

Demographic Study of Gujjars of Delhi: III. Fertility Preferences

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ABSTRACT Fertility preferences are indicators of general attitudes and possible future course of fertility. Also, the acceptance of family planning is closely dependent on it. The present study was conducted keeping this in mind, thereby to know about fertility preferences among Gujjar women residing in Delhi. The data for present study was collected by interviewing ever-married Gujjar women aged 15-49 years from a sample of 558 households. Among them, there is a gap between their ideal and actual fertility experience. With the increase in the number of children and maternal age, the desire to have another child drops rapidly. Among all the women, average number of children considered ideal is lower than the average actual number of children. However, they prefer more sons than daughters and consider that there should be at least one male child in the family, revealing preference for son. The degree of dependence for deciding the family size among Gujjars women is substantially high.

INTRODUCTION

Fertility preferences are the indicators of general attitude and possible future course of fertility. Also, the acceptance of family planning is closely dependent on it. Demographic factors like age at marriage, present family size, gender preference (Mahadevan, 1979; Bhasin, V., 1990; Asari and John, 1998; Chachra and Bhasin, 1998; Bhasin and Nag, 2002) and socio-economic factors like education, occupation, religion, contraceptive practice, etc. (Bhatia, 1970; Asari and John, 1998) are the determinants of desired family size. In most of the South Asian societies, there is a universal attitude for the son preference, for economic, religious or social reasons. Adult sons are expected to provide economic support to their parents (Das, 1984; Miller, 1981). As sons are believed to be the carriers of lineage, women tend to stop childbearing only after they had given birth to the desired number of sons (Vlassof, 1990). The percent of women, at each parity, using contraception tends to increase with number of living sons (Nag, 1991), suggesting preference for son. Old age security also motivates higher fertility (Vlassof and Vlassof, 1980; Goody et al., 1981). Parent's desire for more children is directly correlated with the parental fear of losing them (Mysore Study, 1961; Preston, 1978). Desirable family size also

depends on the relative utilities of economic benefits and the cost of upbringing children. In India, gender disparity is common, especially in rural areas where at least one son is preferred (Das Gupta, 1987).

Gujjar community living in Delhi, are by and large traditional yet winds of change have not left Gujjar villages unaffected. Their villages in Delhi are quite urbanized. If one goes into one of the gullies, one can spot women in 'Pardah' and old men in 'Mundasa' (traditional turban). At the same time, the younger generation is seen in modern dresses. Status of women is considered inferior and most of the women even today continue to subscribe to the idea that decision-making is the male prerogative. Women are discouraged, prevented and suppressed from going against the wishes of their elderly males of the Household. Most of them do not go for the higher studies. Few of them, especially males pursue higher studies. City culture and independent needs have resulted in growing number of nuclear families. Also, public services related to health, education etc has improved a lot in past few decades. It is of interest to know about the fertility preferences among women who are less educated, have lower status and say in decision making and are living in a semi urbanized setting. It may reflect their changing generational attitude (older generation compared to younger) and whether it has been influenced by city culture.

Thus, the focus of this paper is to decipher the fertility preferences among Hindu Gujjar women residing in Delhi. It aims at studying

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desired for more children, gender preference, ideal number of children and decision of family size among them.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present study was conducted among Hindu Gujjars residing in Delhi. Five Gujjar predominated villages selected at random, were visited during different months of the year 2002. The data was collected from ever-married Gujjar women aged 15-49 years from a sample of 558 households using interview schedule (For details see Dabral and Malik, 2004). For the information on desired number of children and decision on family size, currently married non-sterilized women, who are about half of the total sample (49.3 percent), were considered. Sterilized women were assumed that they do not want any more children. It is possible that the responses may not be fully formed, and may change over time, or may not take into account the effect of social pressures influencing the reproductive decision.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Desire for More Children: Over 55 percent of the non-sterilized Gujjar women said that they want another child (Table 1, 2). The remaining said they do not want any more children possibly indicating proportion of potential users of

contraceptives. Generally, the desire to have another child drops, as the number of children increases, possibly because of the fulfillment of desired gender composition particularly number of sons (Table 1). The proportion who wants another child drops from cent percent for women with no children to less than half and fewer for women with two or more living children. Women having five or more living children do not want to have any more children.

The pattern of fertility preferences by women age is similar to the pattern by number of children. Higher proportion of older women do not want any more children (Table 2) possibly because there is a decrease in desire to have more children with increasing maternal age and family size. By 29 years, more than half of the women do not want any more children. By age 35 years and above, almost 95 percent women don't want any more children.

As far as gender preference is concerned, about half of the women who want to have another child say that they want the next child to be a boy and only about one-sixth want a girl, which reflects the universal attitude for son preference (Table 3). For rest of the women, there is no gender preference. Present family size, gender preference, education, religion, etc are some of the factors that influence the desired family size (Mahadevan, 1979; Bhasin, V., 1990; Asari and John, 1998; Chachra and Bhasin, 1998; Bhasin and Nag, 2002). Among Gujjars,

Table 1: Percent distribution of currently married non-sterilized women aged 15-49 years, by their desire for children and number of living children

Desire for children	Number of living children							Total
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+	
Want to have Another Child?								
Yes	100.0	98.1	46.8	28.0	31.6	-	-	56.0
No	-	1.9	53.2	72.0	68.4	100.0	100.0	44.0
Total	Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	Number	45	53	79	50	19	15	275

Table 2: Percent distribution of currently married non-sterilized women aged 15-49 years, by their desire for children and age

	Age (in years)							
Desire for children	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	Total
Want to have Another Child?								
Yes	100.0	77.8	44.4	33.3	5.9	-	-	56.0
No	-	22.2	55.6	66.7	94.1	100.0	100.0	44.0
Total	Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	Number	27	108	72	30	17	6	275

present family size and son preference seems to be the major reasons for the desired number of children. Also, among them as in case of other Indian communities, sons are expected to provide economic support for their parents. And desire for a male child seems to influence the overall demand for children and thus, the fertility level. *Preference for a Male Child:* In India, there is a strong preference for sons as they are expected to provide economic support for their parents. Such preference affects both attitudes and behaviour with respect to children. Majority of ever married women say that there should be at

least one male child in the family irrespective of educational level of the women (Table 4) indicative of a consistent preference for sons. Though there is decline in this attitude among women who have completed high school and above.

All these prevailing mind-set further supplements the son preference attitude among Gujjars already mentioned and is accordance with the studies that revealed that in India son are privileged by their parents for reasons such as religious, social and particularly, economic support (Miller, 1981; Das, 1984).

Ideal Number of Children: Half of the ever married Gujar women consider two to be ideal number of children (Table 5). More than two-fifth consider three to be the ideal number. Among all the women, average number of children considered ideal is between two and three (mean 2.54) which is lower than the average actual number of children (mean 3.10). The mean ideal number increases with the number of the living children and ranges from two for women who have one child and between three and four, for women who have six or more children. Nearly 48 percent of the women state that an ideal family size of three children which is smaller than their actual family size. Over three-fourth of the women with two living children consider two children as ideal while this proportion decreases to less than half for women having three living children, as about half of the women considered three as ideal. There is possibility that in some cases women may tend to adjust their family size upward as their number of living children increases. However, this may not be true for many of the Gujar women, seeing that generally they consider fewer than their living children, as ideal.

Table 3: Percentage of currently married non-sterilized women aged 15-49 years, who want to have another child, by gender preference

Preferred gender of additional child	Total	
	Number	Percent
Girls	23	14.9
Boys	74	48.1
Either	57	37.0
Total	154	100.0

Table 4: Percent distribution of ever-married women aged 15-49 years, by whether they think there should be at least one male child in the family, according to education of women

Education	Whether there should be at least one male child in the family		Total	
	Yes	No	Percent	Number
Illiterate	95.1	4.9	100.0	205
< Middle school completed	95.8	4.2	100.0	143
Middle school completed	94.5	5.5	100.0	109
High school completed and above	70.3	29.7	100.0	101
Total	90.7	9.3	100.0	558

Table 5: Percent distribution of ever-married women aged 15-49 years, by ideal number of children and number of living children

Ideal number of children	Number of living children							Total
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+	
1	2.2	3.6	-	1.2	-	-	-	0.9
2	68.9	89.3	77.0	46.6	31.1	2.2	2.8	50.4
3	28.9	7.1	22.1	50.3	64.4	87.0	47.2	43.2
4+	-	-	0.8	1.8	4.4	10.9	50.0	5.6
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of women	45	56	122	163	90	46	36	558
Mean	2.27	2.04	2.24	2.53	2.73	3.09	3.50	2.54
S.D.	0.49	0.33	0.44	0.56	0.53	0.35	0.60	0.62

Even women with four and above children, report that fewer than four children would be ideal. This indicates that family size norms are quite moderate among Gujjars and substantial proportion of women already has more children than they now consider ideal. There is a tendency among women having no living children (generally young and recently married) to be imaginative while answering questions on ideal number of children since they have yet to experience childbearing.

Decision on Family Size: Decision making for family size, gender composition and consequently contraception is an important facet of family planning. It seems to be more complex in a joint family where words of the mother-in-law or other elderly females carry more weight than choice of the daughter-in law. Also, some times variations are observed between the two spouses in this respect. Among currently married non-sterilized Gujjars women, less than half have to consult their spouse and then jointly take the decision (Table 6). More than one-fourth of the women reported that their husband takes the decision on family size. One in seven follows as per advice of their respective mothers-in-law. About ten percent rest the decision up to God. This suggests that Gujjars women, have to depend on their husband or mother-in-law/ other elderly females for deciding the family size and consequently their degree of dependence is substantially high.

Table 6: Percent distribution of currently married non-sterilized women, aged 15-49 years, by who decides on the number of children

Who decides on number of children	Number	Percent
Husband	77	28.0
Both	129	46.9
Mother-in-law	40	14.5
Up to God	29	10.5
Total	275	100.0

CONCLUSIONS

From the foregoing discussion, it may be concluded that among Gujjar women, there is a gap between their ideal and actual fertility experience. With the increase in the number of children and maternal age, the desire to have another child drops rapidly possibly because there is a decrease in desire to have more children with increasing maternal age and family size.

Family size norms are quite moderate. Among all the women, average number of children considered ideal is lower than the average actual number of children. However, they prefer more sons than daughters and consider that there should be at least one male child in the family, revealing preference for son. The degree of dependence for deciding the family size among Gujjars women is substantially high.

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