

Family Structure and its Effective Influence on Fertility

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INTRODUCTION

Fertility behaviour in India as elsewhere, is a product of interaction among a complex set of factors which includes biological, cultural, demographic, familial and social. Fertility patterns in India are studied by demographers who have paid little attention to the family in which decisions on family size are made. All the studies that directly examine the role of the family in fertility have concentrated on establishing the correlation between family type (nuclear, joint, extended) and fertility (marital or total fertility). Much of the research on family life in India is embroiled in a controversy on whether the forces of modernization are eroding the composition and functions of the traditional joint family. An interesting aspect of this controversial argument is whether fertility behaviour is dependent upon the type of family (nuclear or joint). It has been observed that besides individual variables like ages, educational level and other socio-cultural characteristics, reproductive behaviour is also influenced by some other variables connected with the individuals relationship with the institution of family.

Fertility differentials by type of family structure i.e., extended and nuclear have been studied by Datta (1961), Bebarta (1966), Pakrasi and Malaker (1967), Hussain (1970) and Goyal (1974). The fertility level of a community or society is greatly influenced by its family structure as family, being the most universal and permanent institution of every society has enormous influence on the life of an individual. The joint family system promotes higher fertility than the nuclear families is one notion by some demographers. Many micro-demographic studies conducted in various regions in the country at different times have found that the fertility rate is lower in the joint family than in the nuclear family (eg. Sen, 1965; Driver, 1960 and 1963; Samuel, 1965; Nag, 1967; Murthy, 1968; Bebarta, 1977). Nag (1968, 1975) examined the fertility patterns in forty one non-industrial

societies by controlling the dominant family type and found no relationship between family type and fertility levels. Caldwell (1976, 1983b) suggests that a progressive acceptance of the conjugal family by those in developing societies leads to the transformation of the family structure and eventually, to a reduction in the family size.

The possibility of higher fertility in joint family is due to the congenial environment also the economic cost, the burden of rearing the children is shared by the other members of the family. Whereas if one has to establish the high fertility rate among the nuclear families it is due to greater privacy and no traditional taboos regarding sexual intercourse which is normally enforced in a joint family due to the presence of the elders.

Some intermediate variables pertaining to the present topic have been identified which would affect the fertility level of a woman effectively like the age at marriage, coital frequency and interpersonal communication through which family structure influences fertility behaviour.

Studies dealing with family type and fertility are not many in India but whatever these studies are, most of them show that the average number of children born, when standardized for mother's age, duration of marriage and socio-economic conditions are fewer for extended families than the nuclear families. 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. Karkal (1975) concluded on the basis of data collected from 27 villages in Maharashtra, the extended families had larger average number of live-births than nuclear families when standardized for duration of age at effective marriage and age at marriage of the women.

Lorimer and Davis (1954) also maintained that high fertility in traditional cultures was caused by extended family system. Their

argument is based on extended family's ability to extend financial support and help in child rearing to the newly married couple. An implication of Caldwell's analysis for our study is that fertility decline in India need not necessarily depend upon modernization.

It is facilitated by the changes in family structure and awareness on the part of the parents. It is argued that most Indians are ideologically supportive of joint families because of its apparent advantages to spouses and their children. Desai (1964), Mukherjee (1976) and Desai (1980) are among the few who have attempted to examine fertility behaviour in relation to the couple, their family and their motivations for large families.

There are few studies which explore the problem of association between family type and use of contraception. Some of these studies have reported that nuclear families are more easily motivated for contraception than the joint families are aware of family planning. Another factor that impinges on the family type and contraception dimension is the interpersonal or interspouse communication.

METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this study is to observe and understand the major factors involved in the making of a particular family structure and its effect on the fertility behaviour of the respondents. An in-depth study of the individual fertility performance in different family structures and other related socio-cultural factors have been conducted with the help of schedules and questionnaires. Interview method was also followed to a certain extent in order to get the background of the respondents and the family structure. For this study, the criteria for choosing the respondent was a married woman who is very much within the reproductive age group of 15 to 49 years and who has a minimum of one child. Both working as well as non-working women have been taken for this study as samples. Women were the sole respondents for the present study. Family structure has been given due importance as a variable against fertility behaviour and accordingly the data has been analyzed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Generally, it has been observed that women living in extended families have fewer children than those living in nuclear families. A very significant relationship has been viewed between the family structure and the average fertility of the respondent. The average number of nuclear families is found to be more than the extended families, in the present sample.

The average number of pregnancies for the women in a nuclear family type is 2.52 whereas for the women from Extended family type the fertility rate is 2.30. It shows that the average number of pregnancy rate is more in the nuclear family type than in the extended family type. The overall findings of the present study support the hypothesis of various other similar studies (Table 1).

Table 1: Family structure and average number of pregnancies

Family Type	No. of Women <i>N</i>	Average No. of Pregnancies <i>X</i>
Nuclear	62	2.52
Extended	38	2.30
Total	100	2.4

Nag (1968 and 1975) examined the fertility pattern in forty one non-industrial societies by controlling the dominant family type and found no relationship between family type and fertility levels. Freedman (1961-62) suggested that the link between the joint family and fertility behaviour might have existed in the distant past in developing societies but sufficient modernization may have taken place to minimize, if not destroy, the causal connection.

When the average number of livebirths of the respondents is analysed it has shown 2.23 as the fertility rate for the women under Nuclear

Table 2: Family structure and average number of live births

Family Type	No. of Women <i>N</i>	Average No. of Livebirths <i>X</i>
Nuclear	62	2.23
Extended	38	1.99
Total	100	2.1

family type whereas for the women from extended family type is 1.99 only.

While there is little doubt that the joint family as a social institution was venerable and held by most as an ideal to be emulated, the empirical evidence is far from conclusive in suggesting that it was ever universal. It coexisted with Extended and Nuclear family systems (Kapadia 1955; Kurian 1961, 1971 and 1974; Rose 1961; Goode 1963b; Mukherjee 1969, 1971, 1972 and 1975; Devanadan and Thomas 1966; Gore 1968; Kolenda 1968; Vatuk 1972; Narain 1975; Ramu 1977; Hallen 1962; Augustin 1962; Srivatsava 1986).

CONCLUSION

From the present study it is clear that the average fertility of the women is more in the Nuclear family structure than in the Extended family structure which has also been supported by many other similar studies.

KEY WORDS Family Structure. Low Fertility. Joint Family. Nuclear Family. Fertility Control.

ABSTRACT Generally speaking, in any given community or society it is expected that the fertility level of the women is greatly influenced by the structure of the family. Based on such a hypothesis which is widely accepted proved that the nuclear family land household structures promote lower fertility than extended or joint household structures. Majority of the demographic studies have excluded the influences of family structure on fertility analysis. Few studies have tried to analyze the effect of fertility due to differential family structure has proved high fertility rate among the joint family structure while low fertility rate among the nuclear family structure. But the present study which was conducted during 1990 in Chennai city among a hundred women samples in the reproductive age group has disproved this theory by showing that high fertility rates in the nuclear family type while joint family type has low fertility rate. Another study by Bebarta (1976) has proved that the nuclear type had higher fertility in India has concentrated more on 'fertility control' than on the cultural, familial land inter-personal fertility rate. By having this as background an intensive study has been carried out and the data was collected by means of personal interviews, schedules and questionnaires. The aim of the study is to ascertain the effect of family structure on fertility level.

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