INTERACTION AND FAMILY PLANNING IN THE FRENCH URBAN FAMILY

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RESUMEN

Durante los dos últimos años el Centro Nacional de Investigación Científica llevó a cabo una encuesta entre 550 familias de áreas urbanas de Francia para estudiar la interacción entre los conyuges. La encuesta se realizó con la asistencia del Centro Nacional de Investigación Científica de Francia y el Servicio de Salud Pública de los Estados Unidos. La información obtenida destaca la importancia de la interacción conjugal en el éxito de la planificación de la familia.

El problema en discusión es el siguiente: ¿Hasta que punto las variables socio-económicas (salario del esposo, nivel de educación, ocupación, etc.), están más estrechamente relacionadas con el éxito de la planificación familiar de la pareja, que las variables de interacción positiva (acuerdo y comunicación entre los esposos, igualdad de poder en el proceso de tomar decisiones, etc.)?

El estudio realizado en Indianapolis no ha respondido a esta pregunta; en tanto que la investigación sobre planificación de la familia en Puerto Rico ha demostrado que el grado de libertad de la esposa y la comunicación entre los conyuges tenían una relación más estrecha con el éxito de la planificación de la familia, que el nivel de ingreso del esposo o su educación. Se podría pensar que este resultado está ligado a la muestra de Puerto Rico en la cual los niveles de ingreso y educación fueron generalmente bajos.

El estudio hecho en Francia, aplicado a una muestra estratificada de acuerdo al nivel socio-económico del esposo, señala que esta última hipótesis no es válida: al igual que en la investigación de Puerto Rico, los factores de interacción positiva de la pareja (acuerdo y comunicación entre los esposos, igualdad de poder en la toma de decisiones, etc.) están más íntimamente asociados con el éxito de la planificación familiar o con la terminación de una fecundidad excesiva, que las variables socio-económicas. Estos resultados demuestran también la importancia de la educación de la pareja como un factor determinante en el buen éxito de un programa de planificación de la familia.

SUMMARY

During the last two years, a survey about interaction in the couple has been conducted among 550 urban families in France by the National Center for Scientific Research, with the assistance of the United States Public Health Service. The data given here are relative to the importance of the couple’s interaction in the realization of family planning goals.

These data are used to answer the question, are socioeconomic variables (husband’s level of education, occupation, and income, for example) more closely correlated with the success of the couple’s family planning than are the variables of positive interaction (agreement, communication, and equality in decision-making, for example)?

While the Indianapolis study has not answered this question, the Puerto Rican study has shown that freedom of the wife and communication between spouses were more closely connected with the success of the couple’s family planning than are the variables of positive interaction (agreement, communication, and equality in decision-making, for example)?

The French survey, undertaken with a random sample stratified according to the socioeconomic level of the husband, shows that this last hypothesis is not true. Just as in the Puerto Rican study, the factors of positive interaction in the couple are more closely associated with the success of family planning—particularly with the eradication of excessive fertility—than with socioeconomic variables. These results show the importance of the couple’s education as a determining factor in a successful family planning program.

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The importance of the interaction of the couple for the success of family planning is one of the recent themes in family sociology. It first appeared in the Indianapolis study, which revealed that happy marriage is associated with the eradication of excessive fertility and with the realization of the family planning goals of the number of children and the interval between births. At that time, it was hypothesized that the success of family planning in the couple is related to marital adjustment.

The Puerto Rican survey, conducted in 1959 by Reuben Hill, J. Mayone Stycos, and Kurt Back, further analyzed the correlation of the interaction in the couple with the success of family planning. The survey was conducted among the population of Puerto Rico whose level of income and education was much lower than the level of the white American population in the Indianapolis study. The Puerto Rican study showed that, besides the dynamic variables of the couple (values concerning modernization and preference for the small family), instrumental variables play a very important role in the success of family planning. Among the latter, the accent was put on communication between husband and wife about the number of children wanted as the most important factor for the success of family planning.

Can these results, which did not appear clearly in the Indianapolis study because analysis concerning interaction in the couple was not as deep as in the Puerto Rican study, be extended to the French urban population, which by level of income and education is different from both the American population (whose standards are higher) and the Puerto Rican population (whose standards are lower)?

Research conducted in France among an urban population of 550 married couples permits one to give some partial answers to this question. The 550 couples (whose wives were less than 60 years of age at the time of the survey), interviewed according to a random sample, gave the following data:

1. The real number of children when the woman was more than 45 years old, or the expected number of children in the couples where the woman was less than 45 years old.
2. The number of children wanted by the couple (a) at the moment of marriage or (b) during the marriage if there had been a change since the beginning of the marriage.

Comparison of these data permits the evaluation of the extent to which the French couples have or have not succeeded in family planning.

The French survey studied only family planning for number of children and not the interval between births, while both of these aspects of family planning were evaluated in the Indianapolis study. This limitation of the term, "family planning," was imposed by the empirical data collected in the French survey and does not intend to impoverish the theoretical meaning of this term.

It is necessary to note that in the exposure of the data, realization of family planning goals for the number of children will be analyzed separately from efficiency of contraception. In actuality, a couple can fail to have the total number of wanted children not only when inefficiency of contraception results in more than the desired number, but when external circumstances (separation of the couple during the war, shortage of housing, and so on) have exerted pressure on the couple to have a number of children less than the wanted number. In this case, there is no deficiency in contraception, but there is failure to realize family planning goals.

\[2\] Ibid.
\[3\] Ibid., p. 301.
