

Status and Fertility of Women

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ABSTRACT: *Status of women is the mirror of cultural and socio – economic development of our country. Women’s status and fertility are interrelated. Various factors- environmental, socio- economic, biological, psychological or cultural factors affect fertility. There is a positive correlation between women’s status and their fertility. Educated women have low birth rate in comparison to uneducated women. The fertility rate in Muslim women is higher than the Hindu women. High income group family has low number of birth in comparison to low income group. Low caste women have more number of births in comparison to middle and upper caste women.*

The present article endeavours to study the relationship between the status of women and their fertility.

I. INTRODUCTION

The progress and all round development of a country depends upon harnessing the skills and abilities of all section of society. Women have been discriminated against for ages and they have not been given equal opportunities in many social, economic and cultural spheres. If we do not involve women in developmental activities it not merely obstructs their own development but also affects the progress of the entire nation. The status of women could be the best indicator of a nation’s progress. Asthana said, “The position of women in society is true index of its cultural and spiritual attainments.”¹ Women’s active social role is regarded as an integral part of a progressive social system.

Since people belonging to different socio – economic and religious groups desire children for different reasons and have different attitudes towards family size, and understanding of the variables of socio – economic infrastructure would, therefore, serve a useful purpose in understanding differentials in their fertility behavior. There is a positive correlation between women’s status and their fertility. Educated women have low birth range in comparison to uneducated women. The fertility rate in Muslim women is higher than the Hindu women. High income group family has low number of birth in comparison to low income group. Low caste women have more number of births in comparison to middle and upper caste women.

II. EDUCATION AND FERTILITY:

Education, especially, of women is considered to be one of the most important variables affecting fertility behavior. Education affects fertility through the value of two intermediate variables – age at marriage, as well as, in the attitude regarding the number of children desired and in the acceptance of family planning methods. Generally higher educated people have higher age at marriage and reduce the total reproductive span. Higher education among women is one of the indicators of modernization and higher social status which, in turn, influences the behavior and attitude towards family size.

Berelson (1986) observes, “Educational attainment has a consistently inverse relationship to fertility in almost all instances, and is moreover, one of the strongest relationship between a stratification variable and fertility. Similarly, the inverse relationship of education to completed family size is one of the most clear cut correlations found in the literature.”²

Female labour force participation and fertility

The Mysore population study (UN 1981) suggests a definite association between fertility and the working status of women . The average number of live – births is systematically lower in all age groups and strata for gainfully occupied women. Women’s employment where unaccompanied by education does not have a significant effect in lowering fertility. Thus, it is not female labour force participation per se that determines fertility behavior but the effect of work on fertility depends on the work setting, type of work, role incompatibility and educational level of the women.

Economic status and fertility

There is an inverse correlation between economic prosperity and fertility. At the higher levels of prosperity one gets greater amenities of life and greater pleasure seeking opportunities, and, as a consequence, the importance of sex declines. According to Thompson (1985) “ wealth, in itself, has little influence on birth rates.”³ It is the whole set of social circumstances, living conditions and social relationships that accompany wealth that is really the important factor.

Family structure and fertility

The fertility level of a community or society is greatly influenced by family structure. The joint family promotes higher fertility than the nuclear families. It is because the joint family provides a congenial environment for higher fertility as the economic cost of and burden of rearing and bearing of children are shared by other members of the family. Compared to this, in nuclear families couples have to bear the cost of rearing and bearing children themselves.

The norms of ideal family size exist in every society. These norms are generally influenced by the need for children, values attached to children and preference for a particular sex. The desired ideal family size is indicative of the women’s acceptance of the norm of ideal family size. It is generally observed that when people mention ideal family size, they have specific sex ratio in mind. In our society because of dowry problem and also because sons are treated as an old age security, there is always greater preference for sons. Illiterate or just literate women mentioned higher number of children for an ideal family as compared to educated women. It is further observed that working women specified lesser number of children for an ideal family as compared to non-working ones. Women, whose husbands were land owners mentioned smaller number of children for an ideal family as against those who did not own any land. The desired ideal family size varied with the socio-economic conditions.

Bebarta (1976) from his study of 567 women belonging to joint families and 327 nuclear families from six Delhi villages, concluded that the nuclear type had higher fertility than the joint type in each age group and for the overall sample. The average completed family size for the joint family was 8.06 and 8.28 for the nuclear family.

Karkal (1975) concluded on the basis of data collected from 27 villages in Maharashtra on the other hand that extended families had larger average number of line births than nuclear families when standardised for duration of age at effective marriage and age at marriage of the women, but she found considerable difference in the age at effective marriage, particularly, in the age “ up to 5 years “ group. The differences here are small and Karkal considers that the results of her study may differ due to regional factors.

Lorimer (1984) also maintained that high fertility in traditional cultures was caused by the extended family systems.

Age at marriage and fertility

Age at marriage is considered to have an important bearing on the fertility behavior.

Age at marriage is also influenced by women’s gainful employment, especially, when women work in occupations which require more number of years of schooling and training because such women tend to marry later than those who are not engaged in any gainful activity. The economic status of the family is another important factor that influences age at marriage. Caste is an important institution in our society as it is women into the entire social fabric and age at marriage is also influenced by it. The general hypothesis is that the higher the age at marriage the greater will be the influence in depressing fertility. Age at marriage determines the duration of marriage, and through duration, it influences fertility. Age at marriage also affects fertility through higher education and gainful employment by exposing the women to the wider world and by developing the sense of responsible parenthood in them.

Goyal (1975) has demonstrated that for the country as a whole mean age at marriage for females has increased from 16.1 to 17.2 years and for males from 21.4 to 22.2 years during the decade 1961- 71. He further observes that this increase is evident in both rural and urban areas. The increase has been of a slightly higher order in urban than rural areas.

The government of India in it’s National Population Policy statement has stated that the minimum age at marriage should be raised to 18 years for girls and 21 for boys.

Mitra (1978) stated that “ Raising the age of marriage will not only have a demonstrable demographic impact but will also lead to more responsible parenthood and help to safeguard the health of the mother and the child “. ⁴

III. CONCLUSION:

Therefore, the conclusion is that the entire social and cultural variable has been responsible for differentially influencing the fertility behavior of women.

Regarding Women's status in the society one thing comes first and foremost that is to improve the educational level of girls so that they could play a more active role in family planning and managing resources. Educational and job opportunities should be created for females. There are two factors alone may play a major role in increasing the status of women and hence in reducing fertility. Participation of females in rural non-salary paid activities has nothing to do for the reduction in fertility unless autonomy in decision-making about her or in home affairs is not increased. So, responsibilities in decision should also be given to females.

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