

Factors Affecting the Family Size and Sex Preference among Christian Families in Urban Areas of Faisalabad (Pakistan)

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ABSTRACT

This study was particularly designed to know the motives for having large family size and preference for boys among Christian population in urban Christian localities. 200 females, at least one living child were selected. It was found that 36.5% of the respondents having 1 - 4 male members, most of the respondents (44%) were agreed that "boys have equal rights in the society" and major proportion of the respondents (45.0%) were just agreed with the statement that sons provide old age security to their parents. It is concluded that characteristics like women's education, family income and demographic factors such as age at marriage have bearing upon the family size. There is also strong relationship between desire to have more male children and family size.

Key Words: Socio-economic factors; Family size; Son preference; Decision power

INTRODUCTION

The social, economic and political problems of underdeveloped countries as a result of explosive population growth rate have increased manifold than the European countries in the 20th century. The timing of marriage and first birth are the two important aspects of family formation. Most of the Asian countries are experiencing a decline in population growth rate, while Pakistan is still among the most populous countries in the world, with a population of 149.03 million as compared to 32.5 million at the time of independence showing an increase of more than fourfold (Government of Pakistan, 2003).

Socio-economic and the cultural norms, values and belief system of a society affect the attitude of the people towards family formation and family preference (Chaudhary, 1994). The preference for sons is perceived as having both economic and social benefits. Sons may be better able to contribute to the family household income; they also have higher social status and are less dependence on parents than daughters. The desire for sons is associated with low contraceptive prevalence. It has been suggested that the value of sons should be lowered in order to make a family planning a success and there is some evidence of a change in attitude in relation to this (Zafar, 2002).

In Pakistan, Christian community comprises the largest minority with the population of more than 2.5% and spreads up almost in every part of the country. About 70% of this Christian population lives in remote villages developed by British Missionaries before Pakistan came into being, while rest lives in cities. Only 0.5% of the whole population lives with better standard, while majority resides by the banks of sewerage and drainage canals of dirty waters of cities.

The Christians living in villages a few are farmers and owners of lands, most of them are very poor since start and to earn money had to migrate to nearby or big cities, where they had to adopt the most degraded profession or sweepers. Unfortunately this crisis has put the whole community to face all sort of in human curses like drug addiction. Among children from eight years and above, crimes like robbery, prostitution, illegal sources of money and most of all illiteracy are common, although Christian missionaries and churches ran 90% of the educational institutions. Now the Christian community cannot be enhanced in education, because of the policies and high expenses of these missionaries and church based school. At present only 1% Christian students are receiving education from these schools (Hakim, 2001). Therefore, the only way to build a better future for this community is education at least up to high school level. This can help these poverty-stricken people to fight with dignity against all sort of immoral discrimination and prejudice. All these socio-economic circumstances have influence on behaviour and on attitude towards family formation and building.

A woman in Christian community has a major role in the development of family and then community. But unfortunately in Pakistan suffers the most in all sort of crisis and critical situations facing the ignorance and deprivation from male oriented society due to cultural and traditional setbacks. The biggest tragedy in the life of these women is lack of education, which makes them handicapped in development process. Through our child education enhancement program we reach these helpless women among, which most them are widow, divorcees, wives of drug addicts and jobless men. Most of these women work as weepers and housemaids in the houses of rich Muslims and in these houses they have to face all sort of inhuman

behavior including sexual abuse. In this situation initial strategy should be to share the burden of their families with possible financial and moral support in any possible and feasible aspect to minimize the depression of these women and provide them tension free environment, where they could whole heartedly join our training programmes of various skills of development i.e., adult literacy, knitting and sewing, handicraft, supports goods manufacturing (Hakim, 2001).

The study was carried out to study the socio-economic conditions of the Christians women of child bearing age, to know their view point about the Christianity regarding child bearing and to study the causes of family size and sex preference within the socio-economic and demographic context. Following were the specific objectives:

1. To study the socio-economic conditions of the Christians women of child bearing age.
2. To know their view point about the Christianity regarding child bearing.
3. To study the causes of family size and sex preference within the socio-economic and demographic context.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in urban area of Tehsil Faisalabad. In urban settlement there are number of Christian localities. A total of 200 females of 15 - 19 with at least one living child were selected. A comprehensive questionnaire was prepared in light of the research objectives. A pilot study was conducted to examine the suitability of questionnaire. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economic and the cultural norms, values and belief system of a society affect the attitude of the people towards family formation and family preference (Chaudhry, 1994). According to this, 41% of the respondents were married up to the age of 19 years, 24% at the age of 20 to 21 and 22% at the age of 23 to 25 years only 14.0% got married at the age of above 26 years. A number of studies verify a positive relationship between the level of education and latitude of acceptance (Chaudhry, 1994). About 26.5% of the respondents had either no formal education while 34% respondents were educated up to primary level or above, 20% got the education of up to matriculation, 13% were intermediate, while 6% were graduates (Table I).

The data reveals that monthly family income of about half (49.5%) of the respondents from all resources was up to Rs. 3500, while 33.5% respondents family earned Rs. 4000 - 10000/per month. Remaining 17% respondent's family income was Rs. 10,000 or above per months (Table I). About 43% respondents lived in nuclear families, while 44.5% were lived in joint family system and only 12.5% were resided in extended families (Table I). About 48.5% of

Table I. Percentage distribution of the respondents according to their age, age at marriage of the respondents and husbands

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
Age at marriage of respondents		
Upto 19	82	41.0
20-22	48	24.0
23-25	42	21.0
26 +	28	14.0
Total	200	100.0
Respondents Education		
Illiterate	53	26.5
1-5	69	34.5
6-10	40	20.0
11-14	26	13.0
14 +	12	6.0
Total	200	100.0
Family Income (Rs.)		
Upto 3500	99	49.5
4000-10000	67	33.5
10,000 +	34	17.0
Total	200	100.0
Type of family		
Nuclear	86	43.0
Joint	89	44.5
Extended	25	12.5
Total	200	100.0

Table II. Percentage distribution of the respondents according to their total children

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
No. of children		
1-3	97	48.5
4-6	63	31.5
7 +	40	20.0
Total	200	100.0
Live birth		
1-2	62	31.0
3-4	99	49.5
5 and above	39	19.5
Total	200	100.0
Birth spacing between two children		
Yes	158	79.0
No	33	16.5
No opinion	9	4.5
Total	200	100.0

Table III. Different statements about son preference

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Boys and girls have equal right in the society		
Strongly agree	72	36.0
Agree	88	44.0
Strongly disagree	20	10.0
Disagree	20	10.0
No opinion	-	-
Total	200	100.0
Boys give protection to parents in their old age		
Strongly agree	69	34.5
Agree	90	45.0
Strongly disagree	41	20.5
Total	200	100.0

the respondents had 1 to 3 children, while 31% respondents had 4 - 6 children and only 20% had 7 and more children.

Table IV. Different statement about contraceptive

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
Knowledge about contraceptive method		
Yes	196	98.0
No	4	2.0
Total	200	100.0
Use of difference contraceptive method		
Condoms	40	20.0
Pills	19	9.5
Injection	13	6.5
Any other	8	4.0
No use	120	60
Total	200	100.0
Other women should use contraceptive or not		
Yes	147	73.5
No	23	11.5
No opinion	30	15.0
Total	200	100.0

About 31% of the respondents had 1 - 2, about half (49.5%) had 3 - 4 and remaining (19.5%) had 5 and more live births (Table II). The timing of marriage and first birth are the two important aspects of family formation. Most of the Asian countries are now experiencing a decline in population growth rate, while Pakistan is still exception to it. Its population is 149.03 million as compared to 32.5 million at the time of independence, thereby showing an increase of more than fourfold (Government of Pakistan, 2003).

Majority (79.0%) respondents were in favour of interval between two children and viewed that it is good for mother and the child health, 16.5% expressed no link between spacing and mother child health, while remaining respondents had no opinion about it (Table II). The impact of the gender preference on fertility has usually investigated by examining data relating to the sex composition of living children of couples who did not want any more children. The assumption being that if son preference has an impact on fertility, couples who have sons are much more likely to not want more children to practice contraception. Such an impact has been documented and empirically demonstrated in several South Asian countries (Danforth & Greene, 1997). According to this technique only 36% respondents strongly agreed while 44% agreed that boys and girls have equal rights in the society (Table III). About 34.5% of the respondents strongly agreed, while 45.0% respondents were just agreed with the statement that sons provide old age security to their parents, while 20.5% respondents strongly disagreed with the statement (Table III).

Majority of the respondents (98%) knew, while 2% were not aware of the contraceptive methods. The data indicated that most of the respondents (20%) used condoms, 9.5% used pills and 6.5% used injections, 4% of the respondents opined about any other methods. About 60% of the respondents used no contraceptive method (Table IV). About 73.5% respondents said that other women should use, while 11.5% opined that other women should not use the family planning methods, and about 15% of the respondents did not express their opinion (Table IV).

CONCLUSIONS

1. Educating female member of the society will help to control the family size as well as many other problems relating to population.
2. Family planning programs should be human oriented, emphasizing upon reproductive health and the improvement of women's status and should be focused on maternal and child health.
3. The information, education and communication program should not only encourage people to have fewer children, but also equally teach female and male children.
4. Contraceptive method have no side effects may be introduced.
5. Government should give equal benefits to the minority as well as majority in the society.
6. Education should be completely free and compulsory up to matriculation level.

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