

Attitude of Religious Leaders (Imam Masjid) Towards Family Planning

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ABSTRACT

Family planning is an important health and development issue as well as a human rights issue. Muslim countries and societies are not distinguished from the rest of the world; they aspire to reach their development goals by improving the health of their women and children. Islam should not be considered a barrier in this endeavor. Governments and non-governmental organizations in the Islamic countries as well as the international development community can support the increased use of contraception. Such efforts would help to prevent un-planned pregnancies as well as help the families to achieve their desired family size by providing financial and political support for culturally sensitive reproductive health programs that meet the needs of Muslim couples. The aim of present study was to investigate the attitude of religious leaders towards family planning, because they have significant influence regarding opinion making of their followers. The study was conducted in the city area of Faisalabad. The total sample size was 120. A comprehensive questionnaire consisting of open and close-ended questions was prepared in the light of the research objectives. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data for drawing conclusion. It was found that a vast majority of 86.4% holding Bachelor and above degree approved the family planning, while 70.8% Ahla-e-Hadith disapprove the family planning. A notable tendency was also seen towards family planning in the respondents, who were watching TV programs.

Key Words: Religious leaders; Imam masjid; Family planning

INTRODUCTION

The concept of family planning is not a new one it has deep roots, because in early days of Islam, Sahaba Ikraam (RU) used to use withdrawal during their intercourse. On many occasions, it was brought into the notice of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) that some Sahaba Ikraam used to undergo this practice but the Holy Prophet (SAW) did not forbid this (Saeedi, 2002).

The Qur'an does not prohibit birth control, nor does it forbid a husband or wife to space pregnancies or limit their number. Thus, the great majority of Islamic jurists believe that family planning is permissible in Islam. The silence of the Qur'an on the issue of contraception these jurists have argued is not a matter of omission by God, as He is "All-Knowing" and Islam is understood to be all the times. The proponents of family planning also note that coitus interrupts, or withdrawal, was practiced at the Prophet's time by his Companions. The majority of theologians from almost all schools of Islamic jurisprudence agree that withdrawal is permissible with wife's consent. In Islam, a wife has the right to both sexual pleasure and reproduction. (Some jurists would argue that ejaculation is essential for a woman to have orgasm & therefore it is necessary to have prior consent from a wife before practicing withdrawal) (Omran, 1992).

There are many Hadis that advocate family planning. One of them is narrated as follows:

Hazrat Jaber (RU) says, "We used withdrawal even though the proceedings of Qur'an were not completed" Sufain (RU) said "if withdrawal was not considered a good thing, then Qur'an must have prevented this practice" (Saeedi, 2002).

Family planning program was introduced in Pakistan by Family Planning Association of Pakistan (FPAP) in 1953, while the Government started in 1960. Different strategies and policies were tried to reduce the population growth rate. But appreciable progress could not be made due to inconsistent policies and lack of political support by different governments. The population of Pakistan is estimated to be 155.4 million in the year 2006 (Government of Pakistan, Economic Survey, 2005 - 06).

Despite being one of the first countries in South Asia to launch a national family planning program, Pakistan is exceptional in the region for its poor performance in improving contraceptive prevalence. After nearly three decades of government-sponsored family planning programs, contraceptive prevalence has increased from 5% in 1974 - 75 to 24% in 1996 - 97. A significant proportion of women do not wish to have additional children. Thus, in addition to determining whether there is a problem with supplying contraceptives to those who need them, there is a need to identify the social, religious and cultural aspects of Pakistani society that may constrain couples' use of family planning methods (Fikree *et al.*, 2001).

Objectives. To examine the respondent's socio-economic

characteristics.

- To know the respondent's awareness about Islamic principle regarding family planning.
- To find out association between socio-economic characteristic and family planning.
- To suggest measures for creating awareness among the religious leaders (Imam Masjid) for Islamic view point.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methodology is "the logic of scientific procedure". Methodological techniques are very important for analyzing sociological pursuits and empirical research. Advancement of sociological knowledge in modern age is possible due to the use of sophisticated methodological techniques. A well design-interviewing schedule consisting of open ended and close-ended questions was developed for acquiring response from the respondents.

The study was conducted in Faisalabad City. For data collection the respondents were selected randomly from Faisalabad City. The sample is a smaller representation of a large whole (Chaudhry, 1984). The factors of time, cost and physical limitation usually play an important role in social researches; therefore it is more economical and efficient to base studies on samples rather to study the entire universe. 120 respondents were selected randomly from the Faisalabad city mosques out of 650. The data were analyzed by using the descriptive-frequency distribution and inferential statistic bivariate analysis. Different statistical tests such as chi-square and gamma test, was used to explore the relationship between the variables.

In most of the social studies, conducted in any society, it needs first to evaluate the socio-economic status of the respondents. In the absence of this evaluation, such studies remain incomplete. Accordingly, socio-economic status of the respondents (Religious leaders) has been given due priority. The evaluation of the above table reveals that the majority of the respondents (60%) were in the age group of 31 - 50. Mostly, the respondents had formal education up to Intermediate level, while only 20.87% were Bachelor and above. As the study was based on the religious leaders, who were also divided in various religious sects, therefore their education imparted in the Religious Institutions was also evaluated separately. It was noted that 40.8% had qualified Sahada Tul Aalmia course, which stands as equal to Masters Degree. 15% had no proper education, while the others (44.2%) had attained education form matric to graduation level. It depicts that 85% of the respondents had qualified one or the other course in their own religious institution. It was also noted that among the respondents, a vast majority belonged to Baralvi and Deobandi sects. As regards their economic status, the earnings of the majority ranged from rupees 6001 to 12000 and above per month.

A note worthy number of the respondents (75%) were of the view that age of marriage should range from 21 - 30 years. 48.4% were of the view that there should be 4 - 6

children, while 43.3% recommended 1 - 3 children for an ideal family.

Table II shows that majority of the respondents i.e. 69.2% watched TV programs, while 30.8% did not watch the same. 45.0% of the respondents did not find any advantage in small family size but majority of the respondents (55.0%) acknowledged many advantages of small family size. They were of the view that due to small family size they can give proper education, training, feeding and health to their children within their earnings. Moreover, 33.3% of the respondents preferred female marriage at puberty age (after first menstruation) and majority of the respondents preferred female marriage at maturity (attaining the age of 18 or plus years). 38.3% of the respondents said that interval between two pregnancies as two years. Most of the respondents said that interval between one pregnancy and the other should be as three years. Only 6.7% of the respondents preferred interval between one pregnancy and the other as four years. Majority of the respondents i.e., 62.5% said that Islam approves family planning, while 37.5% did not agree to it.

As probing about fertility behavior of the religious leaders (Respondents) was a sensitive issue, therefore before going in discussion, a sense of 'we feeling' was created to get correct response.

A majority of the respondents (82.55%) openly accepted that they keep in view specifically the health of their spouses to have a healthy family. A negligible number (17.00%) preferred to consider their income and avoid transmission of diseases from parents to their offsprings. However, as regards, the establishment of family planning centers in their area, a majority of 72.5% agreed, whereas only 27.5% were against it. While discussing the issue, it was told that this would not be morally good.

Before asking the respondents about their knowledge regarding contraceptive use, it was probed to know as to how much the respondents were aware of the pregnancy-related problems. 53.3% knew about some of the problem, while 46.7% had no knowledge about it. However, a vast majority (79.2%) knew about the use of contraceptives but practically only 58.4%, were using the same. This situation demands to develop some push factors to realize the respondents to divert a change in their behavior to keep their families healthy and educated by adopting Family Planning practices.

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1. Higher the education of the religious leader (Imam Masjid) more favorable attitude toward family planning.

The chi-square value shows a significant association between education of the respondents and their point of view about family planning. The gamma value shows positive relationship between the variables. Table clearly indicates that level of disapproval of the family planning concept decreased with the increase in the educational level of the respondents. This is justified as 46.9% of the

Table I. Socio-economic characteristics of the religious leaders

Age	Number	Percentage
22-30	26	21.7
31-40	41	34.2
41-50	31	25.8
51 and above	22	18.3
Total	120	100.0
Educational status		
Primary	32	26.7
Middle	36	30.0
Matric	17	14.2
Intermediate	10	8.3
Bachelor and above	25	20.8
Total	120	100.0
Religious education status		
No religious education	18	15.0
Al Sanvia-tul-Aama	14	11.7
Al Sanvia-tul-Hassa	25	20.8
Sahada-tul-Alia	14	11.7
Sahada-tul-Aalmia	49	40.8
Total	120	100.0
Sect		
Baralvi	41	34.2
Ahla-e-Hadith	24	20.0
Deobandi	43	35.8
Ahla-e-Taseeh	12	10.0
Total	120	100.0
Monthly income		
Up to 6000	42	35.0
6001-12000	55	45.8
12001 and above	23	19.2
Total	120	100.0
Age at marriage		
15-20	13	10.8
21-25	45	37.5
26-30	45	37.5
31 and above	17	14.2
Total	120	100.0
Total (Children)		
No child	10	8.3
1-3	52	43.3
4-6	58	48.4
Total	120	100.0

respondents having middle level education, 63.9% with matriculation, 76.5% having intermediate level and 86.4% respondents having bachelors degree and above approved the need for family planning. The Social Survey (1992) also concludes that the awareness of family planning methods is directly related to socioeconomic and educational status. So the hypothesis "Higher the education of the religious leader (Imam Masjid) more favorable attitude toward family planning" is up-held.

Hypothesis 2. Majority of the respondents (Ahla-e-Hadith) disapprove the family planning as compared to other sects.

The chi-square value shows a significant association between sects of the respondents and their point of view about family planning. The gamma value shows positive relationship between the variables. As indicated above, 70.8% (Ahla-e-Hadith) are of the view that Islam disapproves the family planning, while 65.9% Baralvi, 72.1% Deobandi and 83.3% Ahla-e-Taseeh religious leaders

support family planning. Thus, the hypothesis "Majority of the respondents (Ahla-e-Hadith) opposes the family planning as compared to other sects." is up-held.

CONCLUSION

As in South Asia, Pakistan was the pioneer in introducing a family planning program for laying a firm foundation of development and to reduce the high

Table II. Views of the religious leader towards family planning

Watching family planning program on TV	Number	Percentage
Yes	83	69.2
No	37	30.8
Total	120	100.0
Response with regard to small family		
No advantage	54	45.0
Better education, training, feeding & health	66	55.0
Total	120	100.0
Ideal age of female marriage		
Puberty	40	33.3
Maturity	80	66.7
Total	120	100.0
Interval between pregnancy		
2 Years	46	38.3
3 Years	66	55.0
4 Years	8	6.7
Total	120	100.0
Response about family planning		
Islam approves family planning	75	62.5
Islam disapproves family planning	45	37.5
Total	120	100.0

Table III. Fertility regulation behavior of the religious leaders and their attitude towards establishment of family planning centre

Condition for family planning	Number	Percentage
Health of women	99	82.55
Income of family	9	7.5
Transmission of disease from parents to their offspring	12	9.95
Total	120	100.0
Establishment of family planning centre		
Agree	87	72.5
Disagree	33	27.5
Total	120	100.0

Table IV. Knowledge of the religious leaders towards pregnancy related problems and contraceptive use

Knowledge about pregnancy related problems	Number	Percentage
Yes	64	53.3
No	56	46.7
Total	120	100.0
Knowledge about contraceptive use		
Yes	95	79.2
No	25	20.8
Total	120	100.0
Contraceptive use		
Never used	50	41.7
Modern (Condom)	43	35.80
Traditional (With drawl)	27	22.5
Total	120	100.0

Table V. Association between education of the religious leader (Imam Masjid) and their point of view about family planning

Education	Respondents point of view about family planning			Total
	Islam family planning	disapprove Islam family planning	approve Islam family planning	
Primary	8 61.5%	5 38.5%	13 10.8%	
Middle	17 53.1%	15 46.9%	32 26.7%	
Matric	13 36.1%	23 63.9%	36 30.0%	
Intermediate	4 23.5%	13 76.5%	17 14.2%	
Bachelor & above	3 13.6%	19 86.4%	22 18.3%	
Total	45 37.5%	75 62.5%	120 100.0%	

$\chi^2 = 13.329$ d.f. = 4 Significance = 0.010** Gamma = 0.487

Table VI. Association between sects of respondents (Imam Masjid) and their point of view about family planning

Sects	Respondents point of view about family planning			Total
	Islam family planning	disapprove Islam family planning	approve Islam family planning	
Baralvi	14 34.1%	27 65.9%	41 34.2%	
Ahla-e-Hadith	17 70.8%	7 29.2%	24 20.0%	
Deobandi	12 27.9%	31 72.1%	43 35.8%	
Ahla-e-Taseeh	2 16.7%	10 83.3%	12 10.0%	
Total	45 37.5%	75 62.5%	120 100.0%	

$\chi^2 = 15.485$ d.f. = 3 Significance = 0.001** Gamma = 0.198

population growth rate. After half of a century, the desired goals of transformation of the requisite targets into action, due to lack of un-equivocal political commitment and also a fear of the religious extremists, the communication of the true message to the masses was not successfully delivered for a long span of time. Furthermore, the misperception among high volume of common man about the family planning program that a couple may not exceed their family more than two children, come with a big hindrance in the way of achieving the goal of family planning. On Government side, un-just practices of making this program a shuttlecock between many of the ministries and whenever some progress was made the un-stability at political and government level derailed the whole development of the way.

At present, when Government is striving hard to come forward with religious leaders and also with the political

leadership at grass root level, it is hoped that soon the country will see a day with more development in limiting the family size. In this regard, the Ahle-a-Hadith sect, which used to oppose the small family norms and consider it against the teachings of Islam may be brought forward with the valuable views of their eminent scholars for eradicating the misperception of their co-leaders and also the followers. It is worth mentioning here to make the religious leaders more educated with respect to family planning and to facilitate them in a way of counseling with their followers.

On the basis of findings of present study, some important suggestions are made for policy implications; Low literacy rate must be shifted to high literacy rate and all out efforts must be made to transform a civilized society through education. More reforms and facilities to involve maximum number of people for getting education in urban areas in general and rural areas in particular must be introduced. The misperceptions regarding family planning and small family norms must be eradicated through dialogue and debate. The religious leaders must be brought into main streamline for spreading the true Islamic norms regarding family size. All mediums of communications must be used for delivering the true Islamic education regarding family planning and limiting the family size on massive ground. It is found during survey that a sect (Ahle-a-Hadith) opposed the small family size and considered it against the teachings of Islam. It is a need of the time to bring forward the eminent scholars of this sect and their valuable opinion may be got for the others followers of this sect. Our cultural norms regarding early female marriages, son preference, gender discrimination and lack of knowledge are the basic hindrance in limiting family size, which need to be changed by increasing the literacy rate in our society, as education is the prime pillar for change and revolution.

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