

Let's Talk About Sex...in Rural Guatemala:

**Examining the Relationship between Fertility Rates and Contraception Use, and the General
Education of San Antonio Palopó Indigenous Women**

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SOAN 295
El Mundo Maya Ethnographic Research Paper
3/7/10

Abstract

A close relationship exists between a woman's education and how many children she decides to birth. Through a variety of formal and informal interviews with first, second, and third generation women from San Antonio Palopó, the Doctor of the local clinic, and the principals of both the schools in San Antonio, along with conducting an anonymous survey of twenty-five women, I was able to not only conclude the relationship between education and fertility rates exists, but also found why education has this effect and what other means exist that instill the same lessons. Though the *machismo* culture, religious beliefs, and general lack of thought put into family planning forms obstacles of thought difficult to overcome as outsiders, these obstacles are overcome by the internal education of women in the schools. Women who get an education are taught lessons of self-reliance, gender equality, their rights, and are exposed to other cultures, which results in them rejecting the *machismo* culture and other limiting belief systems, understanding the consequences of large families, and creating lives for themselves outside the home. In addition, I found that these same lessons can be discovered through observing the economic market shift, witnessing other's successes and failures, growing-up without a father, or through personal life experience. My research concludes that though these other means exist of acquiring the same lessons that education teaches, an education gives women a higher chance of acting upon from the values they have learned to create flourishing, happy lives for themselves.

Introduction

The issue of limited resources, be it land, water, or food, is frightfully apparent in San Antonio Palopó, and, similarly to the United States, it is those most impoverished who bear the blunt of the suffering. As overwhelming as the issue of limited resources is, to me there seemed to be a simple solution: decrease the population. Thus, I stumbled upon my topic which examines what variables affect women in the quantity of children they decide to birth. I embarked on this subject specifically

looking at the relationships between a women's perception of contraception, quantity of intended children, and their education. My results along with my sources generally establish a close link between education and a women's desire to have a small family (one to three children), but I then sought to answer the question: what are the lessons taught in the schools that cause this relationship? What I discovered were that the lessons influencing a women's decision to have X amount of children, though yielded the best results when taught in schools, could also be learned through other means as well.

Methodology

My research is based upon fifteen formal and informal interviews with first, second, and third generation women. I arranged my formal interviews with women working in stores, host mothers of other students, and school teachers. My informal interviews came about through sitting in pick-ups, waiting for pick-ups at the stop, and just walking the streets of San Antonio making conversation. I asked questions regarding how far they had gone in their education, why they had terminated or never began their education, why education was or was not important, how many children they had or intended on having, why they wanted this family size, and what their thoughts were on contraception. I tried to discover what behind the education system was causing the link, along with what were determining influences in a woman's life.

In addition to interviews with local women, I also conducted interviews with Odilio Chavez and Vicente Perez, the principals of both schools in San Antonio. In these interviews I sought to uncover what specifically was taught in the classes, which had women learning about independence, their rights, equality, family planning, and exposing them to new cultures.

Lastly, I did a series of studies within the only local health clinic in San Antonio. I conducted an interview with Doctor Andrea Barrios about the clinic's purpose, patterns she had observed about women who come in seeking contraception, and the cultural obstacles in addressing high fertility rates.

I also spent a day sitting in the clinic observing the types of women who came in, how many children they had, and talking to them briefly about their education. While in the clinic, I also read the plethora of different pamphlets given to patients about various contraceptive methods. With the help of Doctor Barrios, I created a survey which the doctor administered to twenty-five of her patients asking their age, years of schooling, type of work, number of children birthed and alive, whether they and their spouse want more children, and why they do or do not use contraception. In order to analyze this data I created three graphs: the first showing the relationship between number of children and number of years in school, the second showing the relationship between number of children and if the woman works, and the third showing the relationship between the number of children and the woman's age.

Thus, I used a variety of different methods in examining the emic and etic perspectives of this topic, talking to people within the local community and those working to improve it.

Background and the Obstacles

As of 2002, Guatemala was the most populous country in Central America, and within rural areas of Guatemala, such as San Antonio Palopó, the total fertility rate of Mayan women was 6.5 children per women (Lindstrom, Munoz-Franco 2005:279). Contraceptive use as of 2002 by the rural Mayan population was eighteen percent, which in comparison to the seventy-four percent use by the rest of the Guatemalan population, is overwhelmingly low (Slow 2009:2). Thus, there has been a push to find ways of increasing family planning and contraception use, also called *planificación*, a less controversial and subtle term now used in rural communities, but this effort has proven difficult for a number of reasons.

The *machismo* culture which is undeniably present causes women to live in a constant subservient state below men. *Machismo* instills the mindset within women that they are not capable of making their own decisions without the consultation of their father or husband. Within the *machismo* culture, a large portion of what demonstrates one's masculinity is the number of kids one is able to

produce, and as a result few men use condoms or approve of their wives using *planificación* methods. In attempt to prevent their wives from using methods, husbands use threats of domestic violence or abandoning the family, accuse wives of wanting *planificación* to hide affairs, and argue that *planificación* is “toxic” for the women and harmful any future child's health (Bertrand, Puac, Ward 1992:62). Men also have vocalized the idea that *planificación* is a plot used by the Ladinos, those with Mayan and Spaniard heritage, to lower the indigenous Mayan population (Lindstrom, Munoz-Franco 2005:279). With these fears of the effects and purpose of *planificación*, along with the general fear of the husband, if *planificación* is used at all it is used by the women in a secretive fashion favoring methods such as the injection, a shot only necessary once every three months (Bertrand, Puac, Ward 1992:61-64).

A second obstacle in spreading *planificación* use to lower fertility rates is religion. The majority of the indigenous are a hybrid of Mayan spirituality and Catholicism or Evangelical Christianity. The mentality within many women is *planificación* methods are equivalent to having an abortion, which are illegal in Guatemala and sinful. Under my survey question: “Do you use *planificación*? Why or Why not?” One woman answered, “No, because God gives me the children that he wants.” During my interviews with Doctor Andrea Barrios, who works at the only local health clinic in San Antonio called *El Puesto de Salud*, she informed me this religious sentiment is widespread and often voiced when she begins talking about *planificación* options (Bertrand, Puac, Ward 1992:61).

Another reason women gave for not using *planificación* is that they just never thought about it. Multiple times during my interviews with young women, when asked how many children they wanted, or whether they had planned on using *planificación*, they responded, “I don't know, I never thought about it.” The general lack of premeditated thought about family size is astounding. This absence of thought comes from a combination of the *machismo* culture that has women expecting men to decide for them, from lack of knowledge about the existence of *planificación*, and from the fact the mindset of

predetermining the amount of children one wants is void entirely in the culture.

Upon completion of my research, I have ruled out infant-mortality as a pervasive factor in the low contraception use due to very few women reported during my interviews or in my survey of having miscarriages or children die at a young age. Doctor Andrea Barrios also confirmed that infant mortality has not been a reoccurring problem. Therefore, I would like to note that this is not one of the persistent obstacles preventing lower birth-rates or *planificación* use.

All these obstacles are belief systems, which means that in order to directly address *planificación* and decreasing fertility rates one must battle against one or all these beliefs. Outsider's entering rural indigenous areas and arguing against beliefs that are ingrained within their culture, is dangerous ground. It is dangerous because attacking these beliefs on these topics seems to be another colonialism scheme of Westerners imposing their ideas upon the "ignorant." Thus, exploring other tactics, which do not have outsiders directly attacking these beliefs, that have caused indigenous women to begin using *planificación* and shrink their family size is crucial in discovering a more culturally sensitive way to accomplish lowering the population.

A strong correlation exists between women's general education, and their contraception use and fertility rates. The farther women have gone in their education, the higher the use of a contraceptive method and the less kids they intend on birthing. A study done on contraceptive dynamics in Guatemala between the years 1978 and 1998 acknowledges, "secondary education produced the largest effect; Mayan women with a secondary education were 5.8 times as likely to use some contraceptive method as those with no schooling" (Bertrand, Escudero, Seiber 2001:116). Thus, general education is an essential piece in having fertility-rates decrease as an internal movement.

The Education System and the Reasons it Decreases Fertility Rates

Through interviewing the principals from both San Antonio schools and speaking to Rosario Sicajan and Maria Perez, second generation women currently with careers who have gone all the way

through the education system, I discovered what lessons learned through general education causes women to have fewer children. The education system teaches women about their rights, gender equality, teaches them to think independently, and exposes women to other cultures and ways of thinking about the world. School forces women to look closely at the *machismo* culture they were raised in, and question its very basis.

There are two schools in San Antonio, Escuela Oficial Urbana Mixta 15 de Septiembre 1821 Jornada Matutina and Escuela Oficial Urbana Mixta 15 de Septiembre 1821 Jornada Vespertina. Jornada Vespertina only teaches *primario*, grades one through six, and Jornada Matutina teaches both *primario* and *basico*, *basico* being grades seven to nine. For the equivalent to high school the kids must go to Panajachel, and in order to go to university the kids can go at the closest to Sololá. Though, the absence of a high school or university in San Antonio makes access to them more difficult, for those who do get the opportunity to go, it also has the positive outcome of exposing students to new cultures. Take Rosario Sicajan's life as an example. Rosario is incredible. She has worked as a bartender, waitress, tour guide, teacher, cook, and gardener, is a mother of two, wife, and organizes information sessions for women on *planificación*. Her parents understood the value of education due to the hardships in their own lives of not having one while trying to support six children, and so she grew-up always striving for more knowledge and ways to take her education further. She tells me that after living and working in Antigua for many years, she stayed single and was able to travel to other parts of the world. She says her education was central in her exposure to other cultures, which expanded her mind along with teaching her independence. She discovered the joys of having her own career and decided to only have two kids. Rosario then explains, in contrast, other women never open their minds to other cultures and thus get married and become reliant on their spouse for security and thought guidance. These women live only for their children and their husbands. During the meetings she leads for women on *planificación*, most are uneducated, and as a result fearful of medicine and their

husbands; they have not been exposed to other to other perspectives on these subjects and so they do not have the tools to question the *machismo* culture, find out the truth about medicine, or become independent thinkers (Rosario Sicajan: 3 Mar 2010).

School also teaches women their rights. Women who do not know their rights are vulnerable to the mentality they are not equal to men. Maria Perez, a school teacher, told me that many women who experience domestic violence do not realize this is something bad because they do not know their rights, but once a woman knows her rights she is less fearful and can say to her husband, “You cannot treat me this way.” In school girls learn their rights through a variation of different forums. Informally girls learn their rights from seeing first hand in their classes that they are able to accomplish the same tasks the boys can, and formally learn from teachers about gender equality and women's rights in *Clase de Formación Ciudadana*, Civic Training Class. When women know they have equal rights to men they are more likely to use *planificación* because they are also more likely to want their own careers, become self-reliant, see the strains a large family before they actually have children, and thus question the *machismo* authority that dictates a woman's purpose is to have a large family (Maria Perez: 24 Feb 2010).

Sexual education is also taught within the schools, whereas without an education topics of sex, marriage, and childbirth were learned through experimentation and observation of society (Juana Perez Lopez: 2 Mar 2010; Manuela Perez: 2 Mar 2010). During my interviews with Odilio Chavez and Vicente Perez, the principals of both schools in San Antonio, they informed me that sexual education is taught very basically during science class and during *hogares*, a class taught only to girls. When I sat in on sixth grade science class the kids were taught that because of nature boys and girls begin to be attracted to each other and as a result then date, kiss, and get married. Also once married the husband and wife plan their families together and eventually decide to have two children. Then through a process of reproductive organs, which include the penis and vagina, they create children. This class

depicts how schools are, from a young age, instilling ideas of joint family planning and small family size (Vicente Perez: 26 Feb 2010, Odilio Chavez: 22 Feb 2010). In addition, I interviewed the teacher of *hogares*, Ignacia Perez, who told me she teaches that since the economy is bad, *planificación* is necessary in having a small amount of kids (Ignacia Perez: 6 Mar 2010). Without having to learn through life experience the economic strains of a large family, these girls are able to learn them in schools.

Maria Perez puts it simply saying, “education is important because it give you thoughts, makes it easier to see what is right and wrong, understand your rights, and see your options of changing a bad situation” (Maria Perez: 24 Feb 2010). The schools take the obstacles, which make lowering birth-rates difficult, and overcome them by teaching the girls independence, their rights, and the realities of large families.



Rosaria Diaz sits across from me on her dirt floor playing with her two little boys, Christian (one year old) and Edgar (three years old). Her husband, Pedro, stands leaning against their *pila*, with their six year old, Jennifer, holding onto his leg. Rosaria’s face is lined with wrinkles giving her appearance of at least fifty years, when time says she is actually thirty. These are not lines made by time, but from a “*vida muy cuesta*.”

Growing up with an alcoholic father and a mother balancing seven children, Rosaria never had a day in school but spent her childhood working, selling and weaving textiles. After her father died, leaving the family with no main economic provider, her mother was forced to re-marry even though remarriage was and still is rare among women in San Antonio. At age twenty-two Rosaria married Pedro, with the intention of giving her life some economic stability. This hope would not come to fruition, though, for Pedro soon became blind in one eye making it nearly impossible for him to do most jobs except make textiles on his *telar de pie*, peddle loom. As a result, the economic pressure to

provide for the family was put onto Rosaria.

So every day, Rosaria sells the textiles Pedro and her weave on their two looms, while also carrying Christian in a cloth sling around her back. In the evening she walks up to her house located at the highest point of town. Her house Pedro built by-hand. The first of two rooms has the roof and three walls entirely constructed of rusted scrap sheet tin, and the fourth wall of poorly held together adobe and bamboo shoots. Their two looms and *pila* take up the entire room. The other room is made of adobe brick. A bed takes up half the room, which is where all five members sleep, and a bag full of their textiles sit at the other half of the room. This is their shelter.

goes to school, and when I ask why education is important for her children, Rosaria explains, “because my life is very hard, and so my family needs to go to school to take classes on health and learn Spanish and have a profession, because I was not able to and my life is very hard, very hard.” When I ask whether she wants more children, she replies, “we are very poor and I have to work, it costs a lot to have children, to give them cloths, feed them, send them to school, and so three is enough children.”

Rosaria’s story is an important example of a woman who, though was not educated in school, still understood the costs of a large family and the importance of education, and her story caused me to ask the question: what lessons did her difficult life teach her that brought her to the same understandings of family and education as someone with a general education? Her difficult life experiences taught her independence and self-reliance, as the sole provider for her family she dealt with the financial strains of each child, *machismo* could not exist in their household where Pedro’s livelihood relied upon her, and as a result of spending her entire life in the working world knew she women were equal to men. Rosaria knew her rights.

Most would want to learn the values Rosaria’s life of continuous hardships taught her, by going to school instead of through the tragedies Rosaria experienced. During my research I interviewed many

women, some like Rosaria who had uncovered these principles through exposure to life's difficulties, and some who had uncovered these principles through continuing their education until eventually having a career. So though my research exposed that education is not the only way to gain an understanding for these values, which in turn cause women to have less children, it did prove to teach these values faster in a means that could result in a fruitful life instead of a, "vida muy cuesta" (Rosaria Diaz: 25 Feb 2010).

Other Factors Effecting Perspectives on Women's Education and Fertility Rates

There are many variables, which are effecting why views on women's education and large family living are changing drastically between first, second, and third generation women. These variables also explain how women with no education have also come to similar conclusions, regarding the importance of education and low fertility rate, as women with educations. Women's own life experiences through not being educated and having large families plays an interesting role in how they reflect later on women's education and fertility rates. Women, whose fathers died while they were young such as Manuela, Maria, and Rosaria, learned the lesson of independence. While other women in the first and second generation understood their role to be in the house cooking, cleaning, and caring for children, Manuela, Maria, and Rosaria had to work to make up for their fathers' absence. These women learned they are capable of providing for a family as adequately as a man. Thus, the decisions of whether to put their own girls in school and how many children to have became joint, taking into account the woman's voice. Another factor is whether or not women witnessed other women successfully getting educated and forming careers, witnessed failures in young marriages, or saw from their own families the consequences of an overcrowded house. Glendy and Sandra are each examples of how observing the mistakes and/or successes of others directly influences their own life decisions and opinions. Lastly the overall shift in the economic market has greatly altered perspectives on women's education and large family living.

The Evolving Economic Market's Effects on Education and Fertility Rates

The evolution of the economic market for the indigenous in San Antonio Palopó, has changed how education and large families are viewed within the culture. When land was plentiful and the population smaller, the people of San Antonio were agricultural people, dependent on farming for subsistence and money. In an agricultural society an education is not a necessity, for boys would just inherit the land of their fathers and become farmers, and girls would work the land until married and then would start families. An education was simply extraneous and far from a necessity. In my survey and interviews with women, when I asked why they stopped their education or did not go to school the majority responded saying they were too poor; sending a child to *primario* and *basico* does not spend money, though, it spends time, time which the child could be spending making money. For the majority of first generation and some second generation women, the economic reality required them to work during their pre-pubescent years, and starting a family upon reaching puberty. In addition, since land was not scarce, the amount of children one could have did not put a strain on resources, and instead provided security for a family. A high number of children ensured that if a parent was unable to farm, the family could still be supported.

As the current economic market shifts towards tourism, views on education and birthing high quantities of children have changed dramatically. Agricultural production still exists in the form of onion terraces, which can be seen magnificently lining the mountain sides, but even onions are produced as a cash-crop to be sold in bulk in the bigger trade centers of Panajachel, Sololá, and Guatemala City. The tourism market is centered on the making and selling of textiles and ceramics, but only so many people can live off of a salary purely dependent on textile and ceramic production. Thus, finding other means of work has become necessary causing people to turn to education for job opportunities. Getting an education now means having more opportunities for work and making money. Odilio Chavez, the principal of Jornada Vespertina, recalls, "Before there were only few families here

so there was enough land, but now there are many families. So where are you going to live? There isn't anywhere." One could try to develop the difficult terrain farther up on the mountain, but even this would require money. So Odilio explains that parents have begun realizing they have no land to give their kids to live on, and, as a result, are putting their kids in school in order to provide the tools for which they can create careers and have alternative methods of making money. In addition, parents are acknowledging they do not have the resources required to provide for a large number of children. Having a large quantity of children no longer grants stability, but economic strain. The eight working women I conducted formal interviews with when asked how many children they wanted all said between one and three. When asked why they wanted small families all eight responded informing me, children cost a lot of money. Children require food, shelter, an education, medicine, time, and in the words of Maria Perez, "to have children is a huge responsibility."

First generation women, though themselves were not educated and strove to have large families, grew up in an agricultural economic system and lived through the evolution into the current economic market. Thus, their opinions on women's education and large families shifted along with the market. Manuela, a sixty-two year old woman who had an arranged marriage at fourteen and six children before her husband died, never went to school. Her husband was an onion farmer, and she worked in the house cleaning the onions, making food, taking care of their children, and "there was always more work to do for the women." Manuela witnessed her family's source of income change from relying on onion farming to a combination of small family restaurants, stores, and textile production. Manuela, despite her upbringing, informed me that education is the basis to creating a stable life with and acquiring material positions, for she has seen the market shift. She has given the opportunity of an education to all of her children, and three of four her daughters as a result have become teachers. In addition, when I asked whether she used *planificación* she responded, "no, God gave me all my children, I didn't use *planificación*," but when I asked what she thought of the younger

generation using *planificación* she explained that it is a changing world upon which *planificación* enables women to do more things with their lives. Two of the daughters with educations are not married yet and the third only has two children. The contrast between Manuela's own life (early marriage, lack of education and lack of personal *planificación*) with how she has raised her daughters, clearly demonstrates how the evolving economic market has directly influenced the views of women's education and fertility rates (Manuela Perez: 2 Mar 2010).

The Effects of Witnessing Other's Successes and Failures on Education and Fertility Rates

The observation that witnessing others' failures and successes influences women's opinions of education and size of family, may seem obvious, but is crucial in understanding why some women have formed the attitudes they have on these subjects. It is easy for those from the United States with well educated families to look upon the decisions of those from San Antonio as unintelligent. It was easy for me to ask questions like, how could these people not see that an education will give them more opportunities for work, why would a women ever want to stay at home and just have children instead of go to school and work, and how can some women with the opportunity of moving somewhere else and making more money decide to stay in San Antonio? But what those of us from the outside world often overlook at first glance is the enormous risk involved with stepping outside the roles everyone else in the culture has accepted for generations.

Entire generations of families live in San Antonio, and few have traveled outside the towns around Lake Atitlan. To leave the town means leaving every person who loves you and the way of life you have always known; so it is no small deal to decide to go to university, which is at the closest an hour away in Sololá, or four hours to Guatemala City to attend the only public university. The young women I spoke to agreed that one could not be married or even dating while in school, and some women such as Manuela, a twenty-five year old woman with her own textile shop, expressed never wanting to marry because a woman cannot work and a have husband. Since most women get married

between the ages of fifteen and twenty four, deciding to go to university runs the risk of no longer being a desirable bachelorette upon finishing university in one's mid-twenties. Whether it is harder to find a husband as an older woman was never expressed as a reality women are actually struggling with, but whether or not this is a reality is not important for the importance lies in the fact there is a fear of this reality. There is the fear of leaving behind loved ones, and missing out on the chance to create a family of one's own.

Glendy is a twenty year old and got accepted to nursing school in Xela, which could have enabled her to get a job as a nurse in Guatemala City or even the United States. She turned down the offer.

Glendy is the fourth child of nine in her family. Her three older sisters are all married, and the oldest has two small children. Both her parents are alcoholics, and six years ago she along with her sister, Chona, moved out to live with their aunt, my host mother, Francisca. Francisca currently is married to Thomas, a retired Canadian man, and they have taken the girls in as daughters.

One day I was listening to a conversation between Francisca and Thomas who were discussing Glendy's decision to turn down nursing school. They were outraged, and Thomas kept insisting it was the worst decision she would ever make in her life. I inquired as to what had prompted her to make her decision; Thomas informed me that they suspect she has a boyfriend. Francisca talked about how Glendy needs a good example of someone who has gotten a good education because her sisters are just reinforcing the gender roles of getting married and caring for the house. Glendy does not have anyone close to her who has taken the risk to create a career, and has shown her that one can create a successful, happy life with both a job and a loving husband. So accepting the offer to nursing school is also rejecting a life already spelled out for her. She already knows the dangers and joys of living in San Antonio, getting married, and having children, but she has no one to teach her the dangers and benefits of a professional life. This is a huge risk to take for just the possibility of a better life.

Glendy has also witnessed, though, the challenges of having a large family, and knows the costs of providing for many children. Due to the example of her parents' struggle, Glendy told me during an informal interview, "I only want two or three children because they cost a lot and are a big responsibility." She saw firsthand her own parent's failures to care for their own children, and now is adamant to not repeat their mistakes. Glendy's story displays the complexities of women deciding to pursue a career and have families, and importance of witnessing others who have chosen to step outside their gender role (Glendy Lopez: 26 Feb 2010).

Sandra is twenty-eight and owns her own textile shop. She has a boyfriend whom she plans to marry. When asked why she chose to marry later than most girls, she responded "I had sisters who were married when they were young, and now it's not good, they aren't happy—it's better to wait till later because now I have a house and things." Sandra also later expressed her desire to have, "one child, not many because most women have five or six and you need more money to have lots of kids." Through witnessing her sisters' unhappy young marriages where they are dependent on their husbands and stuck in their houses caring for children, Sandra has learned self-reliance and the importance of a small family (Sandra Perez: 17 Feb 2010).

Having a strong leading example determines the futures for some of these women, and is a vital part of examining the reasons for why some women decide to follow the same traditional roles of generations before and why others take the leap towards a future outside the home. Maria Perez took that leap as the first woman in her family to get an education and she succeeded in becoming a teacher, thus inspiring her six younger sisters to do the same. Having an example to draw upon, which shows that the path one is considering has been done before and can result in happiness, is integral how education and large families are viewed, and as more women obtain careers more shall also bare witness and follow suit.

The Effects on Education and Fertility Rates when Women Grow-Up without a Father

Women whose father's die before they get married are forced to take on responsibilities, which women with fathers do not take on, and as a result their perceptions of education and family size are affected. I have already described how the death of Rosaria Diaz's father caused her to work alongside her mother to support their family causing Rosaria to discover her ability to provide for herself and a family without a male figure. Rosaria also, through exposure to the working world, learned the importance of a women's education in order to give more opportunities for girls to be self-reliant. Another example is Manuela whose father died when she was six, which forced her and her mother to work outside the home in order to compensate for his absence. Based on her experiences in the working world, Manuela now has no desire to ever get married or have children with the reasoning that once married and with children one's spouse and kids restrict one from selling textiles or traveling, and she wants to work and leave the house. She views men and women as equal and learned about her rights from seeing that she was equally as capable as her father to provide for her family. Her exposure to the working world has also taught her about the responsibilities of having children, which she realizes she could never commit to (Manuela Martin Perez: 2 Mar 2010). Lastly Maria Perez, the teacher whom I mention in the previous section, lost her father as well causing her to depend on herself for money. Maria got a job in order to support herself while in school as well as help out her seven sisters. The lessons she learned from her father's death of independence, gender equality, and the costs of a large family influenced the decisions she made later in her life to have only two children and become a teacher (Maria Perez: 24 Feb 2010). These three women's understandings of their capabilities, illustrate how their work experience helped mold their perceptions of large families and the benefits of education. The foundation of Maria, Manuela, and Rosaria's realizations were formed due to the obligations they adopted after their fathers' deaths.

Life Experience's Affects on the Perspectives of Education and Fertility Rates

A women's own life experience greatly influences her opinions of women's education and

fertility rates. This is most relevant to first generation women who as old women have come to believe in the importance of education and small family size, though they may have had neither.

I had the privilege of taking part in a meeting between four *comadronas* or in Kachiquel *iyom*, which are basically midwives with very little medical training, and Doctor Barrios. Three of the *comadronas* were in the first generation, with at least sixty-years of age, while the fourth *comadrona* was in the second generation around the age of forty. None of these women spoke Spanish, which indicated to me that they had received little to no schooling. In this meeting I had the opportunity to ask what they thought of *planificación*. The three older women all were in favor of *planificación* and believed the decision of whether to use it is in the hands of the woman. In contrast, the younger *comadrona* thought God provides the proper amount of children and therefore *planificación* should not be used (Candelaria, Juana, Thomasa, Maria: 4 Mar 2010). In addition, during my formal interview with Doctor Barrios reinforced this data informing me older women more commonly come into the clinic for *planificación* than younger women, because the older women have already had enough children and realize the strain of a large family whereas the younger women are too afraid of their husbands to consider *planificación* (Andrea Barrios: 17 Feb 2010).

The article “Sociocultural Barriers to Family Planning Among Mayans,” helped me make sense why the older generation thought favorably of *planificación*, whom I first anticipated would be more traditional in their thinking and be against it. The article explains, “[women] who are near the end of their childbearing years, were less enthusiastic about the tradition of having large families. These older women felt that having many children was bad for one's health and that it stretched the family finances so much that no one could eat well” (Bertrand, Puac, Ward 1992:62). Thus, women through their life experiences raising children and feeling the financial consequences of their large families, conclude that large families are not the good thing they were raised believing. Sadly, these women discover these lessons after they have already had large families, though hopefully they are passed on to their

children making the lessons not be discovered in vain.



Conclusion

Due to the evolution in how education is thought of, more and more women have been fortunate enough to be put in school. Women who receive an education learn the same lessons of those with life experience, who have grown up without fathers, witnessed other's experiences, and lived through changes in the economic market, but they are saved the costs of these experiences and instead given the opportunity to flourish as independent women. Education teaches the lessons of self-reliance, which in turn causes women to yearn for lives outside the house and desire less children. The results from my survey reinforce my claims that those with more years of school have less children, and that those with jobs have less children as well. Educated women have on average two children where as women with no education have on average four. The averages for how many children women have with jobs and without jobs come out to be two and four respectively as well. Organizations like APROFAM work on lowering fertility rates through contraception education, and though this is a necessary part of solving these elevated rates it is not the sole solution. The only way true change can come about is through an internal evolution in the culture, which is why educating women in the schools plays a central role in tackling the challenges ahead.

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