Couples Reproductive Goals in India and Its Policy Relevance

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Introduction

In most demographic and health surveys information is generally collected on woman's fertility preferences, such as whether she wants to have another child, and if yes, for how long she can wait to get her next child. This information is used to estimate unmet need, and therefore, future demand for limiting and spacing methods of family planning. Intention to use family planning in future is also enquired in most of these surveys. In last 10 years or so, unmet need is being increasingly advocated to be used to monitor the program not only at Macro-level but also at Micro level. The unmet need provides a sort of upper limit to which contraceptive prevalence can be augmented rather easily.

Intention "to have or not to have another child" and to use or not to use contraception basically deals with attitudes, motivation of people and the context in which they live. Actual realization of such intended behavior can be much more complex. The behavior is very much dependent on time and contextual environment-household as well as the community.

The intended behavior may not get translated into actual practice due to the failure of the respondents to anticipate the future correctly. Failure to adhere to the intended use of contraception for not having another child or not to have one soon can occur due to a variety of reasons. For example, sudden death of a child, a change in the economic condition of the household, non-availability of family planning services or, at least, good quality services, etc. can influence the decision. There may also be a possibility that a respondent replies to such attitudinal questions without being serious about them or without realizing their implications.

Demographic surveys are repeat with the evidences of influence of husband and other family members on women behavior. Women are not able to regulate or translate

their desire into reality due to husband's disapproval (Joesoef et. al. 1988, Roy et.al. 2003), household and community rights over women reproductive power. However, information on these matters are collected from women themselves and it may be possible that women may not give the reality in order to enhance their self-esteem with the interviewers.

There are very few studies that included husbands and wives both to collect the information on reproductive goals. This is very relevant from policy point of view because exclusion of men from the research domain, affects our understanding as men are said to be the sole decision maker. In the context of developing countries where women generally desire lesser number of children than their male partners (Bankole and Singh 1998, Mason and Smith, 2000 Lasee and Becker 1997), absence of research on couples is surprising.

Under these circumstances the estimates derived from the responses of woman may prove to be highly un-usable from program points of view, as woman have to follow their husband's decision regarding the fertility preferences as well as the family planning adoption. To what extent couples agree with each other on reproductive matter, sex of the next child, and the intention to use family planning in future has major role not only in determining the family size but also in the process of fertility transition. Therefore, this article examines the reproductive preferences and behavior of married men and women in a demographically backward state of Uttar Pradesh, India. The main objective of the paper is to examine the role of the husband in the couple's reproductive preference and behavior and intention to use family planning in future. The responses of the husbands regarding their desire for additional child, sex of the next child and intention to use family planning in future has been tabulated against the responses of their wives. The responses of husbands and wives have been compared to bring out the similarities and dissimilarities in their responses. In addition to this, article also aims at examining the influence of the spouse's attitude on the women's intention to use family planning in future after controlling for other confounding variables.

Methods and Materials

The data for the present analysis has been taken from District Level Household Survey conducted during 2002-2003. District Level Household Survey under the

Reproductive and Child Health project covers all the districts in India gathering information from around 1000 households from each district. For the first time in India, data was simultaneously collected from the husbands in such a large-scale survey. The currently married women in the age group 15-44 were interviewed in the survey on various issues ranging from fertility, family planning, RTI/STIs, quality of care, Maternal and Child Health services etc. The husbands of the eligible women were also interviewed in the survey. Therefore, the survey provides ample opportunity to analyze the responses from both the husband as well as the wife regarding their reproductive goals. The response rate for husbands was much lower compared to that of the wives. The analysis has been restricted to only Hindus and Muslims as the sample was very small for other religions. The total number of husbands and wives interviewed in the survey were 1,60,771 and 2,50,789 respectively that gives 1,47,447 couples for analysis at the all India level. In case of Uttar Pradesh, total number of husbands and wives interviewed were 18,109 and 31, 228 respectively providing 15,811 couples.

The male's questionnaire is similar in structure to the female questionnaire, but is shorter in length. The men are asked about their background characteristics, fertility experiences, fertility behavior, contraceptive behavior, knowledge and awareness about STDs and HIV/AIDS, and experience of STDs and treatment seeking. Also, questions have been asked regarding the use or non-use of male methods of contraception and reasons for not using a male method.

Under the section of fertility preferences men were asked about their desire for additional child, the sex of the next child, the timing of the next child, and the intention to use family planning in future. Under the contraceptive section, men are asked about their contraceptive use, the method they are currently using, the reasons for not using contraception and reason for not using a male method of contraception. The questions in male questionnaire are worded in the similar way as in the female questionnaire.

The data from the wives as well as the husbands were matched and the couple data has been analyzed for the present paper. Those cases in which one of the spouses was not interviewed has been deleted from the analysis. To fulfill the specific objectives of the paper frequency distributions, cross tabs, and logistic regressions have been used in the paper. To see the agreement between the spouses regarding the fertility

performances, Kappa statistics has been used. The various variables used in the analysis are ethnicity, religion, number of living children, exposure of the household to the mass media, wife's literacy, husband's literacy, place of residence, age-gap between the spouses and marital duration. The number of living children reported by the wives has been used in the analysis.

Analysis

Table 1 provides the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the couples. The major share of the couples i.e. 46 percent women come from the household belonging to other backward castes, where as the percentage for the SC/STs and General castes are 25 percent and 29 percent respectively. A majority of the couples belong to the Hindu religion. Around 43 percent of couples have 0-2 children and 35 percent have 3-4 children. In U.P. more than 20 percent of couples have more than four children. It is evident from the table that more than half of the households covered in the survey come under the exposed category. In the survey two questions were asked; do you have TV in your house, and do you have radio in your house. Using these two questions the exposure of the household to mass media was prepared. However, this variable may not reflect the effect of exposure to mass media for the women in the true sense. But in the absence of any other reliable measure of the exposure to mass media, this measure can provide some idea about the issues of interest. Only around one-third of the wives are literate. On the other hand, less than one third of the husbands were illiterate. The sample mostly belongs to rural areas (69 percent). On an average the age-gap between the spouses were found to be around five years. In case of 65 percent of the couples, the age gap was less than five years. In seven percent of the couples, the wife was older than the husband. In six percent of the cases, husband was much older than his wife. Fifty nine percent of the couples were married for more than 10 years. Only 21 percent of the couples were married for the last five years.

A very prominent measure of reproductive preference is whether or not the respondent intends to have another child. A fairly high degree of agreement exists between the husband and wife regarding their desire for additional child (Table 2) irrespective of the various background characteristics. Wives in comparison to their husbands desire lesser number of children. The difference between the wife's and

husband's desire for additional child came out to be significant irrespective of the socio-economic group they belong to. With the increase in the number of children and the marital duration, the desire for additional child decreases for both the wives as well as the husbands. It is clear from the table that a fair degree of agreement exists between husbands and wives regarding the desire for additional child. A higher value of Kappa coefficient represents good agreement beyond chance. Fairly, higher degree of agreement was found in case of couples belonging to general castes, Hindu religion, exposed to mass media, wife being literate, urban residence etc.

Table 3 gives the desire for male children and the level of agreement between husbands and wives by various socio-economic and demographic characteristics. It is evident from the table that more wives than their husbands prefer their next child to be a male child. But when it comes to the agreement between the husband and wives regarding the sex of the next child, it is no more than agreement by chance. The agreement between the spouses varies from 40 percent to 55 percent for couples belonging to different socio-economic and demographic groups.

The results of the logistic regression analysis for the agreement between the spouses regarding desire for another child are presented in Tables 4. After controlling for various confounding variables, variables like exposure of the household to mass India, belonging to the general castes, having more than two children, belonging to Muslim religion, and marital duration greater than 5 years came out to be significant in explaining the agreement between the couples regarding the desire for the additional child. In reference to the couples from the non exposed households, couples coming from the exposed households, couples belonging to general castes, couples having greater than four children are more likely to have agreement among themselves as compared to the reference category regarding the desire for additional child. The couples belonging to Muslim religion, and marital duration greater than 5 years are less likely to have agreement regarding additional child compared to Hindu couples and couples married for less than 5 years. Ethnicity, number of living children and religion were found significant in the logistic regression (Table 5) for the agreement on desired sex of the additional child. The couples belonging to other backward castes (OBC) and general castes are 1.33 and 1.40 times more likely to have an agreement on the sex of the next child as compared to the couples belonging to SC/STs. Similarly, the couples

with 3-4 surviving children, and 4+ surviving children are 47 percent and 77 percent more likely to agree on the sex of the next child compared to couples having less than or equal to two children.

The results of the logistic regression analysis of wives' contraceptive attitudes are presented in Tables 6. The dependent variable is intention to use contraception by wife, which is coded as one if the individual intends to use contraception in future, and as 0, otherwise. An overview of the results (Table 6) shows that both the husbands' and wives' desire for additional child has a significant effect on the wives' intention to use contraception in future. This relationship exists even after controlling for the other confounding variables like number of living children, wife's education, husband's education, place of residence, husbands' age, marital duration etc.

Discussion

The present study tries to investigate the couples's reproductive goals in a demographically backward state of Uttar Pradesh, India. Uttar Pradesh is a patriarchal society and the various demographic parameters are not encouraging. In Uttar Pradesh like in any other society husbands are more likely than wives to have desire for the additional child. The result is consistent irrespective of the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the spouses. It is clear from the analysis that more wives than their husbands prefer their next child to be a male child. This may be because of the fact that sons are highly valued in the agrarian patriarchal society and women in general gain status or power in the household if they have more sons in their number of children. The findings from the indicators of the fertility preferences have serious implications for fertility and family planning. The result shows that the decline in family size preference, which is the first step in the decline of actual fertility, tends to occur in women. But the success in achieving the lower fertility will primarily depend on how responsive the husband's fertility preferences are to the spouses' fertility preferences.

Generally in demographic survey, questions regarding intention to use contraception and fertility preferences are only asked to women. On the basis of the responses provided by women, various inferences are drawn regarding the unmet need and intention to use contraception. The analysis reveals that the wives intention to use

contraception is very much affected by the fertility preferences of her husband. In a society where, husbands are heads of the households and the main decision maker, the estimates based just on the responses of wives may not reflect the real demand for family planning at least from household/husband perspectives. Even if wife wants to use contraception she may not use because her husband does not allow her to use contraception. It can therefore, be concluded from the analysis that understanding the views of the husbands and incorporating them as an active partner into policies and programmes should go a long way towards realizing the demographic targets in such a demographically backward state of Uttar Pradesh, India.

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Table 1: Percentage Distribution of the Couples According to the Background Characteristics

Background Characteristics	Percentage Distribution
Ethnicity	
SC/ST	24.8
OBC	46.0
General	29.2
Religion	
Hindu	85.9
Muslim	14.1
Number of Living Children	
0-2 children	43.3
3-4 children	35.5
4+ children	21.2
Exposure to Mass Media	
No exposure	48.9
Exposed	51.1
Wife's Literacy	
Literate	36.8
Illiterate	63.2
Husband's Literacy	
Literate	70.9
Illiterate	29.1
Place of Residence	
Rural	69.4
Urban	30.6
Age Gap between Husband and Wife	
Wife is older	7.2
Husband Older by (0-5) years	64.7
Husband Older by (6-10) years	21.9
Husband much Older	6.3
Marital Duration	
0-5 years	21.5
5-10 years	19.3
10+ years	59.2

Table 2: Wives' and husbands' desires for children and level of concordance by background characteristics

Background characteristics	Wife wants no more	Husband wants no more	Difference	Agreement (% of couples agreeing	Kappa coefficient
Ethnicity					
SC/ST	42.4	38.7	3.7***	75.1	0.565***
OBC	45.3	40.7	4.6***	73.9	0.552***
General	45.0	40.5	4.5***	78.3	0.614***
Religion					
Hindu	43.6	39.6	4.0***	77.1	0.593***
Muslim	47.8	41.5	6.3***	65.8	0.452***
Number of Living Children					
0-2 children	14.8	14.7	0.1***	79.6	0.398***
3-4 children	64.4	59.9	4.5***	65.9	0.366***
4+ children	86.4	78.6	7.8***	77.3	0.211***
Exposure to mass media					
No exposure	47.3	42.0	5.3***	72.9	0.540***
Exposed	40.5	37.3	3.2***	78.4	0.606***
Wife's literacy					
Literate	40.8	35.5	5.3**	78.1	0.593***
Illiterate	45.8	41.9	3.9***	74.2	0.558***
Husband's literacy					
Literate	43.1	39.1	4.0***	76.7	0.587***
Illiterate	46.4	41.5	4.9***	72.8	0.541***
Place of residence					
Rural	43.1	39.0	4.1***	75.3	0.568***
Urban	47.7	42.7	5.0***	75.4	0.580***
Age gap between husband and wife					
Wife is older	56.2	45.0	11.2	73.1	0.527***
Husband older by (0-5) years	42.6	37.8	4.8***	76.2	0.582***
Husband older by (6-10) years	43.7	41.2	2.5	74.6	0.566***
Husband much older	49.6	51.3	-1.7***	71.0	0.495***
Marital Duration					
0-5 years	8.7	7.2	1.5***	84.1	0.313***
5-10 years	30.7	28.0	2.7**	70.3	0.450***
10+ years	68.8	63.8	5.0***	72.4	0.447***

Note: *** p< 0.001, ** p< 0.01, * p< 0.05

Table 3: Wives' and Husbands' Desires for Male Children and Level of Concordance by Background Characteristics

Background characteristics	Wife wants boy	Husband wants boy	Difference	Agreement (% of couples agreeing)	Kappa coefficient
Ethnicity					
SC/ST	39.7	31.9	7.8**	42.2	0.159***
OBC	38.0	31.0	7.0***	47.1	0.225***
General	32.2	26.0	6.2***	47.7	0.243***
Religion					
Hindu	38.8	32.5	6.3***	47.2	0.227***
Muslim	29.1	18.7	10.4***	39.5	0.110***
Number of Living Children					
0-2 children	34.6	28.7	5.9***	44.3	0.186***
3-4 children	49.7	40.3	9.4*	55.2	0.270***
4+ children	32.6	23.6	9.0	55.6	0.316***
Exposure to mass media					
No exposure	39.4	32.4	7.0***	45.9	0.207***
Exposed	35.1	28.1	7.0***	46.2	0.220***
Wife's literacy					
Literate	32.5	26.3	6.2***	46.5	0.216***
Illiterate	39.6	32.4	7.2***	45.8	0.203***
Husband's literacy					
Literate	37.0	29.5	7.5***	45.4	0.206***
Illiterate	37.7	32.0	5.7***	47.3	0.226***
Place of residence					
Rural	49.9	32.3	17.6***	46.5	0.218***
Urban	28.9	24.1	4.8**	44.6	0.178***
Age gap between husband and wife					
Wife is older	47.4	33.8	13.6***	44.6	0.181***
Husband older by (0-5) years	37.0	29.7	7.3***	46.3	0.218***
Husband older by (6-10) years	36.4	31.1	5.3*	45.1	0.198***
Husband much older	34.2	32.0	2.2	49.0	0.255***
Marital Duration					
0-5 years	33.6	26.4	7.2***	42.9	0.171***
5-10 years	40.4	34.8	5.6***	48.8	0.250***
10+ years	40.4	32.7	7.7**	49.7	0.250***

Note: *** p< 0.001, ** p< 0.01, * p< 0.05

Table 4: Logistic regression coefficients showing the effect of background characteristics on the agreement between husband and wife regarding more children

Background Characteristics	β	Exp (β)
Age gap between husband and wife		
Wife is older ®		
Husband older by (0-5) years	0.011	1.011
Husband older by (6-10) years	-0.032	0.968
Husband much older	-0.155	0.856
Wife's Education		
Literate ®		
Illiterate	0.072	1.074
Husband's Education		
Literate ®		
Illiterate	-0.032	0.969
Exposure to mass media		
No exposure ®		
Exposed	0.166	1.181**
Ethnicity		
SC/ST ®		
OBC	0.030	1.030
General	0.249	1.283**
Number of Living Children		
0-2 children ®		
3-4 children	-0.377	0.686***
4+ children	0.262	1.300**
Religion		
Hindu ®		
Muslim	-0.599	0.549***
Place of Residence		
Rural ®		
Urban	0.031	1.032
Marital Duration		
0-5 years ®		
5-10 years	-0.632	0.531***
10+ years	-0.596	0.551***

Note: *** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.10

Table 5: Logistic regression coefficients showing the effect of background characteristics on the agreement between husband and wife regarding the sex of next child

Background Characteristics	β	Exp (β)
Age gap between husband and wife		
Wife is older ®		
Husband older by (0-5) years	0.121	1.129
Husband older by (6-10) years	0.113	1.120
Husband much older	0.188	1.207
Wife's Education		
Literate ®		
Illiterate	-0.076	0.927
Husband's Education		
Literate ®		
Illiterate	0.123	1.131
Exposure to mass media		
No exposure ®		
Exposed	0.023	1.024
Ethnicity		
SC/ST ®		
OBC	0.287	1.332***
General	0.338	1.403**
Number of Living Children		
0-2 children ®		
3-4 children	0.390	1.476***
4+ children	0.574	1.775**
Religion		
Hindu ®		
Muslim	-0.458	0.633***
Place of Residence		
Rural ®		
Urban	-0.025	0.975
Marital Duration		
0-5 years ®		
5-10 years	0.213	1.237**
10+ years	0.135	1.145

Note: *** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.10

Table 6: Logistic regression coefficients showing the effect of her husband, her and shared characteristics on wife's intention to use FP

Background Characteristics	β	Exp (β)
Wife's Education		
Literate ®		
Illiterate	-0.566	0.568***
Husband's Education		
Literate ®		
Illiterate	-0.145	0.865
Exposure to mass media		
No exposure ®		
Exposed	-0.034	0.967
Ethnicity		
SC/ST ®		
OBC	0.065	1.067
General	0.111	1.118
Number of Living Children		
0-2 children ®		
3-4 children	0.830	2.293***
4+ children	1.403	4.067***
Religion		
Hindu ®		
Muslim	-0.380	0.684**
Place of Residence		
Rural ®		
Urban	0.007	1.007
Wife's desire		
Wants more children ®		
Wants no more children	0.626	1.870***
Husband's desire		
Wants more children ®		
Wants no more children	0.257	1.292**
Wife's Age		
< 30 years ®		
> 30 years	-1.275	0.279***
Husband's Age		
< 30 years ®		
> 30 years	-0.471	0.625**
Marital Duration		
0-5 years ®		
5-10 years	-0.168	0.845
10+ years	-0.663	0.515***

Note: *** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.10