

Fertility Behavior, Desired Number and Gender Composition of Children: the Philippine Case  
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**ABSTRACT**

*This study contributes to the comprehension of the stall in fertility decline in the Philippines by examining the interconnections between fertility behaviour, fertility preference, women's desired gender composition of children and selected socio-economic factors. Utilizing data from the 2008 National Demographic and Health Survey, this paper employs multivariate analysis to assess these interconnections. Results reveal that there is no gender preference in the country because a great majority of Filipino women prefers to have children of both sexes. There is also evidence of a relationship between fertility, fertility preference and the desired gender composition of children. Furthermore, disparities have been observed by type of residence and geographical location. These interconnections are evocative of an attitude among women to have more children until they reach the desired sex composition of their offspring which impacts on the fertility decline in the country.*

**Introduction**

There are numerous studies on sex preference of children. Although this is less pronounced in Western countries where there are still few studies done on this theme (Hank and Kohler, 2004.) A multi-country comparison is made by Hank and Kohler (2000) for 17 European countries utilising the Family and Fertility Survey (FFS). What they found is that there is generally a preference for mixed sex composition with the exception of Lithuania, Portugal, and the Czech Republic that has indication for preference for girls. The indifference in sex preference is also observed in the US (Pollard and Morgan, 2002).

For other areas, this theme has been studied more. There are differing preferences for the sub-regions within Asia. There is a particular son preference in South Asia. The similar case of preference for sons is evident in Bangladesh (Bairagi, 2001) and is also observable in India with their high sex ratio at birth (Arnold, Kishor, & Roy, 2002). Guilmoto (2010) noted the effects of this preference to the demographic structure of India because of the previously mentioned skewed sex ratio. He also presented this case for China which has even reached about 113 male per 100 female births in 2000. This is also experienced by other East Asian countries including Taiwan and South Korea (Larsen, et al., 1998; Klasen and Wink, 2002.)

The case of other Southeast Asian countries is different with regard to sex preference. According to Arnold and Kuo (1984), there is a slight preference for girl children with those of Malayo-Polynesian background based on the 1970's Value of Children Studies. This study was done for eight countries including the Philippines.

To provide a deeper understanding of the Philippine experience of a stalling fertility decline in recent decades, this study examines the interrelationship of fertility behaviour, fertility preference and desired sex composition of children using the 2008 National Demographic and Health Survey data. The differences are presented based on geographic location and other characteristics. A limitation encountered here is that this only covers the responses of women and is noted that studies revealed that there is a difference between the preference of men and women where the former prefers sons (Mason and Taj, 1987).

### **On sex preference**

In the study of fertility, the value of children is often discussed (Hoffman and Hoffman, 1973; Hogan and Astone, 1986) and related to the theme of value of children are the bulk of research on sex preferences. As seen above, this varies for different countries. As Arnold (1997) studied 44 countries using DHS from the period of 1986 to 1995, he observes that there is no one set of determinants to determine this preference; that these may be influenced by historical and cultural experiences.

In Williamson's study (1976), he determined that such preferences may follow three conditions: economic, social, and psychological. The economic condition determines this preference when either one sex would be more productive in a society. An example is that there may be more opportunities for males for advancements in their careers. The social condition is on the sociocultural, including religious, customs are followed with regard to their being patrilineal or it is important to continue lineage. The last condition which is psychological, is on the prospect of having a compatibility for companionship or even the prospect of security with having either sex.

It is acknowledged that there are indeed differences between countries, but there are also indications that these preferences change over time. One explanation is that it declines with modernization (Bongaarts, 1998.) As Pollard and Morgan notes (2002), when compared with traditional societies, the US does not exhibit this because of the influence of expected roles of sons and daughters. There are to be 'costs and benefits' in having children; and even on their being boys or girls (Thomson, 2001.)

These costs and benefits may be on the actual or the perceived aspects. This relates to what Bulatao (1981) observes of the value and disvalue of children across parities in Korea, the US, and the Philippines. At the lower parities, emotional reasons dominate in having children. As parity increases, the balance within the family is the focus. Sex preference then becomes more evident in the third parity and higher because of the prospect for economic benefit.

Table 1. Value and disvalue attached to children in the Philippines

Child	Value	Disvalue
1st	To carry on name To bring spouse closer To love and care for	Less time with spouse We are too old Overpopulation Work and bother
2nd	Companion for sibling Wants girl	Less time with spouse Overpopulation
3rd	Companion for sibling	(Hard to discipline)
4th	Wants boy	Harder to have a job Financial burden
5th	Pleasure to watch grow Incentive in work Help around house	(Financial burden)
6th or higher	Economic help Help around the house	(Financial burden)

Bulatao, 1971; pp 12 and 18

In cells where no disvalue met the criterion, the disvalue with the highest lambda is listed in the parentheses.

What these studies present is the comparison of countries, which include the case of the Philippines. There may be differences with regard to the urban and rural areas or even the different social characteristics hence this paper will look deeper into the contemporary fertility behavior and attitudes of women in the country by examining their desired number of children and the sex composition of these children.

### Data and Methodology

The data used in this study are drawn from the 2008 Philippine National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) collected by the Philippine National Statistics Office in partnership with ORC Macro International. The 2008 NDHS is a nationally representative sample of 13,594 women, aged 15 to 49 years old from 12,469 households. The overall response rate is 98 percent. It is the ninth in a series of demographic and health surveys conducted to assess the demographic and health situation of the Philippines. The 2008 NDHS collected

detailed information on fertility levels, marriage, fertility preferences, family planning, nutrition and other health related data including violence against women.

Bivariate analyses were done employing the appropriate tests to check for associations between the dependent and independent variables. Multinomial logistic regression is employed to examine the interrelationships between the variables under study.