

Introduction

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Most parts of the world are currently undergoing dramatic socio-demographic changes. A notable aspect of this demographic transition is the declining fertility in many parts of the world while the birth rate remains high in other parts. Several disciplines are describing this demographic transition, including sociology, psychology, anthropology, economics, and – of course – demography. More than 30 years ago, economists, demographers, and psychologists first began an interdisciplinary, international research program investigating the “value of children.”

The “value of children” (VOC) concept is based on the work of Hoffman and Hoffman (1973) and refers to the functions children serve or the needs they fulfill for parents. Hoffman and Hoffman (1973) provided the first and up to now only approach for international and cross-cultural comparisons of variations in fertility decision making by explicitly taking cultural factors into account. They developed an approach comprising objective (economic) and normative factors as well as psychological effects influencing fertility behavior. These aspects were seen as crucial determinants of the births of children. “Value of children” was considered the central mediator variable at the individual level. However, VOC is subject to variation because of changes in society and in socio-cultural context and itself influences fertility and parents’ behavior towards children. Hoffman and Hoffman’s (1973) approach thus focuses on the value of children for their parents. This starting point takes into account the basic asymmetry of the parent-child relationship. This asymmetry is established by the fact that only parents can choose whether or not to enter into such a relationship (to have children or not). It is thus an unconditional decision, whereas the ensuing decisions become more and more conditional (based on mutual influence).

To establish an inventory of the different aspects of value children represent to their parents, Hoffmann and Hoffmann (1973: 46f) categorized inductively empirical results of various sources and came up with the following components:

1. Adult status and social identity
2. Expansion of the self, ties to a larger entity, immortality
3. Morality: religion, altruism, good of the group; norms regarding sexuality, action on impulse, virtue
4. Primary group ties, affection
5. Stimulation, novelty, fun
6. Achievement, competence, creativity

7. Power, influence, effectiveness
8. Social comparison, competition
9. Economic utility

The nine categories of the VOC are an integral part of a model that also takes other influential factors into account: alternative sources of the value of children, costs of children, barriers and incentives. The central assumption is that the value of children varies according to the type of society and has various far-reaching consequences for generative decisions and parent-child relationships. The initial model by Hoffmann and Hoffmann (1973) already includes *alternative sources* of value in people and institutions that produce the same result for the (potential) parents. For example, public social-security systems may make up for the children's economic value. *Costs* emerge for parents directly, in terms of financial and time costs, and indirectly as opportunity costs, when abstaining from other goods or activities because of the children. *Barriers* are defined as factors that make it more difficult to attain the desired value of children, as for example with family poverty, less-than-ideal housing conditions or maternal illness. In contrast, *incentives* are factors that make it easier to reach the desired value of children: wealth, adequate housing conditions, family support, and generally positive attitudes towards children in the social context.

In the 1970s, an empirical analysis of generative behavior in different cultures was carried out on the basis of the VOC-approach. This extensive cross-national comparative study examined the relations between culture, socio-ecological context, the individual value of children for their parents and generative behavior (Arnold et al., 1975). The research program included in the Far East: Taiwan (Wu, 1977), Japan (Iritani, 1977), the Republic of Korea (Lee, 1975), the Philippines (Bulatao, 1975), Thailand (Buripakdi, 1977), Indonesia (Darroch, Meyer, & Singarimbun, 1981), and Singapore (Chen, Kuo, & Chung, 1982). Research was also undertaken in Turkey (Kagitcibasi, 1982), the USA (Arnold & Fawcett, 1975), and Germany (Urdze & Rerrich, 1981). For each country, the opportunity structure and the family resources were controlled for by including participants from both rural and urban areas as well as from all social classes. The surveys for the VOC-studies were conducted in two phases under the supervision of the East-West Population Institute in Honolulu, Hawaii.

The value of children approach was conceptualized in order to develop an instrument for cross-cultural comparisons of the influences on the parents' fertility decisions. Different phenomena in several countries can thus be explained in terms of the variations of the *same* determinants. This should be seen as an attempt to establish an economic model of complex relationships. Assuming differing costs, barriers, incentives, and values of children (VOC) – all of which vary according to conditions in the respective cultures – permits cross-cultural comparisons of fertility levels. The model integrates aspects of explanations of generative behavior from different scientific disciplines (Fawcett, 1976) and anticipates essential elements of explanatory models in modern social science (Coleman, 1990). In particular, it

provides all the necessary elements for a *theoretical model of generative behavior*. Thus, the VOC-approach offers an integrative explanatory concept that combines essential components of approaches from various disciplines. It also offers a conceptual frame from which to develop a coherent, methodologically complete explanation of intercultural differences in generative behavior. The strength of this approach is not only its integrative potential, however, but its combination of individual-actor-based components with structure-based perspectives on fertility behavior. These qualities make it suitable for integration into a comprehensive individualistic structure-theoretic explanation of generative behavior (Huinink, 2000).

However, use of the VOC approach necessitates the resolution of a number of conceptual, object-theoretical, measurement-theoretical and methodological-technical problems that have remained previously unresolved. For example, the VOC-studies often use terminology that does not clarify the concept of value; additionally, these studies have been based on inductive empirical approaches. The basic VOC model can serve as a guideline for future empirical analysis but cannot contribute to an explanation of generative behavior, as the VOC list of the above named 9 categories has emerged from existing empirical research and was not deductively derived from theory (Friedman, Hechter, & Kanazawa, 1994). The theoretical status of the VOC model is unclear because it is uncertain whether the list of the 9 VOC categories is a comprehensive value system (in the sense of theoretical model building) or whether it may be expanded deliberately. Attempts to validate the indicators have been successful, but only to a minor degree and only in intra-cultural studies (especially by Kagitcibasi & Esmer, 1980). In particular, the distinction between the following dimensions has proven to be empirically significant:

- economic-utilitarian VOC (i.e., contributions to the family economy from child labor, household help and additional income; old-age insurance),
- psychological-emotional VOC (i.e., strengthening emotional group ties; expressive stimulation through interaction with children).

This distinction has been used in a number of follow up studies, and has proven its fruitfulness in worldwide cross-national comparisons and in migration research (Nauck, 1987, 1989, 1997). Its empirical content is well in line with earlier theoretical distinctions made by population economists like Becker (1960) and Leibenstein (1957).

After more than three decades, the topic of the value of children has been revisited in order to carry out a large cross-cultural study. Unlike the previous research, this work was not limited to the question of fertility but also included important questions pertaining to childbearing and intergenerational relations and comprises a major theoretical revision of the basic explanatory model (Nauck, 2001, in press; Schwarz, Trommsdorff, Albert, & Mayer, in press; Trommsdorff, 2001, in press; Trommsdorff, Zheng, & Tardif, 2002). This recently revised approach to preconditions and

consequences of the value of children is based on large samples of persons from three biologically related generations (grandmothers, mothers, adolescent children) (300 families in each country) plus a sample of young mothers with a preschool-child (300 in each country). To date, the countries included in this study are Germany, Czech Republic, France, Turkey, Israel and Palestine, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, People's Republic of China, India, South Africa and Ghana. Some of these countries also participated in the original VOC study (Turkey, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, and Germany) and therefore provide data sets which now can be studied with respect to socio-economic and cultural change.

The chapters included in this volume deal with selected aspects of our presently ongoing study on the value of children with each chapter focusing on one country. All chapters first describe some relevant features of the specific country with respect to socio-demographic conditions, family structure, fertility, and education. Also, all chapters deal with issues of the psychological structure of the value of children. Furthermore, contextual factors, including social change, are related more or less explicitly with issues of family and the value of children.

The first chapter by Daniela Klaus, Bernhard Nauck, and Thomas Klein focuses on differences in reproductive behavior between East and West *Germany*, and different age-cohorts. Although highly educated and gainfully employed women show lower instrumental values of children, the overall difference in the value of children is a marginal predictor of child-related decisions in Germany.

The second chapter by Mayer and colleagues introduces aspects of the value-of-children project in *Germany*. The analyses focus mainly on the VOC-construct itself: its dimensionality in Germany, generational and cohort differences on the VOC-dimensions, and on the relevance of VOC for mothers' parenting goals and future expectations of children. Results indicate a shift towards lower traditional VOCs in the younger generations. Furthermore, positive relations between economic-normative VOC and the parenting goal 'obedience' as well as between emotional VOC and the parenting goal 'independence' are observed.

Petr Mareš and Ivo Možný describe the status of women in the *Czech Republic* before and after the transformation process and the consequences of the high percentage of working mothers. They find remarkable changes in family formation over time, especially with regard to extra-marital births. Although a high percentage of Czech women stay unmarried, they view motherhood as a natural part of womanhood and the availability of a suitable partner plays a role in their decisions regarding natality.

The chapter on *Turkey* is co-authored by Cigdem Kagitcibasi, a member of the original VOC study's research team, and Bilge Ataca. The authors take advantage of the fact that Turkey participated in both waves of data collection and compare results from both data sets with regard to changes in the value of children for Turkish mothers. They contextualize their findings in a general model of family change and prove its fruitfulness in the case of Turkey, which is a country of massive social change and extreme social disparities.

Jana Suckow presents data from the 2002 VOC study conducted in *Israel*. Of special interest is the comparison of Jews and Muslims in Israel with respect to their different reproductive behavior. Although they live under similar institutional regulations, their distinct religious affiliations influence the value of children. Data suggest that the Muslims have a higher economic value of children that leads to a higher number of children.

The chapter by Mishra and colleagues presents the value-of children study in *India*. After a general overview of the cultural background of India and traditional and current family situations, a detailed description of the urban and rural sites of data collection and the cultural background of the samples is given. Results indicate that VOC-dimensions in India can be conceptualized broadly as emotional and traditional, and that both dimensions are highly valued across generations and regions, though generational differences occurred in the urban samples. Additionally, fertility-related attitudes differed greatly between rural and urban samples with the exception of the perceived ideal family size: regardless of age or regional origin about two children were seen as ideal for an Indian family.

The chapter by Albert and colleagues on *Indonesia* presents and discusses selected results from the current VOC study in this country. A general introduction to socio-demographic features, anthropological facts, and cultural values is given. Following this, the authors describe their research questions, the sample, the methods used, and their results, including empirical analyses on the value of children and its relations with fertility and parenting goals.

The chapter on the *Republic of Korea* is co-authored by Uichol Kim and Young-Shin Park. They present data from the ongoing VOC study and relate these to the data from the original study carried out in Korea. In spite of the social, economic, and political changes that have occurred in the past 30 years, emphasis on the maintenance of strong relational bonds persists. The psychological benefits associated with children are the most often cited reasons for having a child while personal and financial constraints are the most salient reasons not to have a child. These results challenge the economic and utilitarian models and suggest the importance of understanding the psychological, relational, and cultural factors.

Gang Zheng, Shaohua Shi, and Hong Tang analyze data from the rural, urban, and floating population in *China* to detect differences in their reproductive behavior and values of children. The fact that rural and floating populations are not well covered by the social insurance system leads these parents to rely on their children for old age security.

In summary, this volume brings together studies from different countries on selected aspects of the value of children including theoretical and applied aspects of ongoing processes of socio-demographic change in the international context. The next step of our research program will be to carry out systematic cross-cultural comparisons among these various samples in order to test theoretical models regarding the value of children, parenting, and intergenerational relations.

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