

# **Preference for Number and Sex of Children and Compliance with Birth Control Policy in Rural China**

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This paper examines people's attitude about having too many or too few children, their preference for number and sex of children, and their compliance with birth control policy in rural China. The data come from a national survey "Old-Age Support of Rural Couples Subject to Family Planning Policy" in 2002, with a sample size of 12,000 households. Till now this is the only survey that collected information about compliance/non-compliance with birth control policy in China.

The preliminary analysis suggests that a majority of rural Chinese prefer two children, especially one child of each sex. The ideal number of children is determined by their concerns for several problems relevant to having too many children (for example, high living expenses, need more time and energy to take care of children, and not good for the couple's health) or too few children (for example, shortage of labor force, child without siblings are lonely, shortage of old-age support, and high risk of childlessness). Sociodemographic characteristics, such as age, gender, marital status, and education, also affect individual preference for number of children.

People's attitudes about having too many/few children are significant predictors for their compliance or non-compliance with the birth control policy. The concerns with high living expenses and harmful effects on health prevent people from giving birth to additional children. On the other hand, the concerns with shortage of labor force, loneliness of single child, and old-age security are significant pushing factors for rural Chinese to break birth control policy and give birth to "illegal" children.

Further analyses through multinomial logistic regressions will examine the determinants of people's preference for sex of children. Deep study will also go to the gap between the number and sex of children rural Chinese had and that they wanted. Special focus will be given to the motives for non-compliance with birth control policy in rural China.

**Table 1. Compliance with Birth Control Policy in Rural China**

	%
No illegal children	65.5
Have illegal children	12.9
Not-applicable	21.6

**Table 2. Ideal Number of Children**

Number of Children	%
0	1.4
1	28.8
2	68.0
3 or more	1.7

**Table 3. Ideal Number and Sex of Children**

Number and Sex of Children	%
Childless	1.4
Either a girl or a boy	24.0
A boy	3.0
A girl	1.8
Two children, either boys or girls	20.3
Two boys	1.3
Two girls	.6
A boy and a girl	45.7
Three children or more	1.7

**Table 4. OLS Regression of Ideal Number of Children**

	1	2
Age	.004*** (.000)	.004*** (.000)
Gender	-.088*** (.010)	-.069*** (.010)
Marital Status		
Unmarried	.084* (.036)	.007 (.035)
Divorced	-.176** (.057)	-.202*** (.055)
Widowed	.071* (.028)	.061* (.027)
Education		
Illiterate	.115*** (.023)	.088*** (.023)
Elementary School	.089*** (.019)	.070*** (.019)
Middle School	.029 (.019)	.019 (.018)
Household Annual Income	-.000*** (.000)	-.000*** (.000)
Problems with Too Many Children		
High living expenses	---	-.049*** (.012)
Need Much Time and Energy to Take Care of Them	---	-.018 (.010)
Not Good for the Couple's Health	---	-.052*** (.012)
Problems with Too Few Children		
Shortage of Labor Force	---	.104*** (.011)
Children are Lonely	---	.029** (.010)
Shortage of Support for Old Age	---	.139*** (.010)
High Risk of Childlessness	---	.042*** (.011)
Constant	1.545*** (.026)	1.499*** (.027)
$R^2$	.029	.083

\*  $p \leq .05$     \*\*  $p \leq .01$     \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$

**Table 5. Logistic Regression of Non-Compliance with Birth Control Policy**

	Have Illegal Children
Age	-.010*** (.003)
Gender	.020 (.059)
Education	
Illiterate	-.180 (.144)
Elementary School	.240* (.115)
Middle School	-.039 (.113)
Household Annual Income	.000 (.000)
Problems with Too Many Children	
High living expenses	-.372*** (.070)
Need Much Time and Energy to Take Care of Them	.272*** (.064)
Not Good for the Couple's Health	-.039 (.073)
Problems with Too Few Children	
Shortage of Labor Force	.492*** (.063)
Children are Lonely	-.479*** (.065)
Shortage of Support for Old Age	.250*** (.059)
High Risk of Childlessness	.024 (.067)
Constant	-1.576*** (.164)
Model $\chi^2$	219.163
<i>df</i>	13
<i>p</i>	.000

\*  $p \leq .05$  \*\*  $p \leq .01$  \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$