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Q

You are here: <u>Home / FAIR Conference / 2002 FairMormon Conference</u> / Dealing with Demographics

Dealing with Demographics

I love statistics about Mormons and love to study Mormons in that way. I find that sometimes statistics are misused or wrong. Sometimes statistics are created by state agencies and the agencies themselves determine the numbers as much as what's actually going on. For example, we've heard statistics about child abuse lately. Those come from agencies that depend partly on people's willingness to go in, which depends on whether there are shelters, it depends on how the police deal with the issue and how state agencies deal with police statistics, so I'm not convinced that we have any good data on actual child abuse over time or across states.

Archive

About

Get Involved

Other times people misinterpret or use the wrong denominator. For example I've heard that in the 1860s only two percent of Mormons practiced polygamy. They probably, to get a number that low, used the denominator of everybody in the population, kids and everybody; if you just use people in the marriage ages and look at women it's much higher; it's 30 to 40 percent from what I've seen.

Other times they're close but kind of use the wrong number. I read not too long ago in *The New York Times* that Utah has the highest teenage pregnancy rate in the country, and that's not true. Utah has a high teenage birthrate but a very low abortion rate so if you add births and abortions to estimate pregnancies you get about average teenage pregnancy rate.

Sometimes the number might be right but you're not quite sure how to interpret it. The Eli Lilly drug company released to my friend a few years ago prescriptions for anti-depressants and the rate is higher in Utah than it is in other states. Well, you don't know if that's because Utahans are more likely to get good medical advice rather than treat their depression with alcohol or other drugs or whether the depression rate is actually higher in Utah, so it's always fun to look at a number and then try and find out what that number really means.

I would be curious, before I start showing you my numbers, to hear just a few examples of statistics that maybe you've heard about Mormons that don't seem quite accurate. Anybody got an example they want to share with us?

Q: Suicide rate in Utah is supposedly higher.

Yes it is, and that's probably a believable statistic because every death gets recorded and a cause of death gets reported and you have a good denominator. So, compared to the United States there are more suicides. Now there's a little bit of variation, some deaths it's not clear if it's a suicide or not. If someone had a drug overdose it's not clear if that's intentional or not so the medical profession has some leeway. But the suicide rate is high in Utah, it is lower among more active members of the Church, and Utah is lower than surrounding western states. There's kind of this notion of frontier mentality, people moving in, less established social structure, creates higher suicide, but the rate is higher.

Q: Bankruptcy rates.

Bankruptcy rates, now those are high but those depend a lot state to state because that's a state rule about who applies and whether you go and get formal bankruptcy or just don't pay your bills, but that rate I think is kind of high.

Q: How do you tell in Utah if suicides are Mormons or not Mormons?

You can't because religion doesn't show up on the death certificate. Some studies have matched LDS Church records with death certificates and then you can tell, to the degree the match works and the records are right. There are a couple of studies.

Q: How does that turn out?

That Mormons are... depends on the study but they're not low. I think that suicide should be a concern for Mormons, that we're not lower than the nation.

Q: Usage of Prozac.

Yes, that's the Eli Lilly data, they are the producer of Prozac. It is higher in Utah than the national average.

Q: (inaudible)

He asked about Prozac use. I said Eli Lilly data shows it's higher and you say well maybe Mormons go to the doctor and get a prescription to deal with their depression whereas other people are more likely to self-medicate with alcohol or other drugs and that's a possibility so you don't know the meaning of that statistic.

Q: We go to ice cream and chocolate chips and candy bars. I want to know the statistics on that! (laughter)

Utah is high on Jell-O, high on ice cream, high on milk but it's highest on, from the consumer indexes, the ingredients to make homemade cookies: marshmallows and chocolate chips.

Q: Ritual abuse.

As far as I know, no reliable statistic on that at all.

Q: Higher birthrates

Higher birthrates, yeah if we get a chance we'll talk about that, definitely higher.

Q: Further to what was said a moment ago about alcohol versus Prozac, I wonder if the same might not be true of bankruptcies. In other words Latter-day Saints, instead of simply being dishonest and not paying their bills, do it the legal way.

Yeah, he asked about bankruptcies. We really need credit card failures and so on compared to bankruptcy.

Q: Software piracy.

Software piracy, I don't know how you would identify the... it's like the suicide issue; I don't know how you would identify the religious identity of the pirate.

Q: Does BYU have the highest co-ed pregnancy rate in the country?

Does BYU have the highest co-ed pregnancy rate in the country? I wouldn't be surprised if it has the highest marriage rate in the country but there's no way that I know of to get pregnancy rates for campuses. Universities just don't provide birth rates or pregnancy rates.

Well, we've heard a lot of numbers. What we decided to do a few years ago, some colleagues and I, is to compile all the national data sets that had information on Mormons so that we could get comparisons. So we have six major national studies, three of them on adolescents and three on adults, and we've prepared a book that's being reviewed by publishers and we've tried to summarize how we compare with other people in six areas: religious participation, family life, drug use/alcohol use, happiness/wellbeing, socio-economic status and political attitudes and beliefs.

Now, there are a couple of problems with these data. One is it's self-report and people won't always tell someone doing an interview what they really did or what they really think. Another problem is sampling; they do national samples and they send out interviewers so they sample clusters, geographic clusters, then send the interviewers there so if in a particular survey they happen to get a cluster in Utah, they have more Mormons than average but they're Utah Mormons. If they don't get any clusters in Utah then they have below average Mormons and they're not Utah Mormons. So there's always a little bit of problem, well a big problem, with sampling variability. That's why, when we could, we tried to get comparisons from different surveys.

What I'd like to do for the time I have left is just give you a sampling of some of the information from the family chapter that I did and then if we have time answer any questions.

What we try to do in this chapter is look from birth to death, kind of a life course perspective. So under what conditions, to begin with, are LDS children born? One of these surveys asks women aged fourteen to forty-five, of those who had ever had a baby, "How did you feel when you found out you were pregnant?"

Here you can see the LDS response and everybody else in the country and this tells us if the difference between those is statistically significant. Mormons are more likely to say they felt good when they got pregnant, more likely to say they're happy to be teaching and taking care of the baby, happy to tell friends. But number one, and I love this one, this is on a scale of 1 to 10; Mormons scored 9.4 on happy to go buy things for the baby compared to 7.7 nationally.

The bottom part shows us the characteristics of the women. Now maybe you've heard this image of Mormon women being barefoot and pregnant. On the average, when LDS women are pregnant and find out they're pregnant they're the same age as women nationally, they have more education, they have a few more children already. The baby is less likely to be born below the desirable birth weight, so the baby is healthier on the average. Employment–not a big difference there. Percent who use birth control before conception, and I've double-checked this, 80.5%–exactly the same for LDS and other people. The percent who breast feed, a recommended practice for good health of the baby, is substantially higher for Mormons. Percent of mothers who are married at birth is substantially higher for Mormons; married at conception is higher; and Church attendance is higher.

Let me show you one other, they asked the women if they wanted the baby and LDS are more likely to say "Yes, I wanted this pregnancy and this was the right time." Fewer say "I wanted it, but later." More say "I wanted it, but sooner than I had it." You can't quite read this but the Don't Care and Unwanted are lower, a little lower for LDS respondents.

LDS babies are born into homes where there's more likely to be a mother and a father, the mother is more educated, there are a few more siblings and the family goes to Church more often. So already at the start LDS babies are introduced into a family Church-going lifestyle more often than is the case nationally.

Did we look at groups that consider themselves to be religious? In some cases (and I'm not going to present this) we tested to see if the relationship between frequency of Church attendance and a particular outcome. Let's say I wanted the baby, if that relationship is different for LDS people than non-LDS people and once or twice I'll note that difference. But usually religiosity promotes more of a family center of lifestyle everywhere, but we'll see some cases where that's more true for LDS people.

Let's jump right ahead to the teenage years. What's teenage life like and this is the statistic that's got me into trouble more than any other probably. The percent who have sex before their twentieth birthday and before they're married. Now my friend Bruce Chadwick does statistics based on kids who should be in Seminary in questionnaires sent to their homes, and his numbers are a lot lower than mine, so people would rather hear him speak than they would me. But my numbers are projections based on what we know of what will have happened by the time they turn twenty and here you can see...well, maybe you can't see; it's a little blurry, but nationally, in three different surveys, 80% of the population has pre-marital sex by the time they turn twenty. For LDS people the numbers range from 50 to 60 percent. So, that's well below the national rate but much higher than many people would like them to be.

Q: Are the national and Church rates both lower under age seventeen?

The median age now nationally is about sixteen to seventeen. So by their seventeenth birthday half of the U.S. population is sexually experienced. Now the Mormons, the sample is small enough I don't want to be...to try and provide too much detail.

Here we compare, in this case, respondents who said they attended weekly or less than weekly and you can see there's a little difference in surveys, but if you look at the Adhealth and the NELS survey for those who attend Church less often you won't see very much difference between the LDS population and the population nationally. For those who attend Church weekly you'll see a big difference so, yes, this is one case where religiosity really matters.

Now there's another interesting difference here: Nationally males and females are similar or males are a little higher depending on which survey. For LDS the females are higher and there are different speculations for that. I think probably in a lot of places people are dating non-LDS partners—the LDS are—and men are a little more likely to push to have sex and so the LDS females dating non-LDS males are more likely to have sex than the LDS males dating non-LDS females. This is my guess.

Q: Was there any clarification on the definition of sex?

The wording in the surveys was sexual intercourse and there were phrases so if the person seemed unclear the interviewer tried to provide a definition, so I think so.

LDS kids are more opposed to abortion, less interested in romance than is true nationally, but in terms of how they get along with their parents, how they feel their parents regulate their lives, how they get along with their siblings, in these surveys we don't find very many differences between LDS kids and other kids. They are equally likely to say my parents love me and support me.

Are we concerned about the moral stigma? Well, the interviewer shows up, they don't really know this interviewer from anyone else and this is after a series of questions. They try to get interviewers that are pretty good at building rapport. So, I'm guessing there wouldn't be much more of that for the LDS group than nationally, but I don't know.

So in most other ways LDS kids experience family life a lot like other kids.

So let's talk a little bit about adult married life. It shows marital status much higher, well not much higher, but clearly higher for the LDS population; age at marriage is younger for the LDS population. I haven't really had the right numbers to calculate this, but a big trend nationally is to live together before you get married. Part of the reason age at marriage is going up is because people are living together, so the age at which you start a relationship and move in with a partner hasn't changed a lot. So I suspect the age at which you start a

partnership isn't that different for LDS people and other people; it's that LDS people do it with a marriage more often than is the case nationally.

This is kind of an interesting statistic to me: remarriage rates. Nationally there's not a very big difference in remarriage rates for people under and over fifty. For Mormons, people under fifty have a very high remarriage rate, people over fifty substantially lower and I think that's due to the sex imbalance as you get to older ages. One report we did was based on older data and I'd like to see the numbers now. For every male, single, over age thirty in Church on Sunday there are six single females in Church on Sunday over age thirty–a big difference there. So, high emphasis on marriage, but at older ages the numbers work against you.

Somebody asked about divorce rates. Here we use dissolution to refer to when you actually separate rather than when you get divorced. Now this is tricky, early 1980s some numbers show that LDS divorce rates were lower. The surveys in the 1980s that we had showed virtually no difference in the divorce rate for Mormons and other people. Now these surveys that we've done from the 1990s, two of them show no significant difference, but Mormon numbers are still lower and one survey shows the Mormons lower and statistically lower, I mean the difference is significance.

Now the divorce rates have actually been declining slightly in this country since 1980 and the survey suggests that decline is greater for the LDS population than is true nationally. So I guess I'd have to say, based on these numbers with the sampling issues we had, that LDS divorce is lower than the national average but still fairly high. So if the LDS rate is at about 50% of couples will ever divorce, the Mormon rate might be around 40 to 45%.

Q: What about differences in divorce of temple vs. non-temple marriages?

I get asked that question more than any other I think. The national surveys don't ask about temple marriage, so it's hard to say. What we can look at instead is church attendance. So, for couples where the husband and the wife both attend church regularly, by the way it's true nationally: If both attend church the divorce rate is lower; if neither attend Church, it's higher; and if one attends Church and the other one doesn't, it's even higher. So having similarity helps some.

So if we put together a series of guesses about an LDS husband and wife who both attend church regularly, the lifetime divorce rate may be around 25% to 30%. I would guess the temple divorce rate is in that range. It's pretty high, but it's still a lot lower than the national 50% rate.

Somebody asked about birth rates. Mormons have more kids; their ideal family size is about one child more, and they expect to have about one child more, than is true nationally, depending on which survey. So yeah, higher fertility rates.

Q: What's the average Mormon family size?

If we based it on this expected, or this ideal, it would be a little under four children per family, for people in these surveys.

Q: I was just wondering how converts to the Church might affect the figures. How does that play in?

How would converts affect that? I haven't checked here, the one I checked on was the pre-marital sex because people say, well it's all those converts that had a wild lifestyle and then they repented and joined up! Right? You know what, if we look, and the one survey at what you were when you were age 14, the rate is even higher. The converts coming, in at least statistics on sex, are more likely to be chaste than the people who disaffiliate from the LDS Church. I haven't looked, but I wouldn't be surprised if the same is true for children: That the people who convert are more pro-family, more pro-having kids, so I'm not sure that would make a big difference.

Q: What about differences between, say, Catholics and Protestants?

There's not a big difference between Catholics and Protestants anymore. Those with no religion, which is a fairly small percent, are lower. But Catholics and Protestants, it's just not a major. It's not a difference anymore, except on abortion. But on birth control and family size, there's no meaningful difference.

Q: How about Evangelical Christians?

I didn't bring this chart, but based on numbers in the '80s, we took about ten family demographic characteristics: pre-marital sex, family size, age at marriage, percent married, cohabitation and so on. And, in one corner, you get blacks with higher non-marital birthrates, lower marriage rates, not higher cohabitation. Then, in another corner you kind of get the liberal Protestant. And you know who's most similar to Mormons? Evangelical Christians in terms of family lifestyle, so all this debate about theology might be interesting, but I think there's a lot of common ground in terms of how important we think family are and maybe we could build that ground rather than fight over other things.

Okay, here's an interesting difference on family size I thought you might like to see. Nationally, more education results in smaller families; for LDS, more education results in larger families. And we mentioned that before when we talked about the education of the mothers. But more educated Mormons are more likely to attend Church, to fill commitments and that's manifest, too, through family size.

On most other aspects of family life that are asked about in these surveys-do you think the relationship's fair, how much conflict is there, how much time do you spend together-there is amazingly little difference between Mormons and other groups. I give you one chart to demonstrate in terms of measures of marital satisfaction. Most of these measures don't show a large difference. It looks to me like, in terms of many aspects of family life, we share a common culture and, not in terms of marriage, pre-marital sex, family size but in how you relate to your spouse, seems like we do.

Q: It seems strange to me (inaudible) on a seven-point scale there that if most of those (inaudible) are fairly positives, how (inaudible) divorce?

Well, the divorced ones aren't here. There's a new book out that says if people who aren't very happy, the ones who get divorced don't get any happier and the ones who stay married get happier. And people probably do exaggerate to an interviewer how happy their marriage is, so that the numbers are pretty high. But sometimes we divorce for, not always obviously, but sometimes we divorce for reasons that we could solve if we really wanted to.

Q: The one on the previous thing you had–percentage of happiness with parents (inaudible)–the LDS number was lower than the national (inaudible).

I'm not sure why. It might be the hassles of raising a larger family and the challenges that that provides. I don't know.

Q: Is there any way to kind of normalize the quality of the family relationships (inaudible) family might have a high happiness rating because (inaudible) versus an LDS family that have an expectation (inaudible) family home evening and other kinds of expectations, is there any way to normalize the process (inaudible).

No, there isn't, and that could be part of what's going on is that LDS people, to have a happy marriage, it has to be going really well, whereas other people look around and they think, well as long as we're not really fighting and hitting each other I guess that's okay. I don't know. That's one thing about happiness-if you think you're happy, you're happy right? And in that there's not a big difference.

Okay, questions on how you feel about gender roles. And you'll see some differences here that LDS respondents are more likely to think

there are problems if the mother works when there are young kids at home but on... in terms of equal rights issues, like should women have the same job opportunities, men should share in housework, girls entitled to same independence as boys, sex exists mainly for a man's pleasure; there's not a very big difference on a lot of those items. So my sense is in terms of fair pay, job opportunity, treating your sons and daughters the same; there's not a huge difference but there is a real sense the kids are better off if the mom's at home in these attitudinal data.

Now the last phase of the lifecycle, interaction with older parents, here again we, by and large, we don't see very much difference. LDS people are as likely to visit, call, interact with, give help to their older parents as is the case nationally. Not huge differences. There is one important difference though–LDS older people have more grandkids, so that difference in family size multiplied over another generation is a substantial difference. So LDS are more likely to end up as grandparents.

Q: So how do you (inaudible) almost everybody (inaudible) better than average (inaudible), lower divorce rates, lower (inaudible) the perception of Mormons is that (inaudible)

Kind of family-centered lifestyle, well if you look at the kids, the kids are more likely to be in homes with two parents... The question is, there's this perception that Mormons are happy, healthy, family-centered and my data don't support that. But I would say they do to some extent: two parents, more kids, higher marriage rate, educated, Church-going people; yes. I think there's pretty good evidence that that's the case, do they still argue about the dishes? Fight with their kids? Get mad when their kids get home late? Yes, just as much as anybody else, they do. So there are some important differences and many similarities and I haven't found any statistics where the Mormons look worse off to me either. So I think there's some validity, but maybe we overstate our differences.

Q: What is the most blatant misuse of a statistic that you've come across either in the newspaper or (inaudible)?

The most blatant misuse of a statistic? Oh, I'd have to think about that. One that I've seen fairly often is the high pregnancy rate, when it really should be the birthrate. The rates on abuse, you've seen these reports in the paper about one out of whatever... half the kids will be abused or whatever and I haven't seen an accurate reporting of that. Now I didn't show these charts but, from what I've put together, kids being sexually abused or being forced to have sex, there's not a big difference between Mormons and other people, in those regards, it's not a high percent of the population but not a huge difference.

Q: What are the statistics on LDS longevity versus the general population?

The problem we have is we're doing survey research and so you can't really determine the answer to that with surveys. But it is higher; lower death rates from the two main killers: heart disease and cancer. A little higher death rates from diabetes... ice cream and jell-o (laughter). But I couldn't right now tell you exactly how much longer but it is higher and, now the other survey shows substantially lower, no surprise to you, but substantially lower rates of alcohol consumption and tobacco. Tobacco's the biggest killer in the country, in the U.S. now.

Q: Any stats on sexually transmitted diseases among the LDS people?

I do not, and the behaviors that give rise to that among adolescents, we saw that non-marital sex is lower, drug use is lower, those are the only two components that I can estimate, but they're two big ones. Use of birth control, we've seen that they're about as high so I think reluctance to use preventive birth control wouldn't necessarily be worse among LDS, so I've got to believe it's lower but I haven't seen the numbers.

Q: Any comparative statistics (inaudible) what sexual activity is between Utah Mormons and non-Utah Mormons?

My colleague Bruce Chadwick actually did their survey in the east coast, the west coast and Utah. And it is quite a bit lower in Utah than west coast-east coast and I think that's because of the...

Q. What was the question?

Oh, the non-marital sex of teenagers. He asked about that, LDS teenagers and it's lower in Utah than it is the west coast or the east coast. I can't remember the exact numbers but I think their book is *Building Righteous Youth in Zion* and it has quite a few numbers on different aspects of adolescent life. You might be interested in looking at that.¹

Q: I do know the Utah statistics for sexually transmitted diseases (inaudible) Utah County which is 90% LDS is about 1 to 10 of the rates of sexually transmitted diseases of Salt Lake County.

Okay, so he reports that incidents of sexually transmitted diseases in Utah County are one-tenth the rate in Salt Lake County. One last question and then we'll go to lunch.

Q: I don't have any data on this but a hot topic is sexual abuse by clergy, pedophilia among clergy, any take on that?

Sexual abuse by clergy? Nothing; I don't have any data on that.

Notes

¹ Brent L. Top and Bruce A. Chadwick, *Rearing Righteous Youth of Zion*, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1998.



FAIR is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing well-documented answers to criticisms of the doctrine, practice, and history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

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