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# DEPENDENCE OF THE VALUES OF CHILDREN ON SOCIO-STRUCTURAL CHARACTERISTICS: THE CASE OF ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

Jana Suckow

## INTRODUCTION

Israel and Palestine show different patterns of fertility behavior. Although the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of Israelis (in 2003 it was 2.7)<sup>1</sup> is less than half that of the Palestinians (in 2004 it was 5.6) it is still much higher than in European countries and consistently above reproduction level. The fertility behavior of the Jewish population varies according to region of origin—the TFR is much higher among Jewish women originating from Asia/Africa than among Europe/America or Israeli born (CBS, 2004; Peritz & Baras, 1992). The Palestinian Territory is characterized by a relatively fast reproduction pattern (Khawaja, 2000, 2003) —the average interval between births is 25 months, and the doubling time for the population is 19 years (PCBS, 2003). Palestinian women have their children at a much younger age than Jewish women.

According to the re-conceptualized value of children-approach (VOC) and the theory of social production function these differences in fertility are a result of the different values of children for parents. The purpose of this paper is to analyze differences in the perceived value of children in Israel and Palestine and to identify the factors contributing to these differences. This multi-level model includes factors concerning the institutional framework, opportunity structures, kinship patterns, social networks and individual resources, all factors that create country-specific production functions. Within the respective production functions children as well as occupation and other means of production show different efficiency. To test these predictions the 2002 Value of children-study was used.<sup>2</sup>

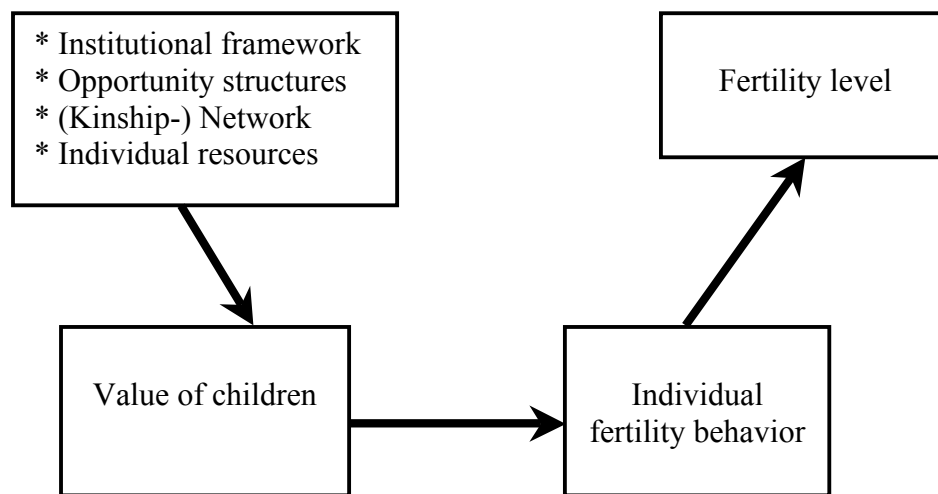
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<sup>1</sup> Although the term “Israelis” is used to refer to the sample studied, it should be understood that data collection was limited to Jews in Israel, and did not include other population groups that may be found in Israel. ‘Palestinians’ refers to non-Jewish residents in the Palestinian Territory.

<sup>2</sup> The project “Value of Children in Six Cultures. A Replication and Extension of the ‘Values-of-Children-Studies’ with Regard to Generative Behavior and Parent-Child-Relationships” was supported by a grant from the German Research Council (TR 169/9-1-3) to the two principal investigators: Bernhard Nauck and Gisela Trommsdorff, Germany. The study involved the collaboration of researchers from the countries where the study was implemented.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Following the theoretical re-conceptualization of the VOC-approach<sup>3</sup> (Nauck, 2005; Trommsdorff, Kim, & Nauck, 2005; Klaus in this volume) applying the general theory of social production functions (Lindenberg, 1984, 1991; Ormel, Lindenberg, Steverink, & Verbrugge, 1999) the central assumption is that the value of children takes an intermediate position between the type of society and several socio-structural conditions on the one hand and the individual generative behavior on the other (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1**  
**Model of Explaining Fertility**

According to the theory of social production functions people try to maximize two essential needs—physical well-being and social approval. Those two basic needs are satisfied indirectly through five instrumental goals (Lindenberg, 1984, 1991, 1996). Physical well-being is attained by stimulation and comfort; status, behavioral confirmation, and affect contribute to social approval (Ormel et al., 1999). Production factors are necessary to satisfy these needs. These can be money, profession etc. and/or of course children. The effectiveness of the production factors depends on the institutional framework and the contextual conditions. We analyse these latter factors on four levels.

(1) On the first and overall level are institutional regulations and laws. Most Western societies offer a welfare system with institutional alternatives for covering the risks of life, such as old-age pension, health care and unemployment benefits. In societies where social security regulations do not exist children have a greater work-utility as well as increased security-utility for their parents.

(2) Whether children can contribute to household income depends on opportunities for children's work. If child labor is legalized and the market offers unskilled jobs for

<sup>3</sup> The original VOC-study was conducted in the 1970s (see Arnold et al. 1975), using the inventory of the values of children established by Hoffman & Hoffman (1973).

children, or if parents live in rural areas with subsistence economy children can contribute to parents' comfort by working.

(3) On the third level the kinship system determines the social-normative value of children. The distinction is between descent and affinal kinship systems. In descent-kinship systems strong norms for (fertility) behavior exist and compliance to norms is highly recognized. Affinal kinship systems, however, are hardly related to generative norms (Lindenberg, 1991) and accordingly children's contribution to social esteem is assumed to be rather low.

(4) Individual resources, such as economic status, education, religiosity, and occupational status determine the values of children at a fourth level. When family's economic status is relatively high the economic utility of children should be low. Similarly, well educated women have more opportunities for transferring their education into gainful employment and thus to increase economic status.

According to the distinction of the values of children Kagitcibasi (1982) found for Turkey (and Klaus in this volume for the 2002 VOC-study) a three-dimensional structure of values. The dimensions are comfort, esteem and affect and each may be differentially influenced by country-specific conditions.

## **ISRAEL AND PALESTINE: TWO DIFFERENT SETTINGS**

Israel and Palestine show differences in nearly all dimensions of social structure. Institutional regulations and the mode of welfare system, the kinship system as well as the level of education and participation in the labor force are especially important to the perceived value of children.

### **Israel**

Israel maintains a welfare and social security system that are comparable to those of most Western countries (Doron & Kramer, 1991). The National Insurance Institute (NII) offers old-age-pensions, unemployment benefits, maternity and health care and income support to cover nearly all risks of life. Because the NII pensions are not enough for survival many elderly live below the poverty line (1999: 24%; Gal, 2002).

Israeli Jews are highly educated. The average years of schooling was 13 in 2001 for both sexes; 26% of the population aged 15 and over have an academic education (CBS, 2004). As a consequence Israeli women marry later, have children later, have fewer children than Palestinian women, and experience greater opportunity costs caused by employment.

The relatively high labor force participation rate of 54% in Israel has hardly changed for nearly 45 years, and unemployment is 9% and less than half that found in Palestine. However, the labor force participation of women has dramatically changed: in 1955 only 27% of the women over 15 years participated in the labour force; by 2002 this rate had increased to 48%. Especially the ratio of the married women increased in Israel: In 1999 55% of all married women participated in labour force.

Israeli Jews follow an affinal kinship-system. The status benefit by parenthood is marginal as the conjugal relation is more important than intergenerational relations, and the flow of wealth is much more in favour of the younger generation.

## **Palestine**

The Palestinian Authority does not offer institutionalized welfare. Although some organisations (UNRWA—United Nations Relief and Works Agency) pay financial support to the needy—this cannot be called welfare or social security system. In most cases refugees are supported, but they make up only 40% of the Palestinian population. Besides their own income from employment the non-refugee population is dependent on what other relatives and especially children can contribute to every day life and life in old age.

In Palestine the prevalent patrilinear descent kinship system generally results in households that are extended. In 2003 the average household-size was 5.7 (PCBS, 2004). The descent kinship system is characterized by a high importance of intergenerational relationships and solidarity, thus parenthood—and especially of a high parity—is highly valued (Nauck & Suckow, 2003).

In 2002, 14% of all Palestinian women could not read nor write (PCBS, 2004), but illiteracy was especially present among older cohorts (aged 55 and over). Among the younger population literacy rates are 97% (PCBS, 2004). The overall Palestinian labor force participation has been consistently about 40% since 1995 (PCBS, 2004). Men's participation rate is 67% (2004) but women's only 14%. The unemployment rate is 20%.

## **HYPOTHESES**

### **Comfort**

As was already described opportunity structures for employment are limited and institutional regulations are rare in Palestine, compared to Israel. Hence, it can be predicted that the dependence on children and so the comfort utility of children is more highly valued in Palestine than in Israel. Rural contexts provide more opportunities for child labor in agriculture than urban contexts which should result in a higher comfort-value of children in rural areas. Within these small-scale opportunities especially education, inclusion in labor force and economic status influence the comfort-utility of children. They all should work in the same direction: the higher they are the lower is the comfort utility of children. The same applies to religiosity. The more religious one is the less important are children for producing comfort.

### **Esteem**

In social contexts, in which children are an effective intermediate good for the production of comfort, social esteem should be derived directly from the number of descendants as well. It is hypothesized that in Palestine children are of higher importance for producing esteem than in Israel and esteem by children is less valued in urban areas.

Education, employment and economic status show the same influence as with respect to comfort – they all decrease the importance of children in producing esteem.

Employment offers additional ways for getting esteem from colleagues, and a high economic status is an alternative to receiving esteem by the birth of children. A positive effect on esteem is to be expected from religiosity.

### **Affect**

The relationship between parents and children is characterized as especially intimate and emotional alternatives for such affection hardly exist. Thus, only slight differences between Palestinian and Jewish mothers are expected and this value is assumed as not being dependent on socio-structural or individual characteristics. Additionally, this value should be higher than with respect to comfort or esteem.

## **SAMPLE DESCRIPTION**

From the 2002 cross-cultural comparing VOC-study two subpopulations of mothers were selected: Jewish mothers (N = 408) and Palestinian mothers (N = 249). The Jewish convenience sample was gathered in Jerusalem, Palestinian mothers were obtained in East-Jerusalem and Ramallah. According to the differences in social structure already described the sample differs especially by education and labor force participation of women. 6% of Palestinian mothers did not have any schooling and only 1% was highly educated. Among Jewish mothers 35% were highly educated and 61% had completed secondary education. According to the comparably high level of education 80% of Jewish mothers were employed, whereas only 20% of the Palestinian mothers were employed. Only 12% percent of the Jewish mothers lived in a rural context, but 70% of the Palestinian mothers did because their sample was mostly gathered in East-Jerusalem.

## **METHOD**

For the cross-cultural comparison of the VOC-concept it has to be assured that procedural equivalence of its measurement was established (Johnson, 1998; see also Klaus in this volume). Exploratory factor analyses and the calculation of agreements as well as reliability-tests were applied to ensure that the VOC-concept was measuring the same in Israel and Palestine. After establishing equivalence it was necessary to determine whether the three dimensions of the value of children were different between groups. In a third step the three scales were tested to determine whether 'external' factors influence them in the predicted manner. These 'external' factors were: 1) country (divided by Israeli Jews and Palestinians), 2) education of the respondent (three categories from 0 'no schooling' to 3 'high level of education'), 3) self-reported economic status (three categories from 1 'low or lower middle' to 3 'upper middle and high'), 4) current status of employment of the respondent, 5) their extent of religiosity (two categories: not or moderately religious and very religious), and last 6) whether they live in an urban or rural setting. For each of the three dimensions these factors were tested stepwise by linear regression models both overall and for the samples separately.

## RESULTS

As Klaus (in this volume) has shown a general factorial solution was established for both mothers' samples. The sample was weighted according to nationality. Items that showed high cross-loadings were excluded and a three-dimensional solution arose. The result of this procedure is displayed in Table 1. All factor loadings were well above 0.50.

**Table 1**  
**Factorial Structure of the VOC-Measurement and Agreement**

Item	Factor Loadings		
	Comfort	Affect	Esteem
Child helps around the house	<b>0.60</b>	-0.05	0.05
To carry on the family name	<b>0.70</b>	0.23	0.00
To help your family economically	<b>0.77</b>	0.00	0.26
Children can help when you're old	<b>0.70</b>	0.26	0.15
Joy to have a small baby	0.06	<b>0.75</b>	0.21
Fun to have young children around	0.09	<b>0.80</b>	0.22
Pleasure watching children grow	0.08	<b>0.83</b>	0.11
Feeling of love between parent and child	-0.01	<b>0.65</b>	-0.15
To have someone to love and care for	0.28	<b>0.50</b>	0.07
Makes family more important	0.02	0.20	<b>0.64</b>
More reason to succeed in work	0.19	0.06	<b>0.80</b>
Increases responsibility/helps to develop	-0.07	0.05	<b>0.86</b>
More contacts/communication with kin	0.09	0.09	<b>0.80</b>
Standing/reputation among kin	0.28	-0.02	<b>0.76</b>
New friends through children	0.41	0.09	<b>0.59</b>

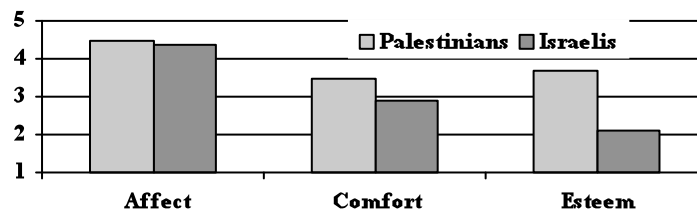
  

Country	Agreements: Proportionality Coefficients		
Palestinians	0.91	0.96	0.93
Israelis	0.97	1.00	0.96

The factor analyses were repeated separately for Israelis and Palestinians with the aim of target rotations (van de Vijver & Leung, 1997; see also Klaus in this volume) to provide factor specific agreements. The second part of the table indicates these agreements. They all are well above 0.90 which indicates high agreement with the pooled solution. As compared to the overall solution of all countries found by Klaus (in this volume) country-specific items were included and some items were deleted from the main solution.

In a final step the scales for the measurement of the VOC-dimensions based on the results of the factor analysis revealed high internal consistency. For Israelis  $\alpha = 0.77$  for comfort, 0.82 for affect and 0.73 for esteem. Among Palestinian mothers  $\alpha = 0.57$  for comfort, 0.63 for affect and 0.69 for esteem.

These three scales were used to compare the importance of comfort, esteem and affect between Israeli and Palestinian mothers. Figure 2 shows that the country differences in the values of children were in line with the hypotheses. Children were of much greater importance for the production of comfort and esteem in Palestine than in Israel, and both aspects were significant. Contrary to this, only slight differences were found with respect to affect which confirms the unaffectedness of this dimension within the respective institutional and contextual conditions.



**Figure 2**  
**The Value of Children in Israel and Palestine**  
 (Source: VOC 2002, mothers' sample)

Regression analyses also were performed to control for relevant predictors in addition to country. These findings are presented in Tables 2 and 3. The overall result is that comfort and esteem were related to a remarkable extent to the considered external factors ( $R^2 = 0.22$  resp.  $R^2 = 0.55$ ) whereas affect was not ( $R^2 < 0.10$ ). This supports the general assumption that comfort and social esteem vary according to the context and resources, whereas affect does not. A closer look indicates that high proportions of the variance were explained by the country-variable, especially with regard to esteem. This emphasizes the high importance of institutional and normative regulations of the respective society common to all its members. Besides the country individual variations in opportunity structures and resources within societies show partly significant effects on comfort and esteem.

Concerning *affect* the explanation of variance was quite low, only two of the six external factors showed any influence on affect. Besides the country, religiosity influenced the emotional dimension in a negative way—that is the more religious the respondents were the less important was affect for their decision to have a child, but both effects were slight. When testing Israelis and Palestinians separately we found a significant effect of religiosity only for Israeli. All other factors did not influence the emotional value of children—neither for Israelis nor for Palestinians.

With respect to *comfort* one additional factor came into play: As predicted the current economic status had a negative influence on the value children contribute to parents' comfort (see Table 2). A high economic status resulted in lower importance of own offspring in providing comfort. Contrary to the predictions there were no effects of region (urban/rural), education, or employment.

Religiosity had a negative influence on the importance of comfort as well—and this influence was nearly as great as that of country. Both factors—economic status and religiosity made substantial contributions to the amount of variance explained, increasing it by 5% when introducing economic status and by another 9% when introducing religiosity.

**Table 2**  
**Regression Models on Dependent Variable 'Comfort' (Beta-Coefficients)**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Country	-.27**	-.29**	-.31**	-.44**	-.40**	-.39**
Education		n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Economic status			-.22**	-.18**	-.17**	-.17**
Religiosity				-.37**	-.38**	-.37**
Employment					n.s.	n.s.
Region						n.s.
R <sup>2</sup>	.071	.071	.120	.215	.219	.220

Note: \*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .01$ .



When analysing the data for Israelis and Palestinians separately different factors were found to influence comfort. For Palestinians only education played a marginal role in that the more highly women were educated the less important was comfort. The trend was in the same direction, but non-significant for Israelis. Israeli women with a high economic status and with a high level of religiosity give lesser importance to children's contribution to comfort. It is convincing that a high economic status lowers the importance of children. And the higher level of religiosity means a high involvement in the religious group that provides support in cases of illness, unemployment or whatever. The effect of religion was even stronger than that of economic status among Israelis. Additionally, among Israelis the remaining five external factors led to a higher explanation of variance ( $R^2 = .24$ ) than among Palestinians ( $R^2 = .04$ ).

When analyzing the *esteem*-dimension it was obvious again that country had the strongest negative effect, followed by education with education slightly lowering, but not eliminating the effect of sample (Table 3). For higher educated women children's contribution to esteem is less important. Religiosity has a positive effect on the esteem-dimension.

**Table 3**  
**Regression Models on Dependent Variable 'Esteem' (Beta-Coefficients)**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Country	-.71**	-.60**	-.61**	-.55**	-.57**	-.59**
Education		-.18**	-.18**	-.14**	-.15**	-.15**
Economic status			n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Religiosity				.16**	.16**	.16**
Employment					n.s.	n.s.
Region						n.s.
R <sup>2</sup>	.510	.531	.531	.548	.549	.550

Note: \*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .01$ .

Only one factor had a significant effect on esteem among Palestinians: economic status. The higher the economic status the less important were children in producing esteem for their mothers. For Israelis education, religion and current employment status were significant influencing factors. Education and employment status influenced children's contribution to esteem in a negative way—that is the more highly educated the women and the more they were included in labor force the less important were children for gaining esteem. Religion also had a positive effect—highly religious women valued more children's contribution to esteem.

These findings suggested that whether the respondent was Jewish or Palestinian had the strongest effect on comfort and esteem. Individual resources, such as education, employment and economic status, cannot match the effects of country, that is, even when educational level, employment and economic status were equal country specific differences would still be prominent. Region, that is whether the respondents lived in an urban or rural setting, had no influence on either comfort or esteem.

## DISCUSSION

The analysis of the value of children measure revealed a factor structure that allowed for comparisons between the samples of Israelis and Palestinians. When

comparing the means of the three dimensions we found the importance of the emotional value of children in both settings nearly independent from any socio-structural conditions. The means of comfort and esteem varied between Israelis and Palestinians to a considerable extent—both were more important for Palestinians than for Israelis. Our intention was to analyse the factors that were, by theory, influencing the values of children. Astonishingly, hardly any of the external factors had an influence on esteem or comfort among Palestinians. Only for Israelis did we find predicted connections between some of the external factors and the value-dimensions.

So why were the values of children nearly independent from socio-structural and individual conditions among Palestinians? First, there was hardly any variance in the answers of Palestinian mothers concerning the values of children. This suggests that there was a high cultural consensus about the overall utility of children in the social production function of their parents that was hardly influenced by situational variations.

For Palestinians there are uncertainties with regard to each dimension of the social production function. This results in an undefined overall value of children that is not dependent on specific conditions of living. Demographers and sociologists consider children as means to strengthen one's ethnic group (Courbage 1995) an idea supported by pro-natalistic ideologies of nationalistic movements. As Fargues (2000, p.469) pointed out "fertility was high because it was desired". Thus, for Palestinians it may be important to increase in size independent from individual resources and opportunities so as to play an important role in the demographic struggle with Israel. Obviously they attempt to do this through increasing numbers of children.

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