

Factors Affecting Family Size and Sex Preference: A Study of Urban Tehsil Faisalabad (Pakistan)

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ABSTRACT

The high growth rate of Pakistan is due to the large family size. An enormous population growth hinders the socio-economic development of society. This study was conducted to explore the socio-economic and cultural aspects of family size and son preference in urban tehsil Faisalabad. Three localities were selected from the list of localities prepared by the Federal Bureau of Statistics. A random sample of 150 females 15 - 45 years of age with at least one living child were selected from these localities. A comprehensive questionnaire consisting of open ended and closed-ended questions was prepared. Pre-testing of the study was carried out with ten respondents to examine the workability and suitability of measuring instruments. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data for drawing conclusion. Descriptive and inferential were used to analyze the data for drawing conclusion. It is concluded that socio-economic characteristics in term of women's education, family income and demographic factors and age at marriage have bearing upon the family size.

Key Words: Socio-economic; Cultural aspects; Awareness; Family size; Son preference

INTRODUCTION

Fertility in Pakistan has shown a wide acknowledged resistance to change. The population of Pakistan was growing at the rate of 3% per annum around 1960s. In response to concern about rapid growth, a national policy of slowing population growth was articulated in the 1960s, with a program appeared to have had invisible impact on growth rate. Total fertility rate (TFR) remained high between six and seven births per woman throughout the 1970s and 1980s and the population growth rate approached and possibly exceeded three percent per annum (Zeba, 2001). With a population of 130.5 million in 1998 Pakistan is the world's, seventh most populous country (Population Census Organization, 1998). According to UN projections, it will become the fourth most populous by the year 2050. It is one of only eight countries as of the mid-1990s with a population in excess of 25 million in combination with a TFR in excess of five births per woman (United Nations, 1996). Pakistan stands apart from its populous neighbors in South Asia, all of which (with the exception of Nepal) experienced substantial declines in fertility prior to 1990 and therefore showed markedly lower fertility in the mid-1990s, (estimated TFRs in 1995 are 2.2 for Sri Lanka, 3.4 for India & Bangladesh & 5.4 for Nepal).

The above scenario raise questions about, which factors have precipitated and sustained fertility transition in the region, in particular the contribution of family planning programs (Shah & Cleland, 1993). Pakistan's program has repeatedly been criticized for poor management and the low quality of the services offered to the majority of its clients (Robinson *et al.*, 1981; Rukanuddin & Hardee-Cleaveland,

1992). An alternative, but not necessarily contradictory, argument is that the motivation to limit fertility did not crystallize in Pakistan before the 1990s and therefore responsibility for the late transition cannot be placed entirely on an indecisive population policy and inadequate family planning services (Zeba, 2001).

In Pakistani society, both Islamic and cultural traditions support the dominant role of the male in important decisions regarding family size. Thus husband's approval plays an important role in the decisions to practice contraception. The main aspect of the present study was to investigate the socioeconomic factors, which affect family size in Urban Areas of District Faisalabad. Following were the specific objectives:

1. To identify the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents.
2. To estimate the family size and sex preference.
3. To find out the relationship of socio-economic, demographic and cultural factors with family size and sex preference.
4. To suggest measures to address the issue of family size and sex preference.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in urban tehsil Faisalabad. Three localities or colonies namely Gulberg, Civil Quarters, Ghulam Muhammad Abad and Abdullahpur were selected randomly. For the identification of the localities, list of localities prepared by the Federal Bureau of Statistics was used. A random sample of one hundred and fifty (150) females of age fifteen to forty five (15 - 45) years with at

least one living child were selected from these localities. A comprehensive questionnaire consisting of open ended and closed-ended questions was prepared. Pre-testing of the study was carried out on ten respondents to examine the workability and suitability of measuring instruments. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data for drawing conclusion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pakistan is at middle stage of demographic transition. The population growth rate is still high as compared to many developing societies (Zeba, 2001). This study revealed that a majority of the respondents (45.33%) were those who were married up to 20 years only 20.67% of the respondent were married up-to the age of 26 years. The mean age at marriage was 19 years. The timing of marriage and first birth are the two important aspects of family formation as indicated by the data (Government of Pakistan, 2003). Data revealed that the majority of the respondents (52.67%) attained matriculation level of education, while 37.33% of the respondents, where having qualification above matric i.e., F.A. or B.A. (Table I). The data showed that a great majority of the respondents (92.67 %) were house wives only 7.33% respondent, were doing job. Income level of 60% respondents was more than Rs. 5001 per month from all sources, while 20.67% respondents monthly income from all sources was Rs. 4001 to Rs. 5000 per month and 19.33% respondent's monthly income was up to Rs. 4000 from all sources (Table I). The data indicate that majority of the respondents (76%) were lived in joint family system, while 24% respondents were living in nuclear family. The data reflects that significant majority (98%) of the respondents' marriage was arranged by their parents remaining 2% respondent's marriage was love marriage (Table I). The data further showed that 54% of the respondents were got pregnant from 1 to 3 times, 32% were 4 to 6 times 8.67% were 7 to 9 times, while only 5.33% of the respondents reported that they become pregnant more than 10 times pregnant (Table II).

The total fertility rate (TFR) continued to remain high between six and seven births per woman throughout the 1970s and 1980s and the population growth rate approached and possibly exceeded three percent per annum (Zeba, 2001). Majority (86%) of the respondents had not miss carriage or abortion, while only 14% of the respondents had no miscarriage or abortion in their reproductive life. 26% respondents desired when she was pregnant that their coming baby would be a boy, while 24% of the respondents desire for the girl and 29.33% of the respondents have no opinion (Table II). In Pakistan, in particular, son preference is very strong and pervasive and has been frequently cited as one of the major obstacles for reducing the national fertility level (Rajaretnam & Deshpande, 1994).

The study shows that majority (97.33%) of the respondents disagreed with the statement "better to be

Table I. Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
Age at Marriage		
15-20	68	45.33
21-25	51	34.00
26+	31	20.67
Total	150	100
Education		
0-5	15	10.00
6-10	79	52.67
11+	56	37.33
Total	150	100
Occupation		
House Wife	139	92.67
Job	11	7.33
Total	150	100
Monthly income from all sources		
Up to 4000	29	19.33
4001-5000	31	20.67
5001+	90	60.00
Total	150	100
Family structure		
Nuclear	36	24.00
Joint	114	76.00
Total	150	100
Marriage arranged by parents or not		
Yes	147	98.00
No.	3	2.00
Total	150	100

Table II. Distribution of with regard to the statements

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
Distribution of Respondents with regard to their no. of pregnancy.		
1-3	81	54.00
4-6	48	32.00
7-9	13	8.67
10+	8	5.55
Total	150	100
Distribution of the respondents with regard to their miscarriage/ abortion		
Yes	21	14.00
No	139	86.00
Total	150	100
Desire for boy or girl if respondent was pregnant		
Boy	40	26.67
Girl	36	24.00
No opinion	74	49.33
Total	150	100

childless rather than to have female children", while 2.67% agreed. 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 dependent on the parents when compared to 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 family planning a success and there is some evidence of a change in attitude in relation to this. In this study 78.67% of the respondents disagreed that "a family with more male children brings economic prosperity to the

family” only 21.33% of the respondents were agreed. Only 34% of the respondents disagreed, while 66% agreed that “a woman with male children received great respect from in-laws family”. About 37% respondents agreed that “male child guarantee old age security”, while 63.34% of respondents disagreed. Whereas 90% of the respondents agreed that “family line continues with the male children” only 10% of the respondents were disagreed (Table III). While 86.67% of the respondents disagreed with the statement “no life without the male children” and 13.33% of the respondents agreed to this statement. Majority (81.33%) of the respondents agreed that “a woman feels natural pleasure after having a birth of male baby”, while 19% of the respondents disagreed. (Table III).

The use of contraceptive is extremely low in Pakistan, by the mid of July 1997, it was estimated at 24.0%. There is a big gap between the knowledge of family planning (91.0%) and the adoption (24.0%) of contraceptive methods (Siddiq, 1997). Use of contraceptives is an effective strategy to control birth rate but this did not worked effectively in Pakistan. From this survey, majority (98.67%) of the respondents had knowledge about contraceptive (Table IV). Research findings revealed that 39.33% of the respondents were ever used the contraceptive method, whereas 60.67% of the respondents never used any such contraceptive method. The 37.36% of the respondents never used any contraceptive due to the fear of side effect. In Pakistani society, both Islamic and cultural traditions support the dominant role of the male in important decisions regarding family size. Thus husband’s approval plays an important role in the decisions to practice contraception (Rahman *et al.*, 1992). In this study the 35.16% of the respondents reported that religion (Islam) did allow to use contraceptive, while 7.33% of the respondents reported that their husband did not allow them to use contraceptive (Table IV). Moreover, 39.13% of the respondents faced hypertension due to the use of contraception and 34.78% faced swelling, while the other (26.09%) of the respondents faced side effect of bleeding by using the contraception method (Table IV).

SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

1. Family planning programs should be human oriented rather than number oriented. These programs should emphasize reproductive health and the improvement of women's status.
2. The Information, Education and Communication Program should not only encourage people to have fewer children, but also explicitly teach them to equally value female and male children.
3. Publicize the negative effects on women and children of sex-detection technologies and abortions past the first trimester.
4. Emphasize consciousness-raising for the whole society on the value of girls and women, the need for education and

Table III. Respondent’s opinion about the following statements about son preference

Response of respondents	Agree F(%)	Dis-agree F(%)	Total F(%)
Better to be childless rather than to have female children	4(2.67)	146(97.33)	150(100)
A family with more male children brings economic prosperity to the family	32(21.33)	118(78.67)	150(100)
A woman with male children received great respect from in-laws family	99(66.00)	51(34.00)	150(100)
Male child guarantee old age security	55(36.66)	95(63.34)	150(100)
Family line continues with the male children	135(90)	15(10)	150(100)
No life without the male children	20(13.33)	130(86.67)	150(100)
A woman feels natural pleasure after having a birth of male baby	122(81.33)	28(18.67)	150(100)

Table IV. Distribution of the respondents according to their statement about contraceptive

Statements	Frequency	Percentage
Respondent’s Knowledge About Contraceptive		
Yes	148	98.67
No	2	1.33
Total	150	100
Contraception Use		
Ever used	59	39.33
Never used	91	60.67
Total	150	100
Reasons for not using contraceptive as reported by the respondents		
Religious	32	35.16
Fear of side effect	34	37.36
Husband not allow	11	7.33
Any other	13	14.29
Total	91	100
Name of side effect if respondent faced		
Hypertension	9	39.13
Swelling	8	34.78
Bleeding	6	26.09
Total	23	100

health care equally for boys and girls and the need for legal changes to promote male-female equality.

5. Establish many of national and regional working groups to formulate and promote action strategies to reduce sex preferences.
6. Promotion of gender-sensitive curricula in schools and strengthen the ethics curricula in medical schools.

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