

Some Aspects of Fertility of the Garo Women of Pochimbosti Garo Village in Sibsagar District, Assam

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ABSTRACT The study deals with the fertility performance of the Garo women living in the village in the Sibsagar district, Upper Assam. An attempt is also made to co-relate fertility performance of the women with some socio-cultural factors like education of the women, family type and occupation of the husband. The study reveals differential fertility in different socio-economic groups. The Garo women exhibit comparatively lower fertility than many other communities of North-east India as reported earlier.

INTRODUCTION

'Fertility', which is one of the primary focii of demography has now become an important field of research in human biology and physical anthropology. In the field of national and international planning, demographic data on population growth and distribution are needed. Fertility helps to understand the factors that brings changes in the population growth. The number of births minus the number of deaths in a population during a specific period of time (usually one year) give the natural increase of the population.

Fertility is related to different socio-cultural and biological factors of a population and it varies from population to population. In this paper an attempt has been made to ascertain the fertility performance of the Garo women living in a plain area (Sibsagar district of Upper Assam) and also correlate fertility performance of the population with some socio-economic factors like education, family type and occupation.

The present study is based on the data collected from "Pochimbosti Garo Gaon" under Sibsagar district, Upper Assam. The entire village is inhabited by Garo people only. They are Christian by religion. There are 105 households in the village.

The Garo, a Bodo group of people, inhabit the Garo Hills district of Meghalaya. Though basically they are hill dwellers, a large section of them settled in the plain areas of Assam, mainly Goalpara and Kamrup district. A sizeable number of Garo people live in Mymensingh district of Bangladesh as well.

The Garos are predominantly matrilineal, lineage is traced through mother and their property is generally inherited by the youngest daughter of the family. But in this village there are some families who are following patrilineal system of descent and inheritance.

It is known from the information collected during field investigation that this village was established some hundred years back. But the exact cause of migration to this place is not clear. As stated by some aged persons of the village, it may be in search of their livelihood as tea garden labourer.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The present study is based on data from 95 ever-married Garo women. The relevant information were collected through interview with the help of a specially designed fertility performance schedule. Information on age at menarche was obtained from the subjects by retrospective method depending on recall. Many of the women could give the exact date of their first menstruation.

The data were collected in the month of September and October 1995. Information were collected only from those women whose husbands are alive and who have given birth to at least one child.

Standard statistical techniques are used to evaluate the data. The fertility performance of the women are evaluated by taking into account

the past fertility history of women and the average number of children ever born to each group of women by age.

RESULTS

The distribution of the 95 women in 5 yearly age groups is presented in table 1. Nearly 50 per cent of the women fall between 21 and 35 years. Maximum number of them are in the age group of 21-25 years.

Table 1: Frequency distribution of the Garo women in different age groups

<i>Present age groups of women (yrs)</i>	<i>No. of women</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
16 - 20	5	5.26
21 - 25	17	17.89
26 - 30	15	15.79
31 - 35	15	15.79
36 - 40	10	10.33
41 - 45	9	9.47
46 - 50	11	11.58
51 - 55	8	8.42
56 - 60	2	2.11
61 - 65	2	2.11
66 - 70	1	1.05
Total	95	100.00

The age at onset of menarche of these women is shown in table 2. The menarcheal age ranges from 10 to 15 years. It is evident from the table that about 85 per cent of the subject experienced their first menstruation by the age of 13 years. The mean age at menarche is 12.55 ± 0.09 .

Table 2: Frequency distribution of women according to age at menarche

<i>Age at menarche (yrs)</i>	<i>No. of women</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
10	1	1.05
11	5	5.26
12	48	50.53
13	26	27.37
14	12	12.63
15	3	3.16
Total	95	100.00
Mean $\pm$ S.E.	12.55 ± 0.0950	S.D. 0.9264

Table 3 depicts the age at marriage of the Garo women. More than 55 per cent of them get married by 19 years of age and 97 per cent of women get married by 25 years of age. The

mean age of marriage is 19.63 ± 0.30 .

Table 3: Frequency distribution of Garo women according to age at marriage

<i>Age at marriage (yrs)</i>	<i>No. of women</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
15	2	2.11
16	11	11.57
17	7	7.37
18	25	26.32
19	8	8.42
20	12	12.63
21	7	7.37
22	7	7.37
23	4	4.21
24	2	2.11
25	7	7.37
26	2	2.11
30	1	1.05
Total	95	100.00
Mean $\pm$ S.E.	19.63 ± 0.3040	S.D. 2.9631

The frequency distribution of the Garo women by age at birth of their first child is presented in table 4; the age ranges from 15 to 32 years. The maximum number of women had their first child birth in the age group 19-20 years (35.79%). The mean age at birth of their first child is 21.727 ± 0.32 .

Table 4: Frequency distribution of Garo women according to age at first child birth

<i>Women age (yrs)</i>	<i>No. of women</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
15 - 16	1	1.05
17 - 18	15	15.79
19 - 20	34	35.79
21 - 22	15	15.79
23 - 24	15	15.79
25 - 26	7	7.37
27 - 28	6	6.32
29 - 30	1	1.05
31 - 32	1	1.05
Total	95	100.00
Mean $\pm$ S.E.	21.727 ± 0.3260	S.D. 3.1771

The age specific fertility performance of the women are shown in table 5. It appears that the average number of live births per women increases with the increase of mother's age. A total of 32 children were born to 95 evermarried women. The average number of live births per woman is thus 3.39 which is comparatively

lower in relation to other populations of North-east India reported earlier.

Table 5: Age-specific fertility performance of women

Age groups of the mother	No. of women	No. of children	Average No. of children per women
16 - 20	5	5	1.00
21 - 25	17	31	1.82
26 - 30	15	39	2.60
31 - 35	15	55	3.67
36 - 40	10	37	3.70
41 - 45	9	30	3.33
46 - 50	11	53	4.82
51 - 55	8	35	4.38
56 - 60	2	15	7.50
61 - 65	2	13	6.50
66 - 70	1	9	9.00
Total	95	322	3.39

Table 6 shows the percentage distribution of women by age and number of livebirths. The total number of 95 women show a range of 1-10 livebirths. 26.32 per cent of the women have 3 children each. The range of live births is found to be 1 to 5 children in the below 30 years age group. In the age group 31-45 years the range of livebirths per woman is 1 to 7. All 24 women in the age group of above 46 years had a range of 2-10 livebirths with a mean of 5.21. The frequency of 2 live births per woman is the highest for the age group upto 30 years, that of 3 livebirths per woman is the highest in the age group of 31-45 years and that of 5 live births per woman is more frequent in the age group above 46 years.

Twenty six out of the 95 evermarried women have attained their menopause. Distribution of

women according to their age at menopause are shown in table 7. The maximum number of women (30.76%) attained their menopause at the age of 45 years. The mean age at menopause is found to be 45.85 ± 0.40 .

Table 7: Frequency distribution of women according to age at menopause

Age at menopause (yrs)	No. of women	Percentage
40	1	3.85
41	1	3.85
42	0	-
43	1	3.85
44	3	11.54
45	8	30.76
46	2	7.69
47	3	11.54
48	6	23.07
49	1	3.85
Total	26	100.00
Mean $\pm$ S.E.	45.85 ± 0.4095	S.D. 2.0883

The average number of children born alive per woman by literacy level is presented in table 8. Out of the 95 evermarried women 65 (68.42%) are literate and 30 are illiterate. It is observed that the average fertility is higher (3.49) in the literate than in the illiterate women (3.17).

Table 8: Average number of children of literate and illiterate mother

Category	No. of women	No. of children	Average
Illiterate	30	95	3.17
Literate	65	227	3.49
Total	95	322	3.39

Table 5: Frequency distribution of the Garo women by age and number of live births

No. of living children	Upto 30 yrs		31 to 45 yrs		46 years and above		Total	Percentage
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage		
1	11	11.58	2	2.11	0	-	13	13.68
2	17	17.89	5	5.26	1	1.05	23	24.21
3	7	7.37	15	15.79	3	3.16	25	26.32
4	1	1.05	2	2.11	6	6.32	9	9.47
5	1	1.05	5	5.26	7	7.37	13	13.68
6			3	3.16	3	3.16	6	6.32
7			2	2.11	0	-	2	2.11
8					1	1.05	1	1.05
9					1	1.05	1	1.05
10					2	2.11	2	2.11
No. of women	37		34		24		95	
No. of live births	75		122		125		322	
Average No. of live birth	2.03		3.59		5.21		3.39	

The literate women are categorised on the basis of their education level and their fertility performance is presented in table 9. It appears that the average number of live births per woman decreases gradually from the lower to higher education level.

Table 9: Average number of children in various educational categories of mother

Womens' education	No. of women	No. of children	Average
Primary (i to iv)	21	100	4.76
Post-primary (v to vii)	23	78	3.39
Undermatric	17	42	2.47
Matriculate and above	4	7	1.75
Total	65	227	3.49

Table 10 depicts the average number of children by family type and age group of women. It is seen that the average number of live births per mother in the nuclear family is higher than that in the joint family in the first two age groups. The average number of live births per woman is slightly higher in the joint family in the age group of 46 years and above.

Table 10: Average number of children in different age groups by two types of families

Age groups (years)	Nuclear family			Joint family		
	No. of women	No. of children	Average	No. of women	No. of children	Average
Upto 30	25	53	2.12	12	22	1.83
31 - 45	27	100	3.70	7	22	3.14
46 and above	17	87	5.12	7	38	5.43
Total	69	240	3.48	26	82	3.15

The average number of live births per woman according to their husband's occupation is shown in table 11. Among the different occupational groups the average number of live births vary from 2.67 per mother among the businessman to 3.79 among the cultivators. Other authors have also shown higher fertility in the agriculturists.

DISCUSSION

This paper aims to study the fertility performance of the Garo women of Pochimbosti

Table 11: Average number of children by husband's occupation

Occupation	No. of women	No. of children	Average
Service Holder	23	81	3.52
Cultivator	19	72	3.79
Other Business	3	8	2.67
Wage Earners	50	161	3.22
Total	95	322	3.39

village in the Sibsagar district of Assam and also correlate fertility performance of these women with some socio-economic factors. The socio-economic characteristics considered in the study include literacy status, educational attainment of the women, occupation of the husband and family type.

The mean menarcheal age of the Garo women is found to be 12.55 ± 0.09 while mean age at menopause is 45.85 ± 0.40 . Thus the reproductive life span of the Garo women is around 33 years. The mean age at marriage is found to be 19.63 ± 0.03 . The average fertility of these women is 3.39. The women of different age groups are found to differ in their fertility performance.

The fertility performance of the literate women is slightly higher than that of the illiterate ones. A decline in fertility performance along with the rise of educational attainment is indicated in the study. A similar findings was reported by Srivastava (1976). On the basis of these findings it may be hypothesised that the level of education and not bare literacy of the women has an impact on their fertility performance.

The fertility of women living in nuclear family is higher than that of those living in joint family. A similar trend has previously been reported by different workers (Nag, 1976; Das and Barua, 1976; Kar and Sharma, 1982). But a reverse trend, higher fertility in the joint family was observed by Davis (1951) and Deka Mahapatra (1976).

Of the occupational groups, the agriculturists have higher fertility than other occupational groups. This finding is in accordance with some earlier findings (Nag, 1962; Ember and Ember, 1993; Roy and Ali, 1966). It is generally believed that the agriculturists need more helping

hand in their agricultural activities. That may be a cause for higher fertility in them (Ember and Ember, 1993).

This sample of Garo women exhibits lower fertility than many other communities of North-east India as reported earlier (Deka Mahapatra, 1976; Barua and Das, 1985; Das and Das, 1992; Choudhury, 1993; Das, 1995).

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