural areas cannot be left out. It is against this background that this study seeks to examine what the situation is as regards attitude towards

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childbearing and childrearing in a rural community. The major aim is to empirically consider the subject matter in view of its critical role in any serious fertility decline. In this regard, the article examines: childbearing and childrearing in retrospect in order to review what the situation was in the past; the present situation in the community regarding the attitude towards childbearing and childrearing with the aim of pointing out the implication for sustainable fertility decline in rural areas of Nigeria.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS CHILDBEARING AND CHILDREARING IN RETROSPECT

A number of traditional attitudes related to childbearing and childrearing are sustained by socio-cultural institution the sub-region that must be mentioned when considering the persistence of high fertility in the region.

African traditional religion places high emphasis on the cult of ancestors belief which still play an important role in life. It is a widely spread view that ancestors favour the sustenance of lineage, which thus encourage high fertility (Caldwell, 1991:231). With this belief, the adoption of birth control measures in traditional societies is generally seen as a disregard for the ancestral spirits that are worshipped and highly dreaded. Elderly members of various families oppose any non pronatalist position. In fact serious pressure is mounted on family units who favour restriction to childbearing (Renne, 1996: 170 – 174). In some traditional communities there exist what can be regarded as societal sanctions such as those often enforced with the threat of ancestral punishment, which are imposed on any member of such communities who is opposed to large number of children.

It is typical of African traditional society that parents and members of the extended family expect economic returns from their children. Thus in the sub-region, childbearing is seen as an investment that yields profit in form of wealth flow in the direction of parents (Caldwell 1982). Children are born in their dozens mostly with the hope that

they would support their families economically. This starts right from childhood. That is why child labour is a very common phenomenon and in a predominantly agrarian society, children constitute a dependable source of labour on farmlands. Related to this is the fact that more children enlarge family and this attracts greater share out of extended family landholding. Therefore, high fertility is seen as a profit (Orubuloye, 1995:139). In addition, childbearing in African society has been considered as a sure security to women. Women are generally treated as secondary citizens and when they get married child bearing is primary where if a woman is not fecund for any reason the probability that she would keep her marriage is very low. In most cases members of the extended family give such women terrible time, in some cases they are driven out of their husbands' homes or the man is forced to marry another woman. This attitude reflects how important childbearing and large numbers of children are to traditional African Society (Renne 1996:172).

Furthermore, the pronatalism of African societies is further demonstrated in the horror with which barrenness is viewed. Barren women are treated in such a way that they feel unwanted. A region where infant mortality level was very high and quite insatiable demand for children, even women who have been blessed with a number of children desire more. The major reason advanced was the fear of becoming "barren" suddenly if anything happens (accident or natural death) and all the children die overnight in case of having two to four children. Therefore, women favour high number of children. This risk of becoming "barren" makes men to embrace polygyny, which makes the number of children per household very high.

In a typical traditional society in Nigeria the practice of spreading the economic cost of childrearing across the extended family has been identified as one of the factor for persistent high fertility. There is a gap between those who take reproductive decision and those who actually bear the economic burden of such decision. Thus, childrearing becomes cheap and having too many children is therefore encouraged (Ainsworth, 1996:82, Caldwell, 1991: 231 and Orubuloye, 1995: 140). This is in contrast with what is obtain

able in industrial highly urbanized societies. In such societies independent childrearing is what is obtainable and by this, parents bear solely the economic implications of their reproductive decisions, since quality training is emphasized, the cost of rearing a child to adulthood is quite enormous. It therefore becomes imperative for people to embrace small family size (Alwin, 1996: 178 – 181).

Moreover, the fact that husbands and their relations are often responsible for decisions in their families while the wives are only left with the option of taking care of their homes (Isiugo-Abanihe 1994); and considering the pervasive practices of women bearing the day – to – day economic consequences of maintaining their homes; also with very low level of contraceptive prevalence if at all in practice; high fertility is inevitable (Babalola 1992:3 and Caldwell, 1991: 231). In other words, a man could take reproductive decision without having to bear extra direct economic burden in the family. Since the wife has no power to oppose his demand for sex in order to keep her marriage and she lacks the courage of adopting covert use of any contraceptive, childbearing continues usually until menopause.

Considering the fact that age at first marriage in traditional African society is low, the beginning of regular sexual relation also very early in such societies where literacy level is very low and contraceptive prevalence has been very low coupled with the subjugation of women in marital homes, childbearing is started very early. Since once a woman gets married keeping her marriage is dependent on having children, childbearing follows immediately. Such women who get married very early continue childbearing for quite a long time. A contributing factor is the rarity of women involvement in formal employment. They are always available for taking care of babies. Therefore, having babies and rearing them is cheap. This situation encourages high fertility.

What we have tried to do so far is to present a brief review of the socio-cultural characteristics of typical African society that form the

bedrock of high fertility. This has been done in respect to childbearing and rearing in order to see changes that have occurred over the years that could be considered as forerunner of sustainable fertility decline.

METHOD OF STUDY

The study area, Ilogbo village, is one of the Awori (Yoruba) settlements founded by descendant of Oduduwa (Odumosu, 1999: 195). The village is located in the North Eastern part of Badagry Local Government Area of Lagos State with a population of 2,727 (according to the National population commission 1991) Ilogbo village is purely an agrarian society, over 90 percent of the population are engaged in agricultural activities. Both men and women are involved in farming activities majoring in the cultivation of food crops, particularly cassava. There is a primary school and graduates of this school get secondary education from Oko - Afo secondary school, which is just about 3 kilometers away from Ilogbo.

For the purpose of this study, a survey of the building in the village was conducted, and we counted about 300 house units in order to ascertain the representativeness of our sample. We decided to include all the house units in our sampling design. Since most of the house units are occupied by one household each (except very few cases where the families of one or two of married young men still live with their parents), we interviewed the head of each household in every systematically chosen house (every 2nd building). The respondents could be male or female depending on the availability of the man or woman in the selected household. So in all 150 households were sampled.

Moreover, in order to really probe into the attitude of the members of the community towards childbearing and childrearing, qualitative data were also collected. We organized focus groups of men and women separately. There were four of such groups, two each per sex and in each group we had about ten participants. The product (extracts) constitutes part of our data analysis. In actual fact basic descriptive analysis is employed to enrich our quantitative

analysis. It is hoped that the study would serve a pilot purpose for further larger scale study where funding would not be a constraint.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

According to Table 1, 55.94 percent of the respondents are females while their male counterparts constitute 44.06 percent. The age distribution of the sample reflects a sort of even distribution. Those above 46 years of age have the highest percentage (22.38) while only 42 percent of the respondents are below age 19. Moreover, the table indicates that most of the respondents had at least primary education. About 40 percent had at least primary school certificate while 35.66 percent had never been to any school. These percentages reveal striking information. Although 39.16 percent had primary education, having as high as 35.66 percent illiterate reveals the low level of literacy in the community. Since education is the main medium of acquiring modern attitude, the persistence of such level of illiteracy suggests that traditional attitude could still be pervasive in the community.

A rural community such as the study area cannot manifest any other occupational distribution; the most common occupation is farming. About 43 percent of the respondents are farmers. Even those who indicated trading as occupation are directly or indirectly engaged in farming. This is not surprising in an agrarian economy where over 70 percent of the population are farmers. Subsistence farming is the order of the day and income level is expectedly very low. The dominant religion of the respondents is Christianity. In this regard over 50 percent of the respondents belong to either catholic or non-catholic Christian groups; of course, the fact that Pentecostal Churches are springing up every angle may justify the religious distribution. However, it should be noted that the Muslims constitute the second largest group.

TABLE 1: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS' SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

| CHARACTERISTICS | Number | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|--------|------------|
| SEX | 80 | 55.94 |
| Female | 63 | 44.06 |
| Male | | |
| AGE | 6 | 4.2 |
| <19 | 26 | 18.18 |
| 20 – 24 | 26 | 18.18 |
| 25 – 29 | 23 | 16.08 |
| 30 – 34 | 18 | 12.59 |
| 35 – 39 | 12 | 8.39 |
| 40 – 44 | 32 | 22.38 |
| >46 | | |
| EDUCATION | 2 | 1.4 |
| Pre-Primary | 56 | 39.16 |
| Primary | 26 | 18.18 |
| Post-Primary | 8 | 5.59 |
| Post-Secondary | 51 | 35.66 |
| None | | |
| OCCUPATION | 11 | 7.69 |
| Self-employed | 11 | 7.69 |
| Wage earners | 57 | 39.86 |
| Traders | 61 | 42.66 |
| Farmers | 3 | 2.10 |
| Unemployed | | |
| RELIGION | 19 | 13.29 |
| Christianity (Catholic) | 60 | 41.96 |
| Christianity (Non-Catholic) | 59 | 41.26 |
| Muslim | 5 | 3.50 |
| African Traditional | | |
| INCOME | 13 | 9.09 |
| < N500 | 25 | 17.48 |
| N500 – N1000 | 14 | 9.79 |
| N1001 – N1500 | 5 | 3.50 |
| N1501 – N2000 | 9 | 6.29 |
| N2001 – N2500 | 30 | 20.98 |
| > N 2500 | 44 | 30.77 |
| Unknown | 3 | 2.10 |
| Unemployed | | |
| TOTAL | 143 | 100 |

AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE AND FERTILITY

One of the most significant factors determining fertility level in developing countries, especially sub-Saharan African countries is age at marriage (Sushama, 1996:118 and Orubuloye, 1995: 130). The commencement of childbearing early in life constitutes one of the first crucial barriers to fertility transition that must be addressed in order to pave way for any meaningful fertility decline in Nigeria. In table 2, median ages at first marriage are 23.5 and 19.43 for male and female respectively. If compared with 18.9 reported in Orubuloye (1995:140) for Southwestern Nigeria, it is obvious that there has been an increase of about 5 years for male median age at marriage and 1 year for their female counterpart.

In such a rural community where the level of literacy remains relatively low, particularly for female sex, the age at first marriage observed in the study is expected. The fertility level (using average family size) manifests an appreciable decline; between 2.7 and 4.5 on the average, compared to between 6 and 8 or more in the past (Orubuloye and Oguntimehim 1999); for a more sustainable fertility decline a higher age at marriage is necessary.

TABLE 2: Age At First Marriage And Average Family Size.

| AGE (Marriage) | MALE | | FEMALE | |
|-------------------|------|-----|--------|-------------|
| | N | CEB | N | Family Size |
| =15 | 06 | 4.2 | 8 | 3.3 |
| 15 – 19 | 11 | 4.5 | 35 | 2.7 |
| 20 – 24 | 15 | 4.0 | 30 | 3.3 |
| 25 – 29 | 01 | 6.0 | 02 | 5.0 |
| 30 – 34 | 19 | 3.7 | 08 | 3.6 |
| =35 | 06 | 4.2 | 02 | 3.0 |
| TOTAL | 58 | - | 85 | - |

Source: Fieldwork at Ilogbo – Eremi, 1999.

One other striking observation in the study as indicated in table 2 is that age at marriage is relatively low among the female. When respondents were questioned on this in one of the focus group it was chorused:

"I will not send my female ward to secondary school because she may get pregnant, she should learn a trade so that if she get pregnant my money will not be wasted, she can still continue her training in her husband's house"

Apparent in this statement is the fact that there exists a high level of premarital sex among the young adolescents of the community with grave reproductive consequences; one of which is the alarming rate of unwanted pregnancy. Since antenatal care cost is relatively high due to the unfavourable economic conditions, most parents do not encourage their pregnant wards to remain with them. They are often forced on the boy friend's family as wives. Thus pregnancy serves as a way of contracting marriage in the population. It is probably as a result of this unfortunate phenomenon that female median age at marriage is quite low (19.43).

It should be noted that although the age at marriage is still relatively low in the village, the number of children ever born has appreciably declined. For instance, as represented in table 2, children even born for women whose age at first marriage falls within 15 – 19 and 20 – 24 (which constitute the majority of the respondents) are 2.7 and 3.3 (for women). This indicates that although the initiation of regular intercourse takes place early childbearing is declining. This may be due to modernization, which has raised the level of awareness and use of contraceptive. However, it appears that the more prominent reason is the economic situation as well as the rising cost of childbearing. Let us examine an extract of one of the focus group discussions.

"I will only have four children, because of the high cost of bringing up children nowadays; I

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will only get pregnant for my husband if he can assure me evidently well that he can take care of such babies, otherwise I will independently prevent the pregnancy and when questioned, I will say it has not stayed."

It is glaring that the cost of caring for pregnancy and children has gone up in recent times due to high cost of health care as well as the gradual appreciation of sending both male and female children to school. In the past, female children were not encouraged to go to school as indicated in focus group extract below:

"I did not go to school because my parents shun female schooling, but now my children, both boys and girls, must go to school"

In most cases in the study population children who cannot cope in school are sent to learn a trade. Thus, the attitude now is at variance with the situation in the past where children, particularly female, were left to fend for themselves very early in life. This has actually opened the eyes of even illiterate couples (particularly women) to resist having pregnancies they cannot adequately cater for and children they cannot train.

Moreover, in the village, farming among young people is becoming unpopular. Therefore, the pressure is always on parents to at least allow children go through primary education and thereafter learn a vocation. By this it becomes more imperative even in such a village community to abhor unplanned childbearing.

IDEAL FAMILY SIZE

The concept of ideal family size is an important indicator of attitude towards childbearing. It has been reported in the literature that as a result of the socio-cultural institutions existing in Nigeria an average person prefers high fertility (Orobuloye, 1995:138 – 139, Caldwell, 1991:230 – 231). In table 3, it appears that the socio-

cultural institutions that sustained high fertility in the past are no longer exerting much influence. From the table, the number of family size considered ideal ranges between 4.0 and 5.0; if examined critically we can read between the lines that the strict adherence to traditional ancestral beliefs of pronatalism is declining. There is what we can call cultural modernization. The fear of ancestral spirit that has propelled highly pronatalist attitude is gradually losing grip over the people. The situation in the study population is signifying the preparation of the way for unprecedented fertility decline. In one of the group discussions it was asserted that:

"Only get the number of children you cater for, many children, long chain of poverty."

The statement quoted here epitomizes the growing realization in the population that having more children may lead to poverty. This suggests the already identified revelation that attitude toward childbearing is gradually changing from quantity to quality. The wealth flow direction is changing in favour of children. According to Caldwell (1982), this situation is a welcome development for the take off of a sustainable fertility transition.

Furthermore, the ideal family size represented in the study may not be unconnected with the new wave of the idea that those who take reproductive decision should be responsible for the economic responsibility. We make this assertion due to the fact that less than 50 percent of the respondents have some of their children living away with uncles, brothers, sisters or other relatives (Table 4). Thus the attitude of spreading the cost of childbearing is fast declining. This must have accounted for the level of ideal family size reported in the study. As a result of the fact that quality training for children is gradually gaining grounds in the population, respondents must have come to the realization that childbearing is becoming quite expensive. This is true even among the illiterate men and women. Hence, fertility decline has really taken off. The change in attitude hereby asserted is a positive development.

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TABLE 3: Education and Ideal Family Size (IFS)

| EDUCATIONAL STATUS | MALE | | FEMALE | |
|--------------------|------|-----|--------|-----|
| | N | IFS | N | IFS |
| Pre-Primary | 01 | 4.0 | 01 | 5.0 |
| Primary | 32 | 5.0 | 24 | 4.5 |
| Post-Primary | 06 | 4.1 | 20 | 4.3 |
| Post-Secondary | 08 | 4.3 | - | - |
| None | 11 | 4.6 | 40 | 5.0 |
| TOTAL | 58 | - | 85 | - |

Source: Fieldwork at Ilogbo - Eremi, 1999.

TABLE 4: Education and Children Living Away From Parent

| EDUCATIONAL STATUS | MALE | | FEMALE | |
|--------------------|------|-------------------------------|--------|-------------------------------|
| | N | % Having children living away | N | % Having children living away |
| Pre-Primary | 01 | 0 | 01 | - |
| Primary | 32 | 25 | 28 | 21.43 |
| Post-Primary | 06 | 0 | 20 | 30 |
| Post-Secondary | 08 | 12.5 | - | - |
| None | 11 | 27.27 | 40 | 30 |
| TOTAL | 58 | - | 85 | - |

Source: Fieldwork at Ilogbo - Eremi, 1999.

CHILDREN AND FAMILY INCOME

It is a widely reported idea that one of the reasons for persistent high fertility in sub-Saharan Africa is the preponderate attitude of bearing children for the purpose of making them support family income and as old age security. Considering the fact that over 60 percent of the Nigerian population still lives on subsistence farming with very poor income and having barely nothing to save for

future, this reason for childbearing is still quite significant. The present study population is not an exception. Indeed, as represented in table 5, the belief that children should support family income is generally high among both men and women. The idea is quite common to all educational groups of women sampled. The percentage of women who see children as tools for raising family income is between 60 and 83.33.

Similarly, bearing children as means of old age economic security is still quite ubiquitous. Both men and women respondents across all educational status, are favourably disposed to the idea. That is, almost all men and women sampled still see children as having the responsibility of taking care of them in old age. This is one of the social factors that must be addressed through a viable social security system by the government in order to pave way for sustainable fertility decline. It must be seen as a crucial factor in rural population (even in urban population) in Nigeria, judging from Table 5 where at least 81 percent and 90 percent of men and women respectively indicated this belief.

TABLE 5: Children and Family Income (FI) Old Age Security (OAS)

| EDUCATIONAL STATUS | MALE | | | FEMALE | | |
|--------------------|------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|
| | N | FI | % OAS | N | FI | % OAS |
| Pre-Primary | 01 | - | - | 21 | - | - |
| Primary | 32 | 37.5 | 100 | 24 | 83.33 | 95.85 |
| Post-Primary | 06 | 16.67 | 100 | 20 | 60 | 90 |
| Post-Secondary | 08 | 75 | 87.5 | - | - | - |
| None | 11 | 54.55 | 81.82 | 40 | 80 | 92.5 |
| TOTAL | 58 | - | - | 85 | - | - |

FI: Percentage of respondent in favour of children contribution to family income

OAS: Percentage of respondents who want children as old age security.

Source: Fieldwork at Ilogbo – Eremi, 1999.

Related to this submission is the common practice of sex preference in which case male children are preferred to their female counterpart. In the study population, table 6, we observe that high proportion of male respondents prefer male children (between 45.45 and 53.13 percent) while their female counterparts are favourably disposed to any of the two sexes. In fact between 55 and 80.07 percents of male and female respondents respectively indicated that they are satisfied with any of them. The discussion in one of the focus groups yields the statement below which throw more light on the preference for a particular sex:

"Female children are not real children because they are normally lost to marriage."

The basis of this statement is simply the idea of having children as old age security. That female children are normally given out in marriage when due. Thus, prevents them to really reap economic benefit from them since unlike their male counterparts they often submit their wishes to their husbands. I think the consciousness of the continuity of lineage that has been entrenched in Nigerian family structure (Caldwell, 1991: 231) is also responsible for the ubiquitous nature of this belief in the study population. Therefore, for real sustainable fertility transition to spread in both rural and urban population conscious efforts should be directed at alleviating poverty and effective social security system should be evolved.

TABLE 6: Sex preference

| EDUCATIONAL STATUS | MALE | | | | FEMALE | | | |
|--------------------|------|-------|--------|-------|--------|------|--------|-------|
| | N | Male | Female | Any | N | Male | Female | Any |
| Pre-Primary | 01 | - | - | - | 01 | - | - | - |
| Primary | 32 | 53.13 | 12.2 | 34.37 | 24 | 8.33 | 16.67 | 75 |
| Post-Primary | 06 | 50 | 33.33 | 16.67 | 20 | 15 | 30 | 55 |
| Post-Secondary | 08 | 50 | 12.5 | 37.5 | - | - | - | - |
| None | 11 | 45.45 | 9.01 | 45.45 | 40 | 12.5 | 75 | 80.07 |
| TOTAL | 58 | - | - | - | 85 | - | - | - |

Source: Fieldwork at Ilogbo – Eremi, 1999.

CONCLUSION

The preceding discussion has considered the present attitudes of men and women toward childbearing and childrearing compared with what has been reported in the past. Based on both qualitative and quantitative data elicited in the sampled population, it is apparent that positive changes are taking place as regards age at first marriage and what is considered ideal family size. Also the attention of parents have begun to shift from quantity of children to quality training for children. Thus, the direction of wealth flow is changing in favour of children and not parents.

However, the common attitude of raising children with the aim of making them support family income as well as old age economic security has not fully changed. Thus, although the level of fertility in the population has begun to decline, compared with the past, there is need for a larger scale investigation into the attitude toward childbearing for the purpose of economic ventures in order to fashion out sustainable policies that could effect fertility transition.

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