

**International Fertility Change: New Data and Insights from the
Developmental Idealism Framework**

By

Arland Thornton

Georgina Binstock

Kathryn Yount

Mohammad Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi

Dirgha Ghimire

Yu Xie

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Abstract

This paper is motivated by the rapid and substantial family and fertility changes that are occurring throughout much of the world. A wide range of structural and ideational explanations have been offered for these family and fertility changes. In this paper we focus on the influence of developmental idealism—an important set of beliefs endorsing development, family change, and the causal connections between development and family behavior. Developmental idealism is argued to be an important ideational force affecting both population policy and the family-related behavior of ordinary people around the world. Our purpose is to present new survey data from settings across six countries--Argentina, China, Egypt, Iran, Nepal, and the United States--about the extent to which the ideas of developmental idealism as they relate to fertility are believed in everyday life in widely diverse settings. We ask if individuals in these six settings believe that fertility and development are correlated, believe that development is a causal force in changing fertility levels, believe that fertility declines enhance the standard of living, and believe that fertility declines lead to improvements in intergenerational relations. We also ask about people's expectations concerning future fertility trends in their countries and whether or not they approve or disapprove of the trends they expect. Finally, we ask the extent to which individuals in these six countries prefer very low fertility (one child) rather than somewhat higher fertility (three children). The data from each of these six settings show a widespread linkage in the minds of ordinary citizens between levels of fertility and development. That is, large fractions of people in these six settings believe that fertility and development are correlated and that fertility and development mutually affect each other, with the idea that fertility declines help foster development being especially important. Endorsements of low and declining fertility vary across settings, as do expectations of future fertility trends.