

Socio-cultural Determinants of Fertility: The Baigas of Baigachak

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INTRODUCTION

There are 427 tribal groups in India constituting 8% of the total population. These are considered to be aboriginals of the country and confined to be hilly and dense forest area, isolated from the mainstream. Madhya Pradesh is the largest tribal state possessing 23% of the population. Out of the 46 tribal groups in Madhya Pradesh, six tribes are considered to be primitive, on the basis of pre-agricultural technology, low literacy and stagnant/diminishing population (Tewari, 1984).

The Baiga tribe is one of the most primitive, aboriginal tribe of Madhya Pradesh. Studies have reported that the tribe has very low population growth as compared to other primitive tribes of the state (Verma, 1999). Fertility is one of the major component of population growth, which is very much influenced by the social, cultural and demographic factors (Fuchs, 1991; Pandey and Verma, 1987; Pandey, 1998; Shukla, 1986). This paper describes the fertility level and its socio-demographic correlates and possible strategies.

The Tribe: The Baiga is one of the primitive tribe of Madhya Pradesh. Elwin (1939) wrote about the Baigas that "the Baiga is one of the most ancient, most remarkable and most delightful of the people of India, the habitat area of the primitive Baigas, is known as Baigachak" which was earmarked in the year 1890 by a forest officer (Tewari, 1984). These people reside in the forest covered hilly tracks. Their economy depends on agricultural pursuits and collection of minor forest produce (MFP), but they lead a life of subsistence economy (Vidyarthi and Rai, 1985). Russel and Hiralal (1916) described the Baiga as a dravidian tribe, though Elwin (1939) has classified the Baiga as Kolarian tribe, that has migrated from Bengal and Bihar to Madhya Pradesh. The main habitat area of the tribe is three blocks of Dindori district namely Bajag, Karanjia and Samnapur.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The study area is two blocks of Dindori district, Madhya Pradesh. In 1997 data was collected in a cross-section survey for Doctoral dissertation work entitled: A study of socio-cultural determinants of population growth in a primitive tribe-The Baiga of Baigachak, in eleven villages following simple random cluster sampling. Rapport was established with the inhabitants of the village with the help of school teachers and forest workers. Information was collected from the each eligible woman by interviewing regarding their fertility record from 475 eligible women among 480 households.

A woman has been considered as eligible, where husband and wife both living together and wife has not attained the age of 50 years/menopause and she has not undergone sterilization (Barclay, 1958). The ages were estimated carefully, the people were not able to give an exact date of birth, but all knew their age relative to others from childhood, local events like harvesting crops and festival were to cross check the ages given. Age at marriage was estimated carefully with the help of educated village marriage pattern was also recorded. Information on time interval between marriage and first conception was collected.

The collected demographic data was edited, re-checked with the original questionnaire and then analysed for all variables and appropriate statistical test of significance were applied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The observation showed that the mean number of children born to an eligible woman in the tribe is 3.39 (2.13) births, which is higher than the state (M.P.) i.e. 3.18 birth (Census of India, 1992).

Socio-cultural Correlates: High prevalence of consanguineous marriage (69%) is observed in the tribe (Verma, 1999; Reddy et al., 1997). The cross-cousin marriages are practised and

preferred. A positive association between consanguinity and fertility was observed in other population (Bittles et al., 1990). The analysis showed that the couples which married in relation, had high average number of children born as compared to the other group of couple which did not marry in relation. Though the difference among mean number of children born between two groups is found to be statistically inconsiderable.

The mean age at first marriage in the Baiga population is 17.5 for males and 14.4 for females. This age is lower than the prescribed legal age (21 years for males and 18 years for females). The figure is even lower than the Madhya Pradesh (rural) (NHFS, 1992) i.e. 16.7, showing no social, economic reasons for its early marriage. This leads to long reproductive period which in turn increases the fertility.

The average number of children born to the couples of the Nuclear Household is 3.75 (0.21), which is significantly higher than the couples of Joint Household i.e. 2.76 (0.35). Similar findings were observed in West Bengal, Datta (1961).

Table 1: Socio-cultural determinants of fertility

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Mean (SE)</i>	<i>Z Statistics</i>
<i>Consanguineous Marriage</i>		
Yes	3.45 (0.25)	0.73
No	3.31 (0.21)	
<i>Type of Household</i>		
Nuclear	3.75 (0.21)	4.69*
Joint	2.76 (0.35)	
<i>Annual Household Income</i>		
≤ 9000/-Rs.	3.48 (0.19)	1.82
>9000/-Rs.	2.84 (0.66)	
<i>Land Holding (in acre)</i>		
Landless	2.94 (0.58)	2.16*
≤2.5	3.18 (0.18)	
>2.5	3.71 (0.48)	
<i>Literacy of Husband</i>		
Illiterate	3.44 (0.34)	0.83
Literate	3.26 (0.22)	
<i>Literacy of Wife</i>		
Illiterate	3.44 (0.18)	2.78*
Literate	2.26 (0.81)	
<i>Occupation of Husband</i>		
Agriculture	3.48 (0.23)	0.84
Non-Agriculture	3.31 (0.32)	

*Statistically significant at 0.05 level

The average age of mother at the time of birth is 18.5 years, indicating that the most of the women becomes mother before obtaining the maturity. The time taken for first birth from age at marriage have been found linearly correlated. The zero order correlation coefficient between two variables is -0.53. This clearly reflects the negative association between age at marriage and interval for first birth. The correlation coefficient is statistically significant ($t=13.44^*$; $p<0.05$).

The fertility analysis with Household Income showed that the wives belonging to the Households with Annual Income less than or equal to Rs. 9000/- Rs. had higher number of children born i.e. 3.48 (0.19) as compared to the other group, which are having income more than 9000/- Rs., had lower fertility i.e. 2.84 (0.06). Though this difference in fertility does not differ considerably.

The analysis of literacy data reveals that the wives of illiterate husbands had higher number of average children born 3.34 (0.18) as compared to literate husbands i.e. 3.26 (0.18).

In the light of low female literacy (13.7%), (Verma, 1999). The analysis of fertility data reveals that significantly low mean number of children born to literate wives 2.66 (0.81) as compared to the illiterate wives i.e. 3.44 (0.18).

Majority of the Baiga population is engaged in agricultural activities (Verma, 1999). The data analysis showed that the average number of children born to the wives whose husbands were engaged in agriculture or its related activities is 3.48 (0.23), which was slightly higher than those of others who were engaged in other activities (labour, household industry etc.) i.e. 3.31 (0.32) births.

CONCLUSION

The fertility among the Baiga tribe is high as compared to Madhya Pradesh (rural) as well as with other primitive tribes of the state. High fertility among the tribe indicates the high mortality must be prevailing in the society since the population is stagnant/diminishing. Hence a study should be made to study the Mortality levels and its correlates. An attention towards low Age at Marriage, low Age at First Birth should be paid. An effort should be made to increase the literacy level, Household Income which in turn will

definitely decrease the fertility level and hence will help them to bring in the mainstream of development.

KEY WORDS Aborigines. Baiga. Dravidian. Annual Household Income. Consanguineous Marriage.

ABSTRACT This paper outlines the fertility and its determinants among the Baiga tribe which is one of the most primitive, aboriginal tribal group of central India. The fertility level in the tribe is high. Mean number of children born to an eligible couple is 3.39 births. Type of Household, Annual Household Income, Couple Literacy are found to be associated variables. Mean age at first birth is also low, giving a long reproductive period.

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