

PDF - VALUE OF CHILDREN AND INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONS IN CULTURAL CONTEXT -

researchcub.info The present study attempts to partly replicate and partly modify the original "Value of Children Study". It is based on the achievements of the original VOC study and attempts to overcome its shortcomings by carrying out a multi-level analysis of the relations between contextual factors, individual value orientations, and parent-child relations over the life span in three generations. The cross-cultural and culture-specific approach is applied to the study of personal and relationship variables including investment in children and/or parents. Along with the theoretical and the methodological conceptualization of the main study, some data from the pilot study focusing on the Chinese studies are presented. The results are discussed with respect to the general model and the question of transmission of values in times of social change. The present study attempts to contribute to a better understanding of some of the psychological processes involved in social change. Ongoing changes within

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Gisela Trommsdorff, Ga ng Zheng, Twila Tardif demographic trends, value orientations, and intergenerational relations are dealt with from a cross-cultural and culture-psychological perspective. In different parts of the world, fertility, life expectancy, and population size are related differently. While in some countries overpopulation is increasing, in other countries the population is declining. Declining fertility rates in affluent industrialized countries contrast with high fertility rates in poor underdeveloped countries. In both cases, economic and socio-political problems are seen as both the causal factors for and the consequence of these demographic developments. Declining fertility rates and increasing life expectancy are inverting the pyramidal population structure in societies currently experiencing high economic productivity. These demographic problems were discussed several decades ago, and since then they have even worsened. Obviously, these problems cannot be dealt with starting from a simple causal line of reasoning. The accelerating demographic changes have turned out to be a precondition and at the same time a consequence of socio-economic changes. A single factor theory is not useful to explain these changes since these demographic changes are related to numerous political, economic, social, and psychological factors. In societies with high fertility the problem is to ensure sufficient material and psychological well-being, including economic security and education for the younger generation. In countries with a high birth rate in which the number of children and adolescents is higher as compared to other age groups, children are at risk to experience less care and formal education since their parents

must invest in many children. In countries with declining fertility the situation is reversed: the growing number of elderly need a growing amount of support while, due to the low birth rate, relatively little manpower is actively engaged in the labor market. On the other hand, children and adolescents experience a longer period of formal education and manifold career opportunities. However, due to the inverted demographic pyramid in these societies the younger generations face the problem of having to provide financial and other support for a growing number of older fellow citizens while at the same time investing in their own future. These demographic phenomena are presumably related to value changes (value of children and value of family) which in turn may affect parenting and parent-child relations over the life span. These aspects of intergenerational relations may be seen as a process for the transmission of values which affect the next generation's decision to have a child, the quality of child-rearing practices, and again the intention of parents and their children to "invest" in each other's (material, social and psychological) well-being and development. Therefore, several generations and several countries need to be included in order to study these questions.

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The "Value-of-Children" Approach

So far, population growth and decline have mostly been studied by demographers, economists, and sociologists. However, psychological problems cannot be ignored. Here the question arises whether demographic differences between societies may not only be related to political, societal, and economic conditions but also to psychological factors, including culture-specific beliefs and value orientations. Furthermore, the changing demographic situation constitutes a specific context with new challenges and problems for individuals and their families. The psychological question of relevance for our topic is how people in different cultures deal with these changes and how intergenerational relations are affected. Several studies on fertility take into account that fertility is based on individual decision making. The general assumption is that this decision is influenced by socio-economic and political conditions on the macro-level. Accordingly, it has often been assumed that high fertility is related to the economic value of children: when children are important for the economic productivity of the household, and their economic utility is high, then the number of children born should be higher than when children's economic utility is low (for a summary see Nauck & Kohlmann, 1999; Nauck, in press). The shortcomings of this view are obvious. On the one hand, it does not explain why children are born under circumstances of low economic utility (e.g., in high-income families) or when they imply high economic costs. The question therefore is why do people have children when having and bringing up children is expensive, e.g., since parents have to invest time and money to raise their children. Furthermore, the economic utility approach does not explain why the birth rate is high in many countries even though the children cannot significantly contribute to a low family income (e.g., in case of unemployment). Besides the economic utility as the basis of a "rational choice" to have children, other psychological aspects need to be taken into account in order to explain why people decide to have a child. This was the starting point for the original "Value of Children Study" (VaC), which was carried out more than three decades ago. The original VOC study emerged out of

demographic research in the 1970s and included a social psychological perspective. In addition, to studying the impact of economic factors on fertility, questions about psychological conditions for fertility (Hoffman & Hoffman, 1973; Kagitcibasi, 1982a, 1982b) and parenting (Hoffman, 1987) were later taken into account. Thus, the VOC study has contributed to a better understanding of differences in fertility by including psychological variables in a complex model which takes into account the macro-, meso-, and micro-level. This comprehensive interdisciplinary and cross-cultural study took into account socio-economic, cultural and psychological aspects of fertility in nine countries, 584 Gisela Trommsdorff, Gang Zheng, Twila Tardif including extensive surveys in the USA, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, and Turkey, with a total of 20,000 married people, mostly women (see the monographs published by the East-West Population Institute at the East-West Center in Honolulu, Hawaii; Arnold et al., 1975; Fawcett, 1973; Hoffman, 1987, 1988; Hoffman & Hoffman, 1973; Kagitcibasi, 1982a, 1982b). Only a few replications of the original VOC study have been carried out so far including smaller samples in China (Beijing) (Lin, Wan, Jing, & Hoffman, 1995), Turkey (Ataca & Sunar, 1999) and Iran (Aghajanian, 1988). Also, the VOC instrument has been used in some smaller studies to measure young parents' value of children (e.g., Quaiser-Pohl & Nickel, 1998). The main goal of the original VOC study was to test expected relationships between socio-economic factors, the value of children, and fertility. The "value of children" was thus conceived of as a psychological construct referring to the expected benefits of having children as compared to the expected costs and disadvantages. Accordingly, the value of children was understood as reflecting parents' motivation to bear and rear children. This motivation includes personal goals and is based on one's own socialization experiences; thus it is related to cultural values. The value of children was conceived of as a psychological variable mediating between contextual factors and fertility. This concept was measured by structured interviews and open questions. These included an assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of having a child in general and the personal "reasons" for wanting a/another child. The instruments were designed to measure the value of children in general and the value of having one's own children. Young parents (mostly mothers) from nine countries were included in the sample.

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