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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE FERTILITY OF LIVE-IN MAIDS AND PROSTITUTES IN A COLOMBIAN CITY: SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

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Résumé — Cette étude examine la proposition qui depuis Cali, Colombie, tout comme plusieurs cités de l'Amérique Latine, a un excédent de femmes à l'âge de procréation et étant donné qu'un nombre de ces femmes sont employées dans des professions telles que celle des bonnes permanentes et celle des prostituées qui exclut la cohabitation ou la grossesse pour une période prolongée, quel effet ceci a sur le taux de fécondité urbain. Les données obtenues suggèrent que la moyenne de fécondité chez les prostituées est presque égale à la moyenne nationale, tandis que les bonnes ont une fécondité complétée qui est moins d'un quart de la moyenne nationale. Quelques implications de ces conclusions pour de plus amples recherches ont été suggérées.

Abstract — Cali, Colombia, like many Latin American cities, has an excess of reproductive age females, some of whom are employed as live-in maids and prostitutes. Since these occupations preclude cohabitation and child-bearing for extended periods, this study examines their possible impact on the urban fertility rate. The data obtained suggest that prostitutes have about national average fertility, while maids have completed fertility that is less than one-fourth the national average. Some implications of these findings for further research are suggested.

Key Words — **fertility, maids, prostitutes, Colombia**

For the past half-century, Latin America has experienced the highest annual rate of population growth of all the major areas of the world (Symonds and Carder 1973:123), and simultaneously, the population shifted from being predominately rural to being predominately urban (Fletcher, 1971). One of the population composition phenomena that has accompanied these demographic changes is the tendency for urban Latin America to have a disproportionate number of reproductive age females. The fertility performance of this concentration of potentially highly fertile young women will have a great impact on health education, family planning, and other applied programmes. Using small but representative samples from two particular groups of reproductive age females in Cali, Colombia, we examine their fertility behaviour, and use this to develop a series of empirically based hypotheses for further study.

A common argument given to account for differences in the female composition of urban versus rural and small town populations in developing societies is that there is no role in the non-urban community for a reproductive age female who is not allied in a sexual union. Thus, the non-urban female is "forced" to enter into a sexual union if she wants to stay in the community; her only other "choice" is to leave the community — and by implication migrate to the urban community.

This raises the question of what types of jobs are available for poorly educated, currently unmarried, nubile females in urban areas in a developing country like Colombia. The employment of live-in maids by those with modest or better means is one common

practice that creates jobs for such women in Cali, as well as in most Latin American cities. If live-in maids are normally between the ages of 15 and 45, here, then, is one socio-economic demographic link between an increase in moderately affluent urbanites and an excess of reproductive age females. Some validity to the suggestion that female migrants to urban centres enter urban domestic work is provided by Quijano (1968:300) who notes a 1966 government study of immigration to Lima which reports that domestic service is the urban occupation for 70 per cent of women immigrants to Lima.

Another employment opportunity in urban areas that could lead to an excess of reproductive age unmated females is the practice of paying for the services of prostitutes. If there is a substantial number of men who want and can pay for the "service," if the social norms do not prohibit the practice and if the law does not make it a crime, then it is a reasonable proposition that a large group of reproductive age women will be needed to fulfill the demand for prostitution services. In Colombia, prostitution is not an illegal activity, and the norms do not prohibit the practice. Insofar as prostitutes are typically females in their reproductive years, then part of the "excess" of reproductive age females in Cali may be the consequence of employment opportunities for prostitutes (Sepulveda, 1970).

Some might argue that the mere existence of these employment opportunities for live-in maids and prostitutes does not necessarily mean that women will be "attracted" to them. There are, however, women employed as live-in maids and as prostitutes, and whether they find their employment acceptable or unacceptable may be a moot question. Even the argument that perhaps poorly educated, nubile urban families aspire to these jobs for the unmarried that others have labelled "unacceptable" seems to beg the question. What we have here is an urban centre in a developing country which is growing at a rapid pace, and in which unemployment for men is high. In such an environment, what choices do poorly educated, nubile females have if they want or have to leave their family of orientation, or if they want to escape from an unsatisfactory marriage, or if they are otherwise forced to support themselves? Since they are not qualified for "more acceptable" jobs, they can quietly starve — which they presumably will not do by choice — or they can enter a reasonably stable sexual alliance — which they may not want to do, or be able to do, at the moment — or they can take the only available jobs for which they are qualified. And the two types of jobs most frequently available for these women in Cali are domestic work and prostitution. Or as stated by Capa and Stycos (1974:98), "statistics on Latin American cities show a surprising number of employed women . . . but they are in highly depressed occupations — vendors in the marketplace and domestic servants in the homes of the middle and upper classes. An unrecorded but sizable number enter prostitution."

Given the presence of substantial numbers of women in these occupations, one could intuitively hypothesize that if live-in maids and prostitutes are typically in their prime childbearing years, and if their occupation precludes cohabitation or childbearing for an extended period during these years, then the socio-economic practice by the moderately affluent of employing live-in maids and prostitutes might be keeping urban fertility rates lower than they would otherwise be.

In Colombia in 1966, on the basis of seven measures of fertility, urban zone fertility was shown to be consistently and substantially lower than was rural zone fertility (Agualimpia, *et al.*, 1969). This was true even for the more refined measures that use only reproductive age females in the denominator. Demographic transition or modernization theorists use this type of information to support the proposition that urban or modern women have lower fertility than do rural or traditional women. And if, as in our case, the

urban population has a larger proportion of reproductive age females than does the rural population, the hypothesis of lower urban than rural fertility presumably becomes stronger. Our hypothesis, while not suggesting that the modernization theory is wrong, does suggest that the urban fertility rate may be "spuriously" low because most measures of fertility still include in the denominator a significant number of reproductive age females who may be "forced" to have low fertility; namely, live-in maids and prostitutes.

The Demographic Setting

Cali, Colombia, is a typical example of a rapid growing South American city. Located in the southwest corner of the country, Cali serves as the market, commercial, and industrial centre for the fertile Cauca Valley. In the mid-1970s Cali's population was estimated to be approximately one million (complete tabulations from the 1973 Colombian census have not yet been published), a significant increase over the 614,000 counted in the 1964 census. The age-sex distribution of the population in 1964 for the nation, for the department (state) of Valle del Cauca (excluding the city of Cali), and for the city of Cali is presented in Table 1.

The Cali data reveal the phenomena of an excess of reproductive age females, and especially of those who are in the prime reproductive ages of 15 to 30. The proportion of the Cali population that is female of reproductive age is several percentage points greater than the corresponding figure for the rest of the Valle, as well as also larger than that of the nation. This trend is even more obvious in the age-sex structure calculated for Cali from the four per cent sample of the 1973 census (Rico and Idarraga: 1977). In more personal terms, the women age 15 to 45 in Cali in 1973 outnumber the men of the same ages by about 50,000.

Estimates are available which suggest that included in Cali's reproductive age female population are a minimum of 20,000 live-in maids and 20,000 prostitutes (Harter and Bertrand, 1975). This estimate of the number of maids is certainly in line with Gendell and Rossel's (1968:571) statement based on their analysis of 1950 and 1960 census data from 16 Latin American nations: "As anyone familiar with Latin America would expect [economically active women are] chiefly service workers. At both dates in most countries, about two of every five women were engaged as service workers. And most of these were apparently providing domestic service." As for the figure of 20,000 full-time prostitutes for the city of Cali, the estimate was based on the number of women who presented themselves at the communicable disease clinic of the local health department for a health inspection. Since lower class or part-time prostitutes are less likely to utilize this service, the estimate is probably an underestimate of the number of prostitutes in the city. At any rate the estimate of 20,000 is less than one-half the number of full-time prostitutes reported for the city in a feature newspaper article in September, 1974 (*Occidente,* 1974).

Just as data on their numbers is scarce, information on the fertility of live-in maids and prostitutes is likewise not a commonly reported statistic. Chaplin (1971:226) states that studies done in Peru and Puerto Rico "suggest that labour market participation does not significantly reduce the fertility of the employed female worker", and he goes on to refer to the 24.7 per cent of the Peruvian women in 1961 who were employed in "the traditionally high fertility domestic service". Based on 1959 Lima birth registration data, Stycos (1965:53-4) reports "that the mean birth order by age of mother is virtually identical for housewives and service workers," and he "gives little comfort to Peruvians who are hoping for increased entry of females into the labour force as a solution to high birth rates". And in his Puerto Rican study, Weller (1968:521) suggests that "perhaps the entry of women into domestic service should be discouraged", because currently there is

TABLE 1 POPULATION STRUCTURE OF CALI, VALLE DE CAUCA (EXCLUDING CALI), AND COLOMBIA BY AGE AND SEX, 1964

Age in Years	Percent Distribution					
	Cali (1)		Valle (excluding Cali) (1)		Colombia (2)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
0-4	8.4	8.2	8.9	8.7	8.9	8.7
5-9	7.0	7.0	8.0	7.8	8.1	7.9
10-14	5.4	5.7	6.4	6.3	6.6	6.4
15-19	4.4	5.9	4.8	5.1	4.8	5.3
20-24	4.1	5.2	4.2	4.2	3.8	4.3
25-29	3.7	4.4	3.5	3.6	3.2	3.5
30-34	3.4	3.8	3.2	3.0	2.9	3.0
35-39	2.8	3.1	2.7	2.7	2.5	2.8
40-44	2.2	2.3	2.2	1.9	2.1	2.0
45-49	1.7	1.9	1.8	1.6	1.7	1.7
50-54	1.4	1.6	1.6	1.4	1.5	1.5
55-59	1.0	1.0	1.0	.8	1.0	.9
60-64	.8	1.0	1.0	.9	.9	1.0
65-69	.5	.6	.5	.5	.5	.6
70-74	.3	.4	.4	.4	.4	.4
75-79	.2	.3	.2	.2	.2	.3
80-84	.1	.2	.1	.2	.1	.2
85 and over	.1	.2	.1	.2	.1	.2
Total	47.5	52.8	50.6	49.5	49.3	50.7

Sources.--(1) Comite Universitario de Investigaciones sobre Poblacion, Censo de Poblacion para el Departamento del Valle (Cali, Colombia: Universidad del Valle, C.U.I.P., 1968), Volume 1, pp.1 and 43; and (2) Carlos Agualimpia M., et al., "Demographic Facts of Colombia: The National Investigation of Morbidity," Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly, 47 (July, 1969), p. 258. The latest official Colombian census data are for 1964. The 1973 Colombian census has been published for a 4% national sample with similar results.

apparently not a great deal of role conflict between the joint roles of mother and domestic worker.

At least one study conducted in a Latin American city, however, suggests, as we do, that the fertility of maids may be lower than that of the general population. Gendel and his colleagues (1970:283) found that domestic servants in Guatemala City had lower fertility than other women or mothers, regardless of whether these other women or mothers were economically active or not. Furthermore, the live-in domestic servants had significantly lower fertility than the live-out domestic servants, which led the authors to state: "A reasonable explanation is that employers prefer household employees who are unmarried or at least childless."

The Pilot Study

To obtain some data which would indicate whether or not live-in maids and prostitutes are contributing normally or abnormally to urban fertility, we interviewed a sample of 100 live-in maids and a sample of 100 prostitutes. The sample of maids was

drawn by a random selection of 100 occupied housing units from the 35 *barrios* (neighbourhoods) in Cali in which virtually all housing units have a maid's room. There were 17 cases in which the maid refused to be interviewed and three cases in which the employer refused to let us interview the maid. Alternative sample units were utilized in these instances.

The sample of 100 prostitutes was drawn from among the clients at the city's *Clinica de Enfermedades Transmisibles,* where prostitutes obtain venereal disease examinations and, if free from such diseases, receive health slips so indicating. The *Clinica* does not ask clients to state their occupation and the health slips are good for eight days from date of issue. The director of the *Clinica* estimated that an average of 2,500 clients are examined each month, that at least 90 per cent of the *Clinica's* clients are prostitutes, and that at least 90 per cent of the prostitutes in the city do not have up-to-date health slips although many of them may have had a VD examination at some time. Our interviewer visited the *Clinica* every other half-day, alternating mornings and afternoons, and selected every 10th client who came in for an examination. It took almost five weeks to obtain our sample of 100. All clients selected were indeed prostitutes; no client refused to be interviewed.

The 100 live-in maids ranged in age from 13 to 55 years, with the mean age being 22.4 years, while the 100 prostitutes ranged in age from 15 to 45 years, with the mean age being 23.2 years. Notwithstanding this similarity in age, the two groups have had considerably different fertility experiences. The average maid has had .38 live births while the average prostitute has had more than five times (1.94) as many live births. Or, to put the matter in terms of woman-years lived during the reproductive age span, the maids have completed 909 woman-years from age 13 through age 44 with an average of .04 live birth per year, while the prostitutes have completed 1,018 woman-years in those ages with an average of .19 live birth per year. Again, the prostitutes have had almost five times as much average woman-year fertility during their reproductive years as have the maids.

If maids and prostitutes go through their reproductive years having live births at each age at the rate at which these groups have had live births at each age, then the "total" completed fertility would be the very low average of 1.28 live births per live-in maid and an average of 5.51 live births per prostitute. This relatively high live birth rate for the prostitutes is about four and one-third times the rate for the maids, but even at that the rate for the prostitutes is slightly less than the national total fertility rate was in 1966. These group rates for the maids and prostitutes are shown in Table 2 along with national age-specific and total fertility rates for Colombia in 1951, 1964, and 1966. A comparison of those rates reveals that if live-in maids and prostitutes follow the patterns set by our two samples, then the completed fertility of live-in maids will be 3.3 live births less than the total fertility rate was in 1966 for urban Colombian women, while the prostitutes will have a completed fertility rate that is .9 live birth more than the urban total fertility rate was in 1966.

As is obvious, the above fertility comparisons, both between the samples and between the samples and national fertility data, only show, at best, an approximation of any fertility differences that may exist. Using Puerto Rican survey data, Myers and Gibson (1969) have pointed out a number of problems involved when trying to infer completed fertility from cumulative live birth data obtained in sample surveys. One major such problem is that when the cumulative fertility of the sample is used, one is making the assumption that the pattern of childbearing has not changed during the years that sample members have been in their reproductive years. For example, the "total" fertility rate of 5.51 for prostitutes shown in Table 2 represents the sum of the pattern of live births experienced

TABLE 2 AGE-SPECIFIC AND TOTAL FERTILITY RATES FOR SPECIFIED COLOMBIAN POPULATIONS

Age of Mother at Delivery	Age-Specific Fertility Rates					
	Colombia 1951 (1)	Colombia 1964 (1)	Colombia 1966 (2)	Urban Colombia 1966 (2)	Live-in Maids in Cali 1974 (3)	Prostitutes in Cali 1974 (3)
15-19*	.406	.366			.261	1.050
15-24			1.546	1.106		
20-24	1.156	1.254			.339	1.396
25-29	1.279	1.401			.372	1.280
25-34			2.734	2.324		
30-34	1.022	1.126			.202	1.538
35-39	.693	.890			.111	.250
35-44			1.549	1.165		
40-44	.274	.360			.000	.000
Total Fertility Rate	4.829	5.396	5.829	4.595	1.285	5.514

Sources.- (1) Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadistica (DANE), Centro de Investigaciones en Metodos Estadisticos para Demografia (CIMED), Aspectos Metodologicos del Estudio ERED, Serie Metodologica No. 1. Febrero 1973 (Bogota, Colombia: DANE-CIMED, 1973), Cuadro No. 14, p. 15; (2) from Data supplied in Carlos Agualimpia M., et al., "Demographic Facts of Colombia: The National Investigation of Morbidity," Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly, 47 (July, 1969). Tables 15 and 18, pp. 271 and 276; and (3) the sums of the yearly data shown in Table 2.

*Includes live births to mothers under age of 15

by our sample members between 1942 and 1974; whereas the live births reflected by the total fertility rate of 5.83 for Colombia in 1966 represents the pattern of childbearing in Colombia in just that one year. Even period rates, such as the Colombian ones given in Table 2 are no more than suggestive of what completed fertility will be; but at least period data provide a good description of fertility behaviour in the year(s) in question and do not merge, as sample rates often do, several decades of perhaps widely varying behaviour into one statistic.

A more meaningful way to get at differences over time in the number or timing of births is through cohort analysis. Even with survey data, Myers and Gibson suggest that a more accurate presentation of the fertility of the group can be made by categorizing the sample into birth cohorts and showing the fertility of each cohort during various past age periods. With this procedure one can at least determine, for example, whether a cohort born between 1940-44 has had higher or lower fertility, at each age period that both cohorts have completed, than has a cohort born between 1945-49. Shown in Table 3 are the average number of live births occurring in age periods completed for various cohorts of live-in maids and prostitutes. Even these data, however, can be only suggestive of the

TABLE 3 AVERAGE NUMBER OF LIVE BIRTHS OCCURRING IN VARIOUS AGE PERIODS FOR LIVE-IN MAIDS AND PROSTITUTES, BY BIRTH COHORT: CALI, COLOMBIA, 1974

Birth Cohort	Age Period								Number of Respondents
	Under 15	15-16	17-18	19-20	21-22	23-24	25-29	30-34	
				Prostitutes					
1925-39	0.33	0.50	0.50	0.67	0.50	0.50	1.17	1.33	6
1940-44	0	0.20	0.40	1.00	0.50	0.60	1.50		10
1945-49	0.18	0.36	0.82	0.54	0.73	0.45			11
1950-51	0.10	0.10	0.42	0.79	0.42				19
1952-53	0	0.20	0.33	0.60					15
1954-55	0	0.21	0.21						19
1956-57	0.09	0.27							11
1958-59	0.22								9
				Maids					
1919-39	0	0	0.22	0.22	0	0	0	0.22	9
1940-44	0	0	0	0.22	0.33	0.22	0.78		9
1945-49	0	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.22	0	0		9
1950-51	0	0	0.14	0.14	0.14				7
1952-53	0	0	0	0.50					6
1954-55	0	0.06	0.06						17
1956-57	0	0.07							15
1958-59	0								24
1960-61	0								4

actual fertility of populations of maids and prostitutes during these periods because our sample cohort sizes are very small. Further, these data, with the possible exception of those for the oldest cohorts, can be only suggestive of what completed fertility will be because the majority of the sample cohorts have 20 or more years of reproductive life still ahead of them. Nevertheless, the differences in the age period fertility data between the two groups are so great that there is a very good possibility that current live-in maids will end up with a completed fertility that is much lower than that of the current prostitutes. Of the 36 pairs of cohort-age period average live birth data given in Table 3, both the maids and the prostitutes have an average of zero three times, and the prostitute average is higher than that of the maids in all of the other 33 cases. Further, the prostitute average is more than twice that of the maids 31 times, at least three times that of the maids 28 times, and at least four times that of the maids 20 (56 percent) times. There is little doubt that at each age period the prostitute cohorts have had considerably higher fertility than the corresponding maid cohorts.

Another way of presenting this information is to calculate the cumulative average live births at various age periods. Again, at no age period have any of the maid cohorts had a cumulatively greater number of live births than the prostitutes. Of the 36 pairs of cohort-age period cumulative live birth data, the prostitute cumulative number is more than double that of the maids in 33 cases, at least three times that of the maids in 31 cases, and at least four times that of the maids in 27 cases. In other words, for 75 per cent of the cohort-age periods the cumulative average live births per prostitute cohort was at least four times that of the counterpart maid cohort.

It is also of interest to note that the sum of the cohort-age period live birth data indicates that by the end of their 34th year the 1939 and earlier cohort of prostitutes had had an average of 5.50 live births — a figure that is identical with our "total" fertility rate for the entire prostitute sample (see Table 2). The 1939 and earlier cohort of maids, however, by the end of their 34th year had had an average of only .67 live births — a figure that is less than one-eighth that of their prostitute counterpart, and only one-half that of our "total" fertility rate for maids. Our sample "total" fertility rate for maids, therefore, at least as far as this oldest cohort is concerned, seems to have overestimated actual completed fertility. At the very least, the fertility histories of the oldest cohorts of maids and prostitutes suggest that prostitutes will have completed fertility that is about the national average and that maids will have completed fertility that is only one-fourth to one-eighth that of the national average.

This research suggests that prostitutes have had live births at a rate which will give them an average completed fertility that is about equal to the national total fertility rate in 1966, and about one child greater than the country's urban total fertility rate in 1966. If so, the socio-economic practice that provides for their current employment may not serve to keep their fertility lower than it might otherwise have been. On the other hand, the live-in maids have been having live births at a rate which would give them an average completed fertility that is three to four children less than the country's urban total fertility rate in 1966. If so, then the socio-economic practice that provides for their current employment may be a major factor that serves to keep the fertility of live-in maids lower than it might otherwise have been. We must also hasten to add though, that present-day urban Colombian society is by no means the first society in which servants have been less fertile than other sectors of the population. D. V. Glass (1968:585), for example, has indicated that the London of 1695 had an average of more than two servants per house in the high status parishes and that almost all of them were unmarried. And John T. Noonan (1968:470) quite bluntly states: "The willingness to have an economy where many servants were not expected to marry has existed in many societies nurturing the class belief that only people of a given status are persons." While we have no reason to believe that the moderately affluent Latin Americans who employ live-in maids view those maids as non-persons, there is reason to believe that such persons are willing to have an economy which enables them to employ reproductive age women who do not have children.

This exploratory research, obviously, cannot answer some crucial questions that need to be answered before a determination can be made as to the social, economic, or demographic effects that are being produced by the current socio-economic practices that have produced an excess of urban reproductive age females. For one thing, in addition to our very small samples, our study included only currently employed live-in maids and prostitutes; thus there is the obvious need for similar data from samples of ex-maids and ex-prostitutes to see if they have higher or lower fertility after having left their respective occupations. If, for example, live-in maids have "catch-up" fertility after leaving their occupation, then the demographic impact of their previously reduced fertility will not be very great. Our data suggest, however, that "catching up" is not very likely. A maid cannot make up those risk-of-pregnancy years that were lost while working as a live-in maid. Further, any future exposure will be at a time when she is an "older" woman, and there are a host of social and biological reasons why the risk of pregnancy or of live birth decreases during the latter part of the reproductive span.

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