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COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS, ECONOMIC
STATUS AND FERTILITY IN THE IRANIAN VILLAGES

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AKBAR AGHAJANIAN — AMIR H. HEHRYAR

**COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS, ECONOMIC STATUS AND FERTILITY
IN THE IRANIAN VILLAGES (*)****INTRODUCTION**

Previous research on fertility behavior has been concentrated on the individual and family characteristics in general and socioeconomic status in particular, as the determinants of fertility behavior. Couples are assumed as responding to a variety of individual circumstances facing them such as objective economic conditions of the family, opportunity cost of mother and the economic benefits from children. Hence, families are envisaged as balancing the cost and benefits of children and choose the family size which maximizes the family's well being. Empirical studies on the effect of individual characteristics on fertility behavior abound in the literature of differential fertility and in the recent work in the economics of fertility behavior (for a review of these studies see Research Triangle Institute, 1974; Schultz, 1974).

These studies, however, do not consider that individual fertility behavior among other behaviors and attitudes is constrained and molden by the community or the group in which the individual participates, particularly in developing countries (Goldberg, 1975; Anker, 1974). Furthermore, a recently evinced concern is that a reduction of fertility in rural communities can be achieved more appropriately through community development programs which will not only provide family planning facilities, but also give inducement to the social control of fertility (McNicoll, 1975). Such policy orientations lay on the importance of the social context or social milieu in which the individual lives, as the antecedent of fertility behavior and attitude. Hence for both scientific and policy reasons, it is suggested to go beyond the individual characteristics in understanding fertility behavior and analyze fertility decisions within the social context or the community characteristics in which the individual lives (Freedman, 1974; Goldberg, 1976). This study concentrates on both community and individual socioeconomic variables as determinants of fertility among married women in 28 villages in southern Iran.

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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The classical sociological model of fertility explains the fertility behavior of the individual in terms of characteristics of the society and its existing institutions which provide the design for living and regularities in human behavior in all aspects of life including fertility and childbearing. These regularities are developed around the requirements of man in society (Davis and Blake, 1956; Freedman, 1975; Demerath, 1976). Environmental factors including natural resources and population, social and economic structure, and the culture of the society particularly determine the reproductive goals of the individual directly and indirectly via other social effects on the intermediate variables such as age at first marriage. In general, the structural and institutional components of the society provide the appropriate family size norms and levels of intermediate variables such that the individual attains the family size within the range required by the community or the society.

Within the institutional framework, the community or the social milieu in which the individual lives should be viewed as a socio-psychological as well as an ecological phenomenon; for it is not merely a physical fact, but also a state of mind (Wirth, 1929: 71). Thus, the community does not only affect a specific kind of behavior or attitude such as fertility but all behaviors and attitudes including fertility. The concept of reference group can be used appropriately to explain the mechanism through which community characteristics affect the individual fertility behavior (Freedman, 1974; Goldeberg, 1975). Broadly, this means that individual self-perception and behavior conform partly to the standard observed in the community and this standard is determined by the community characteristics such as type of economy, cropping pattern and the existence of modern institutions.

The socioeconomic model of fertility explains the changes in the household fertility as a function of each family's access to the resources and the competition of non-child centered activities for the resources (time, energy and money) that is available to the family (Namboodiri, 1972). Fertility is then the result of a rational choice within the household and children or "child services" are consumed by the household. Within this perspective couples are envisaged as responding to a variety of individual circumstances facing them such as family income, education and wife's earning opportunities. Hence the socioeconomic theory of fertility points to three factors regarding the individual differences in the demand for children: 1) cost of children relative to cost of other goods and services that the household might wish to purchase, 2) couple's preferences for children versus other commodities and 3) the total income the family has available for expenditure.

Given these factors, economic status (income) has two types of effects on fertility. As children are assumed to be non-inferior goods, an increased income increases the demand for children. On the other hand, the price or substitution effect of income reduces the demand for children by increasing their price relative to the prices of other goods and high income couples substitute children for other

goods. This price effect of income can operate chiefly through the increasing opportunity cost of mother's time as women increase their educational and employment opportunities. Secondly, with increase in income, parents opt for "higher quality" devoting more of their time and income to children's health and education (Easterlin, 1978, 1975; Becher and Lewis, 1973; Becker and Tose, 1976).

In the context of developing countries particularly in the rural communities, neither the opportunity cost of women's time nor the cost of children can be considered as serious constraints against the number of children desired by the family. In the rural communities women's employment is mostly within the household and whenever women work in the field or in the cottage industry, the organization of work is such that they can take care of their young children or the extended family can arrange for baby sitting. Thus there is rarely any incompatibility observed between the worker and mother role (Stycos and Weller, 1967).

With respect to the costs of children, contrary to the situation in Western-industrial societies, from the point of view of the parents in rural communities the cost of children is not as important as their potential economic benefits. In fact, children in the agricultural societies are valued and considered as part of the investment of the family for their compensating economic utilities (Leibenstein, 1975; Caldwell, 1976; White, 1975; Nag, et. al., 1977). Hence the underlying factor in the relationship between economic status and fertility in rural communities is the differential utilities of children. That is the more the objective economic conditions of the family are in favor of the productive utilities of children, the more the expected and gained utilities of children and hence the higher the fertility level. A positive effect of economic status, then, is expected not only because the richer families can afford more children, but also because the families with more resources have more absorptive capacity for the labor contribution of children which in turn encourages a higher fertility level.

COMMUNITY AND SOCIOECONOMIC VARIATIONS IN RURAL IRAN

Rural community as an ideal type, is generally seen as having these core characteristics: relatively low population density, isolation, economic dependence on agriculture, and a concomitant low degree of role differentiation (Sorokin and Zimmerman, 1929). While rurality as described is a matter of degree, social scientists have been guided by overriding notions about the internal structure of rural communities, emphasizing unity, identity, and homogeneity of internal structure. More specifically it has been suggested that the small size of rural communities, the intensity of ties, personal interaction, and dependence on agriculture as a common activity within these societies, result in their relative economic, social, and cultural homogeneity (Foster, 1953; Redfield, 1956; Shanin, 1971).

Despite these general overriding notions, studies of villages and rural communities in developing countries have revealed the existence of various socio-economic groups and differentiated social structure (Lewis, 1953; Albert, 1971;

English, 1966, Ajami, 1969; Mamdani, 1972; Brandes, 1975). Furthermore they point to the inconsistency and shortsightedness of the ideal type, as substantial variations exist across these communities with respect to isolation, lack of contacts with towns, availability of different services, and mode of economic production (Anker, 1974).

In the case of Iranian villages, Lambton (1953) states that to discuss the peasantry as a single undifferentiated class is to ignore important differences in class structure within the village. The basic dimension of this stratification system has been landholding rights. In general, Iranian villages contain a collectivity of diverse socio-economic classes ranging from wealthy large landholders and educated government employees to the poor landless agricultural workers. Thus significant socioeconomic differences emerge from variation in the amount of land owned by various families, education and occupation of the head of family (Ajami, 1969; Hooglund, 1973). There are physical, economic, social, and cultural differences among the 45,000 villages counted in Iran (Lieberman and Edlefsen, 1973). In Fars, where the villages studied are located, Paydarfar (1973) finds considerable variations in the index of modernization for the forty six villages from which he selected his rural sample.

METHODOLOGY

The data come from a 1974 survey of households in 28 villages in a rural district (Sharestan) in Fars Ostan, a southern province of Iran. These villages were located about 200 kilometers from the city of Shiraz, the capital city of Fars province. The headquarter of the district with a population of 10,000 in 1976, is not only the administrative and commercial center in the district but it is the only place where transportation and communication to larger urban centers in the province and other provinces are available.

For the purpose of establishing a dual record system, households in 28 villages, covered by the family planning services of rural midwives, were surveyed and all currently married women were interviewed for collecting baseline data. Three types of data were collected. Individual level data related to the fertility behavior and other demographic characteristics of currently married women and their husbands. Data on household composition and household economic status and asset holding. Furthermore, community level data were collected by contacting the community leaders and personal observations.

In the 1213 households surveyed, a total of 1,116 women were ever-married among whom a total of 987 or 88 per cent were married at the time of interview – incidentally the same figure is 86 per cent from the 1966 census data for the rural areas of the district. Hence the data base is 987 currently married women. For the purpose of this study, the household and village characteristics were coded to the record of the married women.

Three measures of fertility behavior are utilized in this study 1) children ever born, 2) desire for more children in future, and 3) current contraceptive use. Children ever born is the most widely available and used variable in multivariate analysis of fertility. However, it is a measure of past fertility which may be less related to the independent variables measuring the current situation. It is also subject to recall error and underestimating of the children who have died or left home. Desire for more children, on the other hand, is a measure of current fertility behavior and intention for future which its predictive validity in the context of developing countries has been shown in pannel studies (Freedman, et. al., 1975). This variable was measured by asking woman if she wants any more children. If the woman answered yes, the variable is coded "1" and if no "0." A second measure of current fertility is contraceptive use which is coded as "1" if the woman has reported current contraceptive use and "0" otherwise.

An important measure of the economic status of the household is the amount of land the household holds. The size of the landholding is an important indicator of the availability of resources to the rural family. It is expected that it has positive effect on the fertility level of women and their desire for more children. This positive effect is not only related to the fact that households with more assets can afford more children but also the families with more landholding can utilize the extra labor of more children in the family economy of the agricultural production.

A second dimension of socioeconomic status is the occupation of the husband. Drawing on the economic model of fertility, the classes or occupational groups which have higher level of income should have fewer constraints toward the desired number of children. Our findings from these data suggest that non-farmers have an average yearly income higher than farming families. Then, it seems plausible that non-farming occupation should be positively related to the fertility level, other things being equal. However, given the fact that non-farmers are less involved in agricultural activity which is a predominantly labor intensive production, children should not be important for their economic utilities among non-farm families and hence non-farming occupation should have a negative effect on fertility level and desires. A third hypothesis is that since non-farm families in each village are a very small number in comparison to farm families, their fertility behavior is influenced by the behavior of the majority of the families in the village rather than their non-farming occupation.

Literacy rate is the lowest among the Iranian rural women in general and among women in the rural district studied in particular. Since very few women were literate we only consider the literacy of husband in our analysis. It is expected that women married to literate husbands have lower fertility level and are less likely to desire more children. This negative effect of literacy is expected because, 1) literacy is associated with individual modernity in the sense that one believes in having control over his fate, 2) literacy is associated with lower expected utility of children and higher quality (education) rather than quantity (Kasarda, 1976).

A community variable is defined as a characteristic which is common to all persons in a community (Freedman, 1974). Three of such variables are examined in this study. These variables are constructed based on the information available

from the village level questionnaire. These variables are 1) non-agricultural activity in the village, 2) primary school in the village, and 3) relative access of the village to the nearest city.

The only non-agricultural economic activity in some of the villages studied was carpet industry. This is a household industry and the major input for this production is the labor provided by the married women and their daughters who may work as unpaid family workers or as wage earners. While wage-earning carpet weaving has been traditionally common in large commercial cities and villages surrounding them, most of the second rate carpets woven in the distant villages and among tribes were not woven for wages. Part of this art production, however, has been traditionally transferred to city to be exchanged with other goods needed by the households. What has changed during the last decades is not only the volume of this transaction but its pattern. We believe this new pattern has impact on all attitudes and behavior including fertility behavior.

In past carpets woven in the villages were sold or pre-sold in the house to the village merchant or the city dealer who came from city to the village periodically to buy the ready carpets and finance those being woven. Most of the time this was a non-cash exchange as the weaver family already owed most of the price that was offered and the remaining part was traded for commodities that the household needed. The recent trend is that women usually bring the finished carpet to the city and haggle in the market for the best price. They may return to the village without selling the carpet if they note that market is not good. Similarly, the women shop around to get the least price that is offered for goods for household consumption and production. Some of them open credits with the suppliers and have a continuous economic exchange with them.

The new trend in the carpet transaction provides a good opportunity for communication and contact with the commercial urban culture which is completely different from the situation in the village. In fact, it is an economic force for communication and contact with city which might result in changes in attitudes and behaviors including fertility. Our expectation is that existence of carpet industry in the village, through its modernizing force, would have a negative effect on fertility behavior. Yet considering the fact that this modernizing force is a very recent phenomenon, its effect may appear on measures of current fertility and attitude rather than cumulative fertility.

One of the basic factors differentiating the Iranian villages from urban centers is the existence of a school in the village. The primary school is a very new – 1960s – social and physical phenomenon in the Iranian villages. It has brought teachers and educated people to the villages and it is the modernizing institution which is supposed to close the gap between city and village and create modern individuals (Inkeles and Holsinger, 1974). Accordingly as a modernizing institution, it should have a negative effect on the fertility behavior of the individuals in the villages.

Neither of the villages studied had regular transportations to the only city of the district which is the commercial and administrative center and the only

TABLE 1

Mean and Standard Deviations of the Variables in the Regression Analysis

Variables	Mean	Stand. Dev.
Carpet industry in the village (C_1)	.494	.500
Primary school in the village (C_2)	.357	.479
Access to city (C_3)	.705	.456
Size of landholding of household (L)	3.230	2.900
Husband's occupation (OCC)	.110	.311
Wife's age at marriage (AM)	15.130	1.408
Current age of wife (A)	31.300	9.049
Number of living sons (NSON)	2.101	1.650
Number of living daughters (NDAU)	1.951	1.501
Children ever born (CEB)	5.100	2.870
Current contraceptive use (CU)	.240	.428
Desire for more children (MC)	.321	.428

place where transportations to other cities in the southern and south-western region are available. Thus the villagers depend on their feet and casual transportations to go to the city. The physical distance to the nearest city is, hence, highly correlated with the access to urban facilities in the city including the local market and transportation and communication – post offices, long-distance calls, and telegrams – to large urban centers and the provincial capital, where commercial markets are larger and job opportunities are more frequent.

We believe that the villages which have better access to the city, either because of their short distance or because of their location on the main route coming from the provincial capital going to other cities in southwest, have the relative advantage of access to different cultural, economic, and social values which could have a negative influence on fertility level and attitude.

The three community variables are included in the multivariate models of fertility as dichotomous variables. Non-agricultural industry in the villages is coded as "1" if carpet weaving is a major handicraft industry in the village, "0" otherwise. Existence of school is coded as "1" if there is a primary school in the village and "0" otherwise. Villages with better access to city, either because of their location on the main route connecting cities or because of their short distance to the head-quarter of the district, are coded "1" and other villages are coded "0".

In examining the effect of socioeconomic and community variables on fertility behavior and attitudes, we have to control for the exposure to childbearing by introducing duration of marriage, number of living children and age of women in the multivariate models. Table 1 presents the mean and the standard deviation of the dependent and independent variables. We use dummy variable regression analysis to examine the specified relationship between the three measures of fertility and the community, socioeconomic and demographic variables.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

We begin the analysis of cumulative fertility with an equation that includes community variables and socioeconomic characteristics controlling for the duration of marriage. The unstandardized coefficients and the standard error of estimates for this equation are reported in Table 2. All the variables, except the existence of school, have significant effects on the number of children ever born. Controlling for other community variables and socioeconomic characteristics, women living in the villages with carpet industry have about one-half children more than the other women. Access to city has an impressive negative effect on the fertility level of women. In fact, controlling for other variables, women in the villages with better access to the city, have on the average, .7 children less than other women.

With respect to the effect of socioeconomic variables, they are all significant. Controlling for other variables, each hectare of land is associated with .182 children born alive. That is, women in households with more landholding have larger number of children ever born than other women. Literacy of the husband has a significant effect on the number of children ever born. Women married to literate husbands have, on the average, .31 less children than other women. Similarly, the effect of non-farming occupation of the husband is negative.

The community and socioeconomic variables plus the duration of marriage explain about 48 per cent of the variance in the number of children ever born to rural women. To examine how important are community and socioeconomic variables in predicting the number of children ever born, we have run equations 2 and 3 reported in Table 2. When we leave out the socioeconomic variables, the community variables and duration of marriage explain 45 per cent of the variance in the number of children ever born. That is, three per cent of the variance in the full model is unique to the socioeconomic variables. On the other hand, when the community variables are left out, the socioeconomic variables and duration of marriage explain about 47 per cent of the variance in the number of children ever born; pointing out that only one per cent of the variance explained is unique to the community variables.

Our second measure of fertility is a measure of current behavior and, partly, intentions for future; it is the desire for more children as expressed by the wives. Table 3 presents the result of a full model relating the community, socioeconomic and demographic variables to the demand for more children. The model explains about 22.7 per cent of the variance in the desire for more children. All the community variables have significant effects and the direction of the effects are theoretically consistent. Other things being equal, the rate of desire for more children is about 5.5 per cent less in the villages with carpet industry than in other villages. Similarly women in the villages with schools are much less likely than other women to desire more children. Women in the villages with better access to the city show less tendency to desire for more children. All these com-

TABLE 2

Regression of Children Ever Born on the Community and Socioeconomic Variables

Regression	Independent variables										R ²	F-Ratio
	C ₁	C ₂	C ₃	L	OCC	E	MD	Intercept				
(1)	.673 (.171)	.119(*) (.162)	-.705 (.211)	.182 (.025)	-.403 (.021)	-.318 (.118)	.162 (.008)	2.012			.480	129.59
(2)	.387 (.177)	.256(*) (.165)	-.564 (.216)				.175 (.006)	2.308			.450	201.18
(3)				.173 (.025)	-.159 (.022)	-.312 (.113)	.163 (.006)	1.90			.470	218.06

Note: the standard errors of the estimates are in parentheses.
 (*) Not significant at the .05 level.

TABLE 3

Regression of the Desire for More Children on the Community Characteristics, Socioeconomic and Demographic Variables

Regression	Independent variables										R ²	F-Ratio
	C ₁	C ₂	C ₃	L	OCC	E	NSON	NDAU	A	Intercept		
(1)	-.055 (.005)	-.082 (.032)	-.22 (.042)	.008 (.005)	.097(*) (.051)	-.030(*) (.031)	-.062 (.009)	-.032 (.010)	-.001 (.001)	.239	.227	42.39
(2)				.012 (.005)	.100(*) (.051)	-.038(*) (.047)	-.066 (.001)	-.033 (.010)	-.001 (.001)	.815	.175	33.4
(3)	-.059 (.025)	-.075 (.032)	-.221 (.042)				-.059 (.009)	-.031 (.010)	-.001 (.001)	.856	.222	44.85

Note: The standard errors of the estimates are in parentheses.
 (*) Not significant at the .05 level.

munity effects conform to a priori expectations: community characteristics as correlates of modernization change all attitudes and aspirations and behaviors including fertility.

Among the socioeconomic variables, size of landholding of the household is the only significant variable. Other things being equal, the more the size of the landholding of the household the more the desire for more children. Non-farming occupation of the husband has no significant effect on the desire for more children. This supports our earlier argument about the importance of the community and the majority for the current fertility behavior of the small number of non-farming families in each village. Literacy of the husband, has no significant effect on the desire for more children.

In general, it seems that community variables are much more important in predicting desire for more children than individual socioeconomic variables. When we leave out the community variables from the model, as shown in the second model in Table 3, the amount of explained variance is reduced to 17.5 percent: showing a total of 5.2 percent of the explained variance due to the community variables. On the other hand, when the socioeconomic variables are left out, there is only a reduction of .5 percentage points in the amount of explained variance in the demand for more children.

In assessing the determinants of current contraceptive use we continue comparing the results of different regressions. In all these equations we control age of the women at the time of the interview and the number of living children, as important factors affecting current fertility behavior.

Table 4 shows the results of the full model relating the community, socioeconomic and demographic variables to the probability of current contraceptive use. Controlling for other variables, the rate of contraceptive use is about ten per cent more in the the villages with carpet industry than in the other villages. That is, women living in the villages with carpet industry are more likely to use contraceptives than other women controlling for other important variables. While the existence of a school in the village has a positive effect on the rate of contraceptive use, this effect is not significant. On the other hand, women in the villages which have better access to the city are more likely than other women to use contraceptives. In fact, controlling for other variables, the rate of contraceptive use is 10.8 percentage points more in the less isolated villages.

Size of the landholding of the household and occupation of the husband do not show any significant effects on the probability of current contraceptive use. Literacy of husband has significant positive effects on the rate of contraceptive use. The rate of contraceptive use among women married to literate husbands is 6 per cent more than other women.

Model 1 reported in Table 4 explains about 16.2 per cent of the variance in the probability of current contraceptive use. To examine how important are the community and socioeconomic variables in predicting contraceptives use, models 2 and 3 were run. Equation 2 includes living children, age of the women, and com-

TABLE 4
Regression of Current Contraceptive Use on Community Characteristics, and Socioeconomic Variables

Regression	Independent variables										R ²	F-Ratio
	C ₁	C ₂	C ₃	L	OCC	E	NSON	NDAU	A	Intercept		
(1)	.110 (.033)	.036 (.033)	.108 (.04)	-.024 (.05)	.042 (.029)	.063 (.009)	.086 (.009)	.055 (.001)	-.009	.098	.162	20.81
(2)	.103 (.032)	.038 (.030)	.115 (.040)				.087 (.008)	.056 (.009)	-.010 (.001)	.117	.156	29.99
(3)				-.004 (.005)	-.040 (.043)	.072 (.029)	.089 (.009)	.055 (.009)	-.009 (.001)	.224	.121	22.33

Note: The standard errors of the estimates are in parentheses.
 (*) Not significant at the .05 level.

TABLE 4
Regression of Current Contraceptive Use on Community Characteristics, and Socioeconomic Variables

Regression	Independent variables										R ²	F-Ratio
	C ₁	C ₂	C ₃	L	OCC	E	NSON	NDAU	A	Intercept		
(1)	.110 (.033)	.036 (.033)	.108 (.04)	-.024 (.05)	.042 (.029)	.063 (.009)	.086 (.009)	.055 (.001)	-.009	.098	.162	20.81
(2)	.103 (.032)	.038 (.030)	.115 (.040)				.087 (.008)	.056 (.009)	-.010 (.001)	.117	.156	29.99
(3)				-.004 (.005)	-.040 (.043)	.072 (.029)	.089 (.009)	.055 (.009)	-.009 (.001)	.224	.121	22.33

Note: The standard errors of the estimates are in parentheses.
 (*) Not significant at the .05 level.

munity variables. The amount of variance explained in this model is 15.6 per cent. On the other hand, when the socioeconomic variables are included in the model, the explained variance is only 12.1 per cent. It seems that community variables explain more variance in the rate of contraceptive use than the economic variables.

CONCLUSION

Utilizing data from a sample of married women in 28 Iranian villages, we have demonstrated the strong effects of community characteristics on fertility behavior and desires, controlling for various socioeconomic and demographic variables. These effects are particularly strong, when there is no time difference in the measurement of fertility and the independent variables. Hence, the three community variables, which measure different aspects of the modernization of the villages, have significant negative effects on the desire for more children which is a measure of current fertility behavior. Similarly, they have a significant positive effect on the probability of current contraceptives as expected. Socioeconomic variables, on the other hand, are good predictors of cumulative fertility level and do not show any major effects on the desire for more children or the probability of current contraceptive use.

Historically, individual families have shown a fertility response to the economic conditions in peasant societies (Davis, 1963; Friedlander, 1969). Similarly, findings from the present study show that to the extent that economic differences exist in today's peasant societies, such differences reflect in fertility behavior and the responses are consistent with individual family's economic advantages. Furthermore, the study shows how even small changes in the gap between city and village, which is significantly wide in Iran, are important in changing aspirations and attitudes which eventually result in reduction of actual fertility. For example, if a small household industry such as carpet industry, can provide impressive changes in attitudes and behavior related to fertility, the expansion of such industry would not only bring changes in fertility behavior, but also positive economic consequences such as employment of a large number of under or unemployed rural women. On the other hand, transfer of such modern institutions as schools to the villages, is not only important for their indirect effect on fertility behavior and attitudes, but as part of a policy of reducing rural-urban inequality.

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SUMMARY

Past research on the determinants of fertility behavior has concentrated on the situation and characteristics of individuals and families. Fertility behavior, however, is molded and constrained by the community or the social milieu in which the individuals live. Hence, it is necessary to go beyond the individual characteristics and study fertility decisions within the context of the society in which the individual participates. Using this perspective this study incorporates the contextual variables in addition to individual socioeconomic variables in explanatory models of fertility behavior. Data from currently married women in 28 Iranian villages suggest that community or village characteristics, such as the relative access to city or the existence of a primary school in the village, are important predictors of fertility behavior even when the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics are controlled.

RIASSUNTO

Le ricerche esistenti sulle determinanti del comportamento riproduttivo si sono concentrate sulla situazione e le caratteristiche individuali e familiari. Il comportamento riproduttivo, tuttavia è modellato e condizionato dalla comunità o dall'ambiente sociale nel quale l'individuo vive. E' quindi necessario andare al di là delle caratteristiche individuali e studiare il comportamento riproduttivo nel contesto sociale nel quale l'individuo spesso è inserito. Avvalendosi di queste prospettive, nel presente studio si tiene conto delle variabili contestuali oltre che di quelle socio-economiche individuali, nei modelli esplicativi del comportamento riproduttivo.

I dati relativi a donne coniugate e residenti in ventotto villaggi iraniani, suggeriscono che le caratteristiche comunitarie o locali, quali le possibilità di collegamento del villaggio con la città o l'esistenza di una scuola primaria locale, sono elementi importanti nella previsione del comportamento riproduttivo anche allorché vi sia un controllo delle caratteristiche socio-economiche e demografiche.