

THE FORMATION AND STABILITY OF IDEAL FAMILY SIZE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

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Abstract—A sample of 1,123 sixth, ninth, and twelfth graders in two Southern counties was questioned to ascertain how many children they think is ideal. More than three-fourths of the students in each grade had given thought to an ideal number of children for themselves; fewer had thought about the ideal number for the average American couple. Two and three children were the modal responses; mean ideal sizes were 3.02 for self and 3.16 for the average couple. The range of acceptable fertility behavior, "too few" or "too many" children, is defined by medians of 1.56 and 5.96. Ideal and acceptable family sizes increase slightly in the higher grades. A sex difference in ideals appeared only at grade 12; girls wanted more children. Negroes wanted fewer children than did whites at grade 6, more at grade 12. Size of family of orientation was directly related to ideals at grades 6 and 9, but the relation was curvilinear at grade 12. The direct relation between ideals and socioeconomic status became more pronounced at grade 12. Ideal sizes were larger for Catholics than for other religious groups. The study lends at least minimal support to the notion that early socialization affects ideas about family size.

For several years now, demographers have been analyzing data on how many children the adult population thinks is ideal for themselves and for an average family to have (Freedman and Sharp, 1954; Whelpton, Campbell, and Patterson, 1966; Westoff, Potter, and Sagi, 1963; Blake, 1966). Such information has proven useful in developing more refined models for projecting the trend of births and, when related to the characteristics of the respondents, in determining what factors may influence family size (for example, Yeracaris, 1959; Freedman, Whelpton, and Campbell, 1959; references above).

It is reasonable to assume that, in societies with advanced technology and a value system which stresses rationality in decision-making, ideals will corre-

spond fairly closely to behavior. As a case in point, recent developments in contraceptive techniques make ideals about family size more of a reality for couples who have access to these new methods. Higgins (1962, p. 70) puts it succinctly:

As a consequence of the availability of contraceptives, questions pertaining to ideal family size have become practical issues; contraception means that countless couples can, with greater or less success, realize their family size ideals.

Most of the research on ideal family size among adults has found a great consensus among the population on a two-to-four child range as the best family size (Whelpton, Campbell, and Patterson, 1966, p. 33; Blake, 1966, p. 163).

Some writers have been prompted to state that a norm exists concerning ideal family size which partly accounts for this consensus. Freedman (1967, p. 1) illustrates this line of thinking:

I assume that in any organized society, and especially in a developed society, the frequency distribution of family size is a social fact considerably affected by social norms about how many children married couples ought to have. Like other social norms those about reproduction are likely to specify a range of permissible behavior. The probability of undesirable social consequences including sanctions increases at the margin of this range and much more outside of the range.

Indeed, in many cultures sanctions are brought to bear if a couple is childless. In some societies, barrenness on the part of a woman is adequate grounds for divorce; in others, it reflects on the virility of the male and the physical adequacy of the female and affects behavior toward such people. Couples having many children, on the other hand, may be rewarded in a society which seeks a larger population and penalized in one where very large families tax community resources.

Given the usefulness of data on ideal family size, and the evidence that perhaps a norm or normative range on how many children people should have exists in the population, it would seem reasonable to try to find out when and how these ideals about family size come to be formed, how stable they are, and what factors might modify them. Little or no empirical data can be found to answer these questions. In the reports on the Indianapolis Study, Kiser and Whelpton suggested that family size preferences were developed at an early age and speculated that data on the preferences of young people would have theoretical value. They write:

. . . problems arise because childhood is recalled so selectively. This does not mean, however, that future research should ignore the childhood milieu. With the aid of more

appropriate study designs certain early influences may yet appear as important determinants of fertility. (Kiser and Whelpton, 1958, p. 296.)

Other authors have speculated on how family size ideals may be formed among young people. Hendershot (1967), for example, has stated that perhaps family size preferences are formed in one of two ways: (1) as a result of direct communication of mother's ideas about family size; or (2) as a result of transmission of various patterns of family interaction and roles which the daughter then attempts to reproduce in her own family.

Kantner and Potter (1954) cite these two ways of transmission but also name the possibility that parents teach young people various ways of coping with problems through emphasizing deferred gratification, which might lead to postponement of children, or by emphasizing impetuous and immediate action. These factors combined may influence ideals developed by the young person.

A study by Bumpass (1967) provides some indirect empirical support for the notion that ideals about family size are formed early in life, remain fairly stable, and affect later fertility. He found that women with no children are as stable in their fertility expectations as are women with children, and that if change occurs at all, it usually occurs in the direction of ideals.

The most complete hypothesis on the role of childhood in the formation of family size ideals has been stated by Westoff and Potvin (1966, p. 496). They write:

. . . a normative range of family size (e.g., two to four children) is internalized by the girl during the period of late childhood and early adolescence (say 8 to 13) in much the same way as a child learns other values and styles of interaction. Of particular relevance in the formulation of these family-size norms is the number of siblings within the girl's own family, within the families of her play-

mates, and within other reference groups to which she is exposed. Determinants of this early context in which socialization to the norms of family size takes place are religion, ethnic and class membership. . . .

In the present study, attention was turned to the existence of family-size preferences among young people, to the discovery of factors which might be related to the formation of these ideals in early years, and to the stability of these preferences during the early part of the life cycle. (For information about the full study, see Gustavus, 1968.) Specifically, the purpose of the study was threefold:

1. To find out to what extent young people have given thought to an ideal family size, and at how young an age such a consideration is found.

2. To ascertain the number of children young people think is ideal for various persons to have, and to see if this ideal changes during the adolescent years.

3. To measure differences in these ideals among groups of young people classified according to their demographic, social, and economic characteristics.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Information was obtained from sixth, ninth, and twelfth graders in several Southern schools in the winter of 1968. It was felt that identification of grade level would help to indicate how early in the life cycle family size ideals are formed and to what extent they change with age. It was recognized, however, that comparing ideals for students at different grade levels would only give an approximation to measurement of cohort changes in ideal family size. The sixth graders of today are not necessarily the ninth or twelfth graders of three or six years hence. School dropouts are missing from the older groups, and rapid social change may play a part in creating differences. Nevertheless, the sample was designed to permit comparisons of the

three groups while recognizing these limitations.

A stratified sample of 1,123 students was drawn from the schools in Leon County, Florida, and Thomas County, Georgia. The sample included Negroes and whites of all socioeconomic levels. Middle class Negroes were largely found in the secondary and elementary schools attached to a nearby university which is predominantly Negro. Care was taken not to draw samples from school classes where the children were stratified by ability. An administered questionnaire was used in sixth, ninth, and twelfth grade classes during school time. The questionnaire was read aloud to students and an effort made to respond to each student's questions in the same way. Simple words were employed due to the age of the youths in the sample and aid was given in understanding and marking the questionnaire when necessary.

RESULTS

Respondents were asked if they had ever thought about ideal family size prior to the survey, so that it would be possible to indicate whether the preferences registered were reflecting decisions made prior to filling out the questionnaire or decisions made at that time. Two questions measured this variable, one asking whether they had ever thought about an ideal number of children for themselves, and one asking if they had ever thought about what would be the ideal family size for an average American couple. Table 1 shows that, at all grade levels, over three-fourths of the students said they had thought about how many children would be ideal for them. Fewer at each level reported having thought about an ideal for the average American couple.

Females were more likely than males to have thought about ideal family size in each context and at each grade level. The Negro children more often said they had thought about ideal family size than

TABLE 1.—Percentage of Students Who Report Having Thought About Ideal Family Size for the Average American Couple and for Self, by Selected Characteristics: Grades 6, 9, and 12 in Two Southern Counties, 1968

| Characteristic | Ideal for avg. couple, grade | | | Ideal for self, grade | | | Number of students, grade | | |
|---|------------------------------|----|-----|-----------------------|----|----|---------------------------|-----|-----|
| | 6 | 9 | 12 | 6 | 9 | 12 | 6 | 9 | 12 |
| All students | 65 | 77 | 84 | 76 | 84 | 88 | 375 | 438 | 306 |
| SEX | | | | | | | | | |
| Male | 60 | 69 | 76 | 64 | 75 | 75 | 194 | 202 | 139 |
| Female | 70 | 84 | 90 | 87 | 91 | 96 | 181 | 235 | 167 |
| RACE | | | | | | | | | |
| White | 57 | 78 | 82 | 68 | 83 | 84 | 213 | 277 | 202 |
| Negro | 74 | 76 | 88 | 85 | 85 | 91 | 163 | 160 | 104 |
| NUMBER OF SIBLINGS | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 or fewer | 52 | 80 | 81 | 66 | 80 | 90 | 73 | 95 | 70 |
| 3 or 4 | 64 | 78 | 83 | 70 | 83 | 81 | 153 | 182 | 144 |
| 5 or more | 71 | 75 | 88 | 84 | 91 | 92 | 150 | 151 | 92 |
| FATHER'S OCCU- PATIONAL SCORE ^a | | | | | | | | | |
| 0 - 29 (low) | 74 | 86 | 89 | 81 | 90 | 93 | 69 | 50 | 28 |
| 30 - 59 | 64 | 73 | 84 | 80 | 79 | 92 | 85 | 104 | 73 |
| 60 - 79 | 65 | 80 | 80 | 77 | 85 | 80 | 60 | 82 | 54 |
| 80 - 100 (high) | 58 | 74 | 85 | 66 | 81 | 85 | 115 | 145 | 111 |
| RELIGION | | | | | | | | | |
| Catholic | 65 | 74 | 100 | 65 | 83 | 92 | 54 | 35 | 12 |
| Baptist | 66 | 76 | 88 | 76 | 85 | 90 | 187 | 226 | 154 |
| Methodist | 62 | 80 | 77 | 78 | 88 | 84 | 64 | 77 | 62 |
| Other Protestant | 65 | 76 | 80 | 77 | 77 | 81 | 66 | 95 | 64 |

a - Excludes approximately 13 percent of the students who did not report father's occupation.

did the white children, except among the ninth graders, where the white children had a higher percentage reporting they had thought about ideal family size for the average American couple. This difference is quite small, however.

Whether or not the respondents thought about ideal family size is differently related at each grade level to the number of siblings respondents have. Table 1 shows that having thought about ideal family size is directly related to number of siblings among the sixth graders. Among the ninth graders number of siblings is directly related to having thought about ideal family size for self, but apparently inversely related to having thought about the ideal number for an average American couple. There is a curvilinear relationship among the twelfth graders between number of siblings and having thought about an ideal number for self, and a direct relation-

ship with having thought about the ideal number for an average couple.

Table 1 also shows that while father's occupational score (based on U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1963; and Nam and Powers, 1968) used as a measure of socioeconomic status (SES), is inversely related to having thought about ideal family size among the sixth graders, the two variables show no clear relationship among the ninth and twelfth graders. Finally, while the sixth grade Catholic children least often reported having thought about ideal family size for themselves, twelfth grade Catholics reported having thought about ideal family size for themselves more often than did the twelfth grade children of other religious groups. However, because of the limited sample size of some categories, comparisons among religious groups at different grade levels are unreliable.

While no hypothesis was formulated

prior to the study concerning differences in ideal family size by grade, this variable was included in an effort to determine at what age these ideals begin to appear. Preliminary analysis of the data indicated that ideal family size varied between the sixth and twelfth grades and that certain of the social and economic variables used showed differential effect on ideal family size between these grade levels. Consequently, all of the data on ideal family size will be presented by grade level.

Table 2 shows the percentage distributions of how many children the students said would be ideal, by various characteristics. The students were asked to choose an ideal number for themselves, for an average American couple, and for their parents, whether they had previously thought about these questions or not. Perhaps most obvious in Table 2

is the clustering of responses to the first two of these questions within the two-to-four child range found in recent fertility studies of the adult population (Whelpton, Campbell, and Patterson, 1966, p. 33). Two and three children were the most popular choices as ideals for self and for the average American couple. The mean number of children chosen for the average couple was 3.16, while the mean number chosen for self was 3.02. In each case, the mean ideal increases with grade level, although the increments between grade levels are small.

Each of the respondents was also asked how many children he thought would be too many and how many would be too few when he had his own family. The medians of these two distributions also shown in Table 2, were 5.96 and 1.56 children, respectively. It may be said that these two figures constitute the

TABLE 2.—Percentage Distribution of Students by Number of Children Reported as Ideal for Average American Couple and for Self, Making Family Too Large or Too Small, and Desirable for Their Parents: Grades 6, 9, and 12 in Two Southern Counties, 1968

| Item and grade | Number of children | | | | | | | | | No number | Mean |
|--|--------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-----|------|-----------|------|
| | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8+ | | |
| IDEAL: AVG. COUPLE | | | | | | | | | | | |
| All students . . . | 0.4 | 1.1 | 29.4 | 32.9 | 29.1 | 4.4 | 1.3 | 0.2 | 1.2 | ... | 3.16 |
| Sixth graders. . . | 0.8 | 1.9 | 37.0 | 27.5 | 23.5 | 6.1 | 1.3 | 0.0 | 1.9 | ... | 3.06 |
| Ninth graders. . . | 0.2 | 0.7 | 29.0 | 32.0 | 31.5 | 3.9 | 1.1 | 0.5 | 1.1 | ... | 3.19 |
| Twelfth graders. . . | 0.3 | 0.7 | 20.6 | 40.5 | 32.7 | 2.9 | 1.6 | 0.0 | 0.7 | ... | 3.24 |
| IDEAL: SELF | | | | | | | | | | | |
| All students . . . | 4.3 | 3.4 | 35.2 | 23.7 | 22.5 | 4.2 | 3.1 | 1.0 | 2.6 | ... | 3.02 |
| Sixth graders. . . | 2.9 | 4.5 | 42.2 | 21.6 | 19.7 | 3.2 | 2.4 | 1.1 | 2.4 | ... | 2.90 |
| Ninth graders. . . | 5.7 | 3.2 | 34.9 | 22.3 | 23.5 | 3.4 | 3.6 | 0.9 | 2.5 | ... | 2.99 |
| Twelfth graders. . . | 4.0 | 2.3 | 27.2 | 28.1 | 24.5 | 6.6 | 3.3 | 1.0 | 3.0 | ... | 3.23 |
| FAMILY TOO LARGE | | | | | | | | | | | |
| All students . . . | ... | 1.6 | 1.5 | 3.8 | 13.7 | 26.4 | 18.7 | 7.2 | 19.0 | 8.1 | ... |
| Sixth graders. . . | 0.3 | 1.1 | 2.1 | 4.0 | 13.0 | 21.5 | 16.8 | 8.8 | 24.2 | 8.2 | ... |
| Ninth graders. . . | 0.4 | 1.6 | 1.8 | 4.6 | 14.2 | 29.4 | 19.6 | 6.2 | 16.0 | 6.2 | ... |
| Twelfth graders. . . | ... | 2.3 | 0.3 | 2.6 | 13.8 | 27.6 | 19.7 | 6.9 | 17.0 | 9.8 | ... |
| FAMILY TOO SMALL | | | | | | | | | | | |
| All students . . . | 18.8 | 51.1 | 16.3 | 5.8 | 1.2 | 0.9 | 0.3 | 0.6 | 0.2 | 4.8 | ... |
| Sixth graders. . . | 18.9 | 51.8 | 15.7 | 5.3 | 0.8 | 0.8 | 0.5 | 1.1 | 0.0 | 5.1 | ... |
| Ninth graders. . . | 18.7 | 52.7 | 15.5 | 5.7 | 1.8 | 1.1 | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.2 | 3.9 | ... |
| Twelfth graders. . . | 19.0 | 48.5 | 18.3 | 6.5 | 0.6 | 0.6 | 0.0 | 0.6 | 0.3 | 5.6 | ... |
| DESIRABLE FOR THEIR PARENTS^a | | | | | | | | | | | |
| All students . . . | 1.4 | 4.6 | 14.7 | 24.4 | 28.0 | 12.1 | 7.4 | 3.1 | 4.3 | ... | 3.80 |
| Sixth graders. . . | 0.5 | 5.6 | 13.4 | 23.6 | 26.3 | 13.7 | 9.1 | 3.2 | 4.6 | ... | 3.90 |
| Ninth graders. . . | 1.1 | 3.7 | 16.6 | 24.6 | 28.0 | 12.0 | 6.4 | 3.0 | 4.6 | ... | 3.79 |
| Twelfth graders. . . | 3.0 | 4.6 | 13.9 | 25.1 | 29.9 | 10.6 | 6.3 | 3.0 | 3.6 | ... | 3.68 |

a - Number students said their parents should have had.

boundary points of *acceptable* fertility behavior, as opposed to the range of *ideal* fertility behavior. The grade differentials on these two items were consistent with the differentials in mean ideal family size reported above, in that the high school seniors in the sample were slightly more willing to accept larger families for themselves than were the younger students.

The respondents' reports of how many children they thought their parents should have had is shown at the bottom of Table 2. The mean of this distribution is larger than the mean number of children for the average American couple or for self. As Table 3 helps confirm, this mean seemed to be influenced by the actual size of the respondents' families. While the ideal family size for self and for the average American couple are positively correlated with the number of siblings the children had, these correlations are smaller than corresponding correlations for the number of children respondents thought parents should have had. It is difficult to tell what factors are operating here but several hypotheses are possible. It may be that students have had a pleasant experience in their own families and wish to endorse their parents' choice of number of children. Alternatively, these young people may not have been able to respond to a question about how many children their parents should have had without think-

ing of brothers and sisters and being hesitant to "eliminate" any of them. Because the number of children young people think their parents should have had varied so consistently with the number of children they actually had, further reports of this variable will be dropped to concentrate on variations in own and average ideal family size.

Table 4 shows the mean ideal family size for an average American couple and for self by grade and several social and economic characteristics. Based on other research, it was hypothesized that girls would want more children for themselves and for the average couple than would boys. Table 1 has already shown that the girls in the sample did report having thought about ideal family size more often than did the boys. Yet in Table 4 it is apparent that the hypothesis about ideals does not hold among those in the sixth and ninth grades. Among the twelfth graders, the girls wanted slightly more children than did the boys. Since recent studies dealing with the adult population have found that ideal family size is generally larger among women than among men, it might be suggested here that this sex difference is just beginning to appear by the twelfth grade.

Looking at mean ideal family size by race in Table 4, it can be seen that the white children in the lower grades chose slightly larger families for themselves than did the Negro children, with little difference showing up among the twelfth graders. While the sixth grade white children chose slightly more children as ideal for the average couple than did the Negro sixth graders, the ninth and twelfth grade Negro children selected slightly more children as ideal for the average couple than did their white counterparts. It is interesting that the Negro children consistently chose fewer children for themselves than they chose for the average American couple. This was not always true for the white children and when it was, the differential

TABLE 3.—Correlation Coefficients (Pearsonian *r*'s) Between Size of Family of Orientation and Size of Family Ideal for Self, Ideal for Average American Couple, and Desirable for Their Parents: Grades 6, 9, and 12 in Two Southern Counties, 1968

| Grade | Ideal for | | Desirable for parents |
|------------------|-----------|-------------|-----------------------|
| | Self | Avg. couple | |
| All students | +0.04 | +0.10 | +0.49 |
| Sixth graders. | +0.11 | +0.11 | +0.53 |
| Ninth graders. | +0.03 | +0.15 | +0.42 |
| Twelfth graders. | +0.01 | +0.02 | +0.54 |

TABLE 4.—Mean Ideal Family Size for Average American Couple and for Self, as Reported by Students, by Selected Characteristics: Grades 6, 9, and 12 in Two Southern Counties, 1968

| Characteristic | Ideal for avg. couple, grade | | | Ideal for self, grade | | |
|---|------------------------------|------|------|-----------------------|------|------|
| | 6 | 9 | 12 | 6 | 9 | 12 |
| All students | 3.06 | 3.19 | 3.24 | 2.90 | 2.99 | 3.23 |
| SEX | | | | | | |
| Male | 3.07 | 3.22 | 3.17 | 2.93 | 3.00 | 3.09 |
| Female | 3.05 | 3.16 | 3.29 | 2.85 | 2.98 | 3.34 |
| RACE | | | | | | |
| White | 3.12 | 3.18 | 3.16 | 2.95 | 3.12 | 3.21 |
| Negro | 2.98 | 3.21 | 3.38 | 2.83 | 2.75 | 3.25 |
| NUMBER OF SIBLINGS | | | | | | |
| 2 or fewer | 2.82 | 2.85 | 3.28 | 2.67 | 2.88 | 3.37 |
| 3 or 4 | 3.09 | 3.25 | 3.21 | 2.92 | 3.08 | 3.09 |
| 5 or more | 3.13 | 3.29 | 3.27 | 2.97 | 2.97 | 3.35 |
| FATHER'S OCCU- PATIONAL SCORE ^a | | | | | | |
| 0 - 29 (low) | 2.98 | 3.16 | 3.11 | 2.78 | 2.60 | 2.84 |
| 30 - 59 | 2.73 | 3.22 | 3.37 | 2.56 | 2.85 | 3.15 |
| 60 - 79 | 3.33 | 3.12 | 3.41 | 3.13 | 3.11 | 3.27 |
| 80 - 100 (high) | 3.16 | 3.21 | 3.16 | 3.10 | 3.10 | 3.53 |
| RELIGION | | | | | | |
| Catholic | 3.55 | 3.36 | 3.75 | 3.62 | 3.28 | 4.00 |
| Baptist | 2.95 | 3.20 | 3.27 | 2.67 | 2.82 | 3.22 |
| Methodist | 3.11 | 3.18 | 3.27 | 2.91 | 3.09 | 3.19 |
| Other Protestant | 2.91 | 3.13 | 3.19 | 2.94 | 3.23 | 3.36 |

a - Excludes approximately 13 percent of the students who did not report father's occupation.

was slight. It might be hypothesized that the Negro children were more likely than were the white children to think of themselves as different from the average American and thus to choose more discrepant ideals in these two situations. (For an elaboration of these data, see Gustavus and Mommsen, 1969).

Table 4 shows mean ideal family size by the number of siblings students have. The correlations reported earlier showed a decreasing relationship from the sixth to the twelfth grade between these two variables. An examination of the means in Table 4 emphasizes this finding. Mean ideal family size for both self and the average couple seems to be directly related to number of siblings among the sixth graders, and directly but less clearly related among the ninth graders. The relationship is more curvilinear by the twelfth grade, with those in the very smallest and the very largest families wanting the greatest number of children for themselves.

Table 4 would seem to indicate that

there is little clear relationship between ideals for the average couple and SES. Own ideals and SES are generally directly related, however. This relationship is slightly erratic in the sixth grade and varies within a range of 2.8 to 3.1 children. In the ninth grade, the relationship is again slightly erratic but the range is wider, from 2.6 to 3.1 children. Finally, in the twelfth grade, the relationship is clearly direct and the range is the greatest of the three grades, from 2.8 to 3.5 children.

A limited number of Catholic students in the sample makes conclusions concerning religious differentials in ideal family size only tentative. However, Table 4 shows that the Catholic students always chose larger ideal family sizes for themselves and for an average couple than did the students in other religious groups.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study may be summarized as follows: (1) The vast

majority of young people sampled said they had previously given thought to an ideal family size. Even three-fourths of those in the sixth grade reported thinking about an ideal number of children for themselves to have. (2) The percentages who said they had previously thought about ideal family size were slightly higher for girls than boys and for Negroes than whites. There were no clear relationships between such a consideration and religion, socioeconomic status, or size of family of orientation. (3) The ideal family size of these young people clustered in the two-to-four child range with two and three children being the modal categories. (4) Mean ideal family size for the average American couple (3.16) was slightly higher than the mean ideal for themselves (3.02). The means for both referents appeared to increase with each higher grade level. (5) Students in the sample reported a median number of children of less than 1.56 as too few and of more than 5.96 as too many. This indicates the range of acceptable fertility behavior. (6) Differentials in ideal family size were observed for several population characteristics. Although no differences in ideals were noted between boys and girls in the earlier grades, in the twelfth grade girls wanted more children than did boys. At the sixth grade, Negroes wanted fewer children than did whites, but the situation reversed itself at the twelfth grade. Size of family of orientation was directly related to ideals at grades six and nine but the relationship became curvilinear by grade twelve. Ideals were greatest among the higher socioeconomic groups at all grades, and the difference became more pronounced at the higher grades. Catholics had higher ideal family size than did other religious categories.

These data on the formation of ideal family size among young people would seem to have several important implications for a general theory of fertility. First, it is apparent that young people

can verbalize an ideal number of children for themselves as early as the sixth grade. The ideal family size range of two to four children matches the range generally given by adult samples, although the mean ideal among these young people is slightly smaller than that given by adults in other studies.

The data tend to support the hypothesis of Westoff and Potvin that certain factors in the child's background—size of family of orientation, religion, and socioeconomic status—are related to the size of family the child considers ideal. Further, the data provide support for the notion that these factors change in amount of influence over time. That is, size of family of orientation seems less clearly related to ideals among the twelfth graders than among the younger students, and socioeconomic factors seem to be more clearly related to ideals among the older students.

In addition to the data analyzed here, information has been obtained from this same sample of young people on why they want the number of children they do, where they got that ideal, and with whom they have discussed ideal family size. The ideals of the best friend and the size of best friend's family have also been obtained. These data will be discussed in subsequent papers.

Other questions not answered by these data await investigation using longitudinal data and nationally representative samples. The inclusion of school dropouts in future samples would widen the scope of the findings. Parallel information from mothers of young people on some of these matters would perhaps provide another perspective on how ideals are formed. The role of mass media in influencing children on ideal size of families also needs to be investigated.

Certainly this study lends at least minimal support to the notion that ideas about family size are formed very early in the life cycle. Further studies should

pursue this line of research in the interest of strengthening a growing body of data and theory on factors related to fertility.

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