

DRAFT BRIEF MANUSCRIPT

Title: Indicators of Preferences for Zero, One, or Two Children: Theory and Measurement

Authors: Toni Falbo & Shengjie Lin

Population Research Center, University of Texas at Austin

In an era of low fertility, researchers have become curious about what is motivating preferences for zero, one, or two child families. This brief report describes the first of six studies conducted to explore the possibility that psychological variables, such as schema, form the foundation for judgements about the number of children desired.

Bachrach (2014) presented a cognitive-social model of fertility intentions which highlighted the role of *schema* in determining fertility intentions. As used in this context, a sibling schema is relatively stable mental representation that reflects an individual's sense of what constitutes the right number of children desired.

In this first study, childless and unmarried college students ($N = 232$) completed an online questionnaire that asked them about the number of siblings they grew up with and the number of children they wanted, and also asked them to complete a series of inventories reflecting individual variations in personality (Big Five), family relations (Obligations & Parental Support), and attitudes (Dominant Social & New Ecology).

Study 1 Findings

The results of this study are presented in Table 1. The positive and significant correlation between sibship size and number of children wanted reported in Table 1 suggests that sibship size might serve as a schema guiding cognitions about the number of children desired. Figure 1 adds to our interpretation of this correlation, by providing the percentage of participants who selected zero or one child, two children, or three or more children by sibship size, grouped by those who have no siblings, one sibling, two siblings, and three or more siblings.

The results presented in Figure 1 indicate that desiring no children or just one child was rare. Even only children were unlikely to choose having no children or just one. Instead the two-child family was selected much more frequently than any other number by those who have no siblings or just one sibling. Participants with two siblings selected two or three or more children as the desirable number, while participants with three or more siblings were most likely to select three or more children as their desired number. Overall, Figure 1 indicates that two or three or more children was the most common number of children desired.

The number of children desired was significantly related to a few psychological variables considered in this study. In terms of personality, only one of the five basic personality dimensions was significantly associated with number of children wanted. Greater agreeableness, reflecting warmth and friendliness, was associated with wanting more children.

In terms of family relations, perceptions of parents were also related to the number of children participants desired. Family Obligation Values reflect perceptions that parents value

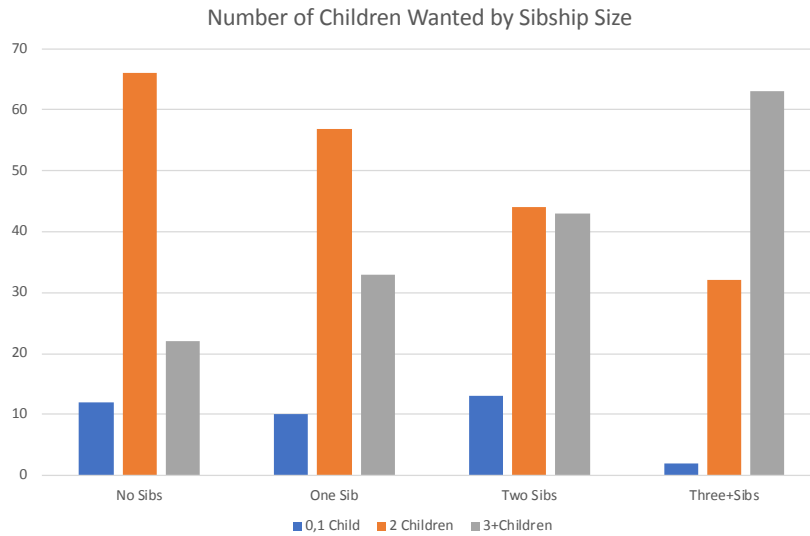
Table 1
Correlations between Number of Children Wanted and Other Variables: Study One

	Correlation	Mean (SD)	Range	
			Min	Max
Number of Children	--	2.43 (1.13)	0	6
Other Variables				
Sibship Size	.21*	1.62 (1.33)	0	7
Big Five				
Consciousness	-.09	5.82 (0.88)	3.5	7
Agreeableness	.20*	5.51 (0.83)	3	7
Emotionally Stable	-.10	4.51 (0.76)	2	7
Openness	-.04	5.50 (0.75)	3.5	7
Extraversion	.12 ^b	5.05 (0.91)	3	7
Family Relations				
Family Obligations	.23**	3.55 (0.62)	1.38	5
Parental Support	.14*	5.34 (1.06)	2.44	7
Attitudes				
Dominant Social	.26**	2.86 (0.72)	1	5
New Ecological	-.30**	3.90 (0.63)	2	5

** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$

expressions of respect for family and support for family members. These obligation values were positively related to the number of children wanted; the greater the perception that parents value obligations, the more children the participants desired. In addition, perceptions of parents as supporting the participant's self-determination were associated with more children desired. Higher scores on these Parental Support scores are thought to reflect greater security of attachment. Both indicators of family relations are thought to reflect positive relations with parents; not surprisingly, they were positively correlated, $r(234) = .33, p < .0001$.

Figure 1
 Percentage of Participants Desiring Numbers of Children by their Sibship Size



Finally, attitudes toward the environment, measured here in terms of the prevailing dominant social attitudes regarding the environment as a resource to be consumed, in contrast to the alternative, the new ecological paradigm that regards the environment as a resource that needs protection. The results in Table 1 indicate that participants with more Dominant Social attitudes reported wanting more children, while those with greater New Ecological attitudes reported wanting fewer. Scores on these two scales were negatively correlated, $r(234) = -.60$, $p < .0001$.

Discussion

This first study demonstrated that young adults have preferences for numbers of children that are correlated with their sibship size, with young adults from larger families desiring more children. Interestingly, those who grew up without siblings were overwhelmingly likely to report desiring two children, as opposed to desiring no children or one child. Thus, the results of Study One indicate that children without siblings do not desire to replicate that experience for their children, while those who grew up with siblings are more prone to do so.

The results also suggest other indicators relevant to number of children wanted, specifically, that family relations and attitudes toward the environment are correlated with number of children desired.

The remaining studies in this series address the reluctance of young adults to report wanting no children or one child, in comparison to wanting two children.

Reference

Bachrach, C.A. (2014). Culture and demography: From reluctant bedfellows to committed partners. *Demography*, 51, 3-25. DOI 10.1007/s13524-013-0257-6

