

## Status of Women and Family Planning : The Indian Case

*Education is the key element for improving the status of  
women and for achieving a reduction in fertility*

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The degree of personal autonomy of women in India varies from state to state. Several studies have noted the regional variations in the status of women in India (Karve, 1965; Srinivas, 1978; Mitra, 1979; Dyson and Moore, 1983). Women's personal autonomy is manifested in practices such as veiling (*purdah* or *ghungat*), pressures to get girls married at a very young age (partly to protect their virginity and partly to ensure compliance with parents' wishes in respect of the choice of spouse), denying or limiting educational or employment opportunities to girls, attaching differential values to sons and daughters, restricting the ability of women to control their fertility by pres-

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sureing them to produce children (particularly male heirs), restricting their access to information, and economic and health resources etc.

The aforementioned studies indicate that there is greater autonomy for women as one moves from the north of India to the south and from west to east. Regional variations in fertility are fairly consistent over time and follow a more or less similar pattern, the northern states of India having higher fertility than the southern ones, and the western states having higher fertility than the eastern ones (Dyson and Moore, 1983).

The aim of this article is to examine the extent to which the status of women is related to awareness, knowledge and practice of family planning in India. It makes use of both macro-level data for the states of India and data from household surveys and field studies to assess the extent of interaction between the indicators of status of women and indicators of family planning.

By status is implied the extent to which women have control over their own lives and have access to knowledge, economic resources, political power etc. There is no single index of status of women which can reflect all its dimensions.

In determining the status of women, factors such as the role of women in decision making in the family and in the community, their educational status, their participation in social, political and economic activities and their position in the various professions as well as their legal status in terms of marriage, divorce, inheritance etc., should be taken into consideration (ECAFE, 1973).

Family planning can be defined as the conscious effort of couples to regulate the number and spacing of births. Family planning usually connotes the use of birth control but also includes efforts of couples to induce pregnancy. The first task in this study is to quantify those variables before establishing their intercorrelations. Recognizing the limitations of the available data, the following indicators have been utilized.

#### **Indicators of the status of women**

$S_1$  = Proportion of females married in the age group 15-19 years, 1981.

$S_2$  = Singulate mean age at marriage for females, 1981.

$S_3$  = Female work participation rate, 1981.

$S_4$  = Female workers as a percentage of male workers, 1981.

$S_5$  = Percentage of females in non-agricultural activities, 1977-1978.

- $S_6$  = Female literates as a percentage of male literates, 1982.  
 $S_7$  = Enrolment of girls as a percentage of total enrolment in grades 1-5, 1982.  
 $S_8$  = Enrolment of girls as a percentage of total enrolment in grades 6-8, 1982.

(Note: [These indicators are shown in table 1.](#))

### **Fertility and family planning indicators**

- $F_1$  = General marital fertility rate (GMFR), 1978.  
 $F_2$  = Total marital fertility rate (TMFR), 1978.  
 $F_3$  = Average number of children per woman (45-49 years of age), 1981.  
 $F_4$  = Percentage of couples protected by all methods of contraception, 1987.  
 $F_5$  = Percentage of couples protected by sterilization, 1987.

(Note: [These indicators are shown in table 2.](#))

Most of the indicators are straightforward, but a brief explanation is required for  $F_4$  and  $F_5$ . The estimates of couples protected are derived by the Department of Family Welfare based on the age distribution of the acceptors and estimation of joint survival ratios of husbands and wives in the different age groups. In essence, they are composite measures based on assumptions regarding survival and attrition. Some measures of the awareness and knowledge of family planning, current and ever-users as a proportion of the eligible couples, and the average open- and closed-birth intervals (as measures of spacing and limitation) would have been more appropriate, but such data are not available on a comparable basis for the different states of India.

In spite of the limitations of the data, these indicators may be taken to show the broad order of magnitude of variables for the different states. Also, the analysis has been restricted to the 14 major states to avoid errors owing to the limited amount of data or lack of them for some areas such as Assam.

In order to assess the strength of the relationship between the regional variations in fertility and the status of women, Spearman's rank correlations  $\rho$  (rho) have been computed as shown in [table 3](#).

**Table 1: Indicators of the status of women by states of India**

Indian state	Proportion of females married in age group 15-19		Singulate mean age at marriage for females		Female work participation rate		Female workers as a percentage of male workers		Percentage of females in non-agricultural activities		Female literates per 100 male literates		Enrolment of girls as a percentage of total enrolment (grades 1-5)		Enrolment of girls as a percentage of total enrolment (grades 6-8)	
	(1981)	Rank S <sub>1</sub>	(1981)	Rank S <sub>2</sub>	(1981)	Rank S <sub>3</sub>	(1981)	Rank S <sub>4</sub>	(1977, 1978)	Rank S <sub>5</sub>	(1982)	Rank S <sub>6</sub>	(1982)	Rank S <sub>7</sub>	(1982)	Rank S <sub>8</sub>
Andhra Pradesh	56.23	5	17.26	10	27.87	1	48	1	6.80	3	50	8	41.41	6	34.70	8
Bihar	63.95	2	16.55	13	9.16	10	18	9.5	2.42	8	34	12	29.69	13	21.35	13
Gujarat	26.73	11	19.52	4	11.85	7	22	7	2.15	14	56	4	39.92	7	37.07	4
Haryana	47.62	6	17.84	9	4.82	13	9	13	2.36	9	41	10	34.44	10	26.23	12
Karnataka	36.24	9	19.21	6	19.23	5	34	5	4.94	4	55	6	43.57	4	36.88	5
Kerala	14.13	14	21.82	1	12.79	6	32	6	9.45	1	90	1	48.51	1	47.91	1
Madhya Pradesh	62.18	3	16.56	12	22.63	3	40	3.5	2.27	10	37	11	33.10	12	26.26	11
Maharashtra	38.16	7	18.77	8	24.39	2	44	2	3.85	7	55	6	43.40	5	36.44	6
Orissa	30.76	10	19.08	7	10.88	8	20	8	3.92	6	44	9	39.31	9	33.28	9
Punjab	14.42	13	21.07	2	3.09	14	5	14	2.20	12	65	2	45.00	3	39.48	2
Rajasthan	64.31	1	16.10	14	9.44	9	18	9.5	2.25	11	29	14	25.01	14	19.49	14
Tamil Nadu	22.81	12	20.25	3	22.57	4	40	3.5	7.56	2	58	3	45.60	2	38.76	3
Uttar Pradesh	60.66	4	16.71	11	6.02	11	11	11.5	2.18	13	33	13	33.33	11	26.71	10
West Bengal	37.50	8	19.23	5	5.97	12	11	11.5	4.85	5	55	6	39.62	8	36.27	7

Sources: Proportion of married females is from the 1981 census based on 20 per cent samples from *Family Welfare Programme in India, 1986-87*, page 63; Singulate mean age at marriage for 1981 is taken from *Family Welfare Programme in India, 1986-87*, page 63; Percentage of rural females 5+ in non-agricultural activities is from the NSS 32nd round (1977-78), while other figures relating to employment are derived from the 1981 census; figures relating to literacy and school enrolment are from the *Fourth All India Education Survey*, NCERT 1982.

Table 2: Fertility and family planning variables by state in India

State	Fertility measures					Family planning indicators, 1987				
	GMFR 1978		TMFR 1978	Average No. of children per woman, aged 45-49		Percentage of couples protected by all methods		Percentage of couples protected by sterilization		Rank
	Rank	F1	Rank	F2	Rank	F3	Rank	F4	Rank	
Andhra Pradesh	153.9	9	4.8	11	4.34	13	35.8	10	32.6	7
Bihar	149.8	11	4.8	11	4.59	12	20.6	14	18.3	13
Gujarat	183.5	5	5.7	4.5	5.15	6	51.0	4	38.0	4
Haryana	177.4	6	5.4	7	6.21	1	53.2	3	30.6	8.5
Karnataka	158.4	8	5.0	8	5.07	8	39.7	7	33.2	6
Kerala	145.3	12	4.8	11	4.99	9	44.6	6	39.0	3
Madhya Pradesh	184.8	4	5.9	3	5.51	3	36.1	9	27.6	10
Maharashtra	133.4	14	4.3	14	4.95	10	54.9	2	42.9	1
Orissa	174.2	7	5.6	6	4.75	11	36.4	8	30.6	8.5
Punjab	186.0	3	5.7	4.5	5.28	4.5	62.4	1	33.9	5
Rajasthan	191.7	2	6.0	2	5.90	2	26.0	12	21.3	12
Tamil Nadu	144.6	13	4.8	11	4.18	14	46.3	5	39.5	2
Uttar Pradesh	207.2	1	6.6	1	5.28	4.5	25.0	13	15.3	14
West Bengal	152.8	10	4.8	11	5.11	7	29.5	11	27.2	11

Sources: GMFR & TMFR are from Registrar General India, *Survey Report on Levels, Trends and Differentials in Fertility, 1979*; Average number of children for women 45-49 years of age is from *Census of India 1981, Series 1, Paper 2 of 1983* (based on 5% sample); and Family planning indices are taken from *Family Welfare Programme in India, Yearbook 1986-87*, p. 216.

**Table 3 : Regional variations in fertility and status of women:  
Spearman's rank correlation coefficients**

Status indicators	Family planning indicators				
	GMFR 1978	TMFR 1978	Average number of children per woman 45-49	Percentage of couples protected by all methods	Percentage of couples protected by steri- lization
	F <sub>1</sub>	F <sub>2</sub>	F <sub>3</sub>	F <sub>4</sub>	F <sub>5</sub>
S <sub>1</sub> Proportion of 15-19 year-olds married	0.31	0.28	0.28	-0.68*	-0.74*
S <sub>2</sub> Singulate mean age at marriage	-0.34	-0.27	-0.23	0.65*	0.72*
S <sub>3</sub> Work participation rate	-0.28	-0.34	-0.52	0.06	0.48
S <sub>4</sub> Females as a pro- portion of male workers	-0.53	-0.42	-0.55*	0.07	0.50
S <sub>5</sub> Percentage in non- agricultural activities	-0.52	-0.71*	-0.68*	0.05	0.39
S <sub>6</sub> Female literates as a percentage of male literates	-0.46	-0.67*	-0.32	0.70*	0.84*
S <sub>7</sub> Female enrolment as a percentage of male enrolment (grades 1-5)	-0.51	-0.47	-0.44	0.65*	0.88*
S <sub>8</sub> Female enrolment as percentage of male enrolment (grades 6 - 8)	-0.37	-0.31	-0.32	0.63*	0.80*

Note: \* Significant at 5 per cent level of significance.

In all cases the coefficients are in the expected direction. The proportion of females in the age group 15-19 years, which is an inverse indicator of status of women, has a positive relationship with the fertility measures (F<sub>1</sub>, F<sub>2</sub> and F<sub>3</sub>) and is negatively related to the two family planning indices (F<sub>4</sub> and F<sub>5</sub>).<sup>†</sup> By contrast, the singulate mean age at marriage has a negative re-

<sup>†</sup> Early marriage of girls is widely prevalent in communities where the autonomy of women is restricted; therefore, the proportion of married girls in the age group 15-19 years can be taken as a proxy for the low status of women.

relationship with the fertility indicators and a positive relationship with the adoption of family planning. The indicators of participation of females in economic activity ( $S_4$  and  $S_5$ ) have a negative relationship with fertility ( $F_1$ ,  $F_2$  and  $F_3$ ), but a positive relationship with family planning adoption ( $F_4$  and  $F_5$ ). The indicators of educational status of women ( $S_6$ ,  $S_7$  and  $S_8$ ) are negatively related to fertility ( $F_1$ ,  $F_2$  and  $F_3$ ) but are positively related to family planning adoption ( $F_4$  and  $F_5$ ). The low correlation coefficients with  $F_4$  may be attributed to the fact that  $F_4$  is a synthetic measure of adoption of various methods.

Even using these rough indicators, analysis shows that there is a definite statistical relationship between women's status and their ability to control fertility. This study confirms the findings of earlier studies by Jejeebhoy, and Bhargava and Saxena using entirely different variables and approaches (Jejeebhoy, 1981; Bhargava and Saxena, 1987).

The Jejeebhoy study showed that the regional variation in marital fertility is highly correlated with the practice of *purdah*, the sex ratios of infant and child mortality, the proportion favouring equal property rights, and the total and non-agricultural labour force participation rates. She also found that the Coale and Trussel Index of fertility regulation (the "m" index) and the ratio of observed to natural fertility are strongly correlated with socio-cultural variables such as the practice of *purdah*, the proportion favouring equal property rights, participation in non-agricultural activities and the proportion of attended births.

Bhargava and Saxena applied multiple classification analysis to survey data on 1,200 married women from Greater Bombay and found that women's education is the main predictor variable in determining the variation in fertility, followed by age at marriage and work participation of women. In the present analysis, the strongest relationship to adoption of family planning is observed for the educational attainment of women, followed by age at marriage and women's work participation, particularly in non-agricultural activities. These findings have important policy implications which will be discussed in the last section of this article.

### **Evidence from surveys**

Although the above analysis suggests that the status of women is one of the most crucial variables affecting reproductive behaviour, one must be cautious about making generalizations based on statistical association, rather than demonstrated causal relationships. Unfortunately, evidence of this type is difficult to obtain particularly in the Indian context. Nevertheless, some surveys and micro studies have thrown light on the association of schooling, work participation, age at marriage etc., on fertility and family planning.

**Table 4: Fertility indices according to educational level of women, India, 1978**

Educational level		GFR	GMFR	TFR	TMFR
Illiterate	Rural	140.4	167.7	4.74	5.48
	Urban	117.2	144.5	4.00	4.93
Literate but below primary	Rural	122.3	175.9	3.85	4.98
	Urban	106.7	139.1	3.27	4.46
Primary and above but below matriculation	Rural	99.2	198.0	3.61	4.90
	Urban	84.6	146.0	2.61	4.23
Matriculation and above	Rural	81.3	186.4	2.48	4.67
	Urban	75.4	144.1	1.88	4.01
All literates	Rural	111.1	182.7	3.56	4.96
	Urban	88.9	142.8	2.58	4.27

Source: Registrar General, India: *Survey Report on Levels, Trends and Differentials in Fertility*, pp. 6-8.

#### Association with education

Table 4 shows the association of fertility with the educational level of women based on a national sample. This table shows that there is a marked reduction in fertility with increases in the educational level no matter which index is considered. The total fertility rate (TFR) of literate women is lower than that of illiterate women by 25 per cent in rural areas and 35 per cent in urban areas. The drop is even greater for women who matriculated, the reduction in TFR being 48 per cent in rural areas and 53 per cent in urban areas. Surveys in different parts of the country show reductions in fertility with increasing educational level; the reductions are particularly marked for persons with at least 10 years of schooling (WHO, 1972; Jolly, 1981).

#### Association with work participation

It is not merely work participation or the lack of involvement in work, but the kind of work a woman does which appears to have a bearing on the reduction in fertility, as is apparent from table 5.



**Table 5: Fertility indices according to women's work participation**

*All India (1978)*

Category		GFR	GMFR	TFR	TMFR
Workers	Rural	112.6	148.5	3.85	4.91
	Urban	62.8	103.7	2.25	4.11
Non-workers	Rural	143.3	178.7	4.76	5.61
	Urban	102.3	144.4	3.24	4.65

*Age-specific fertility rate, Delhi Demographic Survey, 1980*

Category	15	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	Total
Net working	0.03	0.75	1.62	1.37	0.92	0.47	0.15	5.32
Manual workers	0.01	1.05	1.78	1.57	1.22	0.78	0.21	6.62
Non-manual	0.00	0.31	0.85	0.90	0.53	0.23	0.15	2.97
Total	0.01	0.79	1.64	1.42	0.97	0.52	0.16	5.51

*Sources:* Data for all India = Registrar General, New Delhi, *Survey Report on Levels, Trends and Differentials in Fertility*, 1979;

K.G. Jolly, 1981, age-specific fertility rates = 123.

It has been observed that non-manual workers have lower fertility than manual workers. The WHO study at Gandhigram showed that women who are engaged in clerical and other "white collar" occupations had lower fertility than other workers, who in turn had lower fertility than non-working women (WHO, 1972).

#### **Association with age at marriage**

That there is a definite reduction in fertility with increases in the age at marriage is brought out by the data from the Delhi Demographic Survey. Comparison of fertility levels of women with similar levels of education also shows a decline in fertility with increases in age at marriage; this trend has been observed for all levels of education (Jolly, 1981).

#### **Association with number and sex of surviving children**

In the Indian setting, the presence of a child makes a difference in the status of the mother, particularly if the child happens to be a male. If there are more male children, the position of the mother is even better, although

**Table 6: Age-specific fertility rates according to age at marriage**

Present age group	Age at marriage				All
	Below 16	16-17	18-19	20+	
Below 15	0.03	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01
15-19	1.44	0.94	0.32	0.00	0.79
20-24	1.66	1.73	1.80	0.98	1.64
25-29	1.39	1.38	1.34	1.26	1.42
30-34	0.87	0.93	0.90	0.95	0.97
35-39	0.53	0.50	0.40	0.59	0.52
40-44	0.13	0.17	0.12	0.31	0.16
Total	6.06	5.65	4.88	4.10	5.51

Source: Delhi Demographic Survey, 1980. K.G. Jolly, 1981.

**Table 7 : Percentage of couples practising family planning according to age of wife and number of surviving children**

	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39
<b>Rural</b>				
<i>No surviving son but having:</i>				
One daughter	2.67	3.91	3.48	5.83
Two daughters	2.65	4.70	8.61	4.87
3 + daughters	2.93	4.69	6.44	6.51
<i>Number of surviving sons:</i>				
One son	5.06	8.75	10.96	11.67
Two sons	8.69	15.29	19.36	19.51
3 + sons	16.80	17.99	19.89	20.42
<b>Urban</b>				
<i>No surviving son but having:</i>				
One daughter	7.99	15.65	19.82	9.84
Two daughters	11.58	18.68	15.89	18.39
3 + daughters	15.76	18.65	19.59	19.43
<i>Number of surviving sons:</i>				
One son	13.76	22.84	27.42	30.47
Two sons	21.50	35.15	37.91	36.18
3 + sons	26.15	32.72	24.69	33.72

Source: "Some aspects of practice of family planning as revealed in the NSS" by N.C. Das, *Sarvekshana* [NSS 28th Round (Oct. 1973 - June 1974)], Vol. II, No. 3, Jan. 1979, pp. 126-127.

this cannot be proved statistically (Puri, 1971). Studies in the past had shown a close association between fertility levels and the experience of child loss among women (WHO, 1972; Vaidyanathan and Pisharoti, 1986) but little was known about the association between fertility levels and the number and sex of the living children. However, the National Sample Survey (NSS) in its twenty-eighth round (October 1973-June 1974) obtained that information, which is presented in [table 7](#).

It is apparent from that table that the percentage of couples practising family planning is greater among those with two or more surviving children, particularly if these happen to be boys.

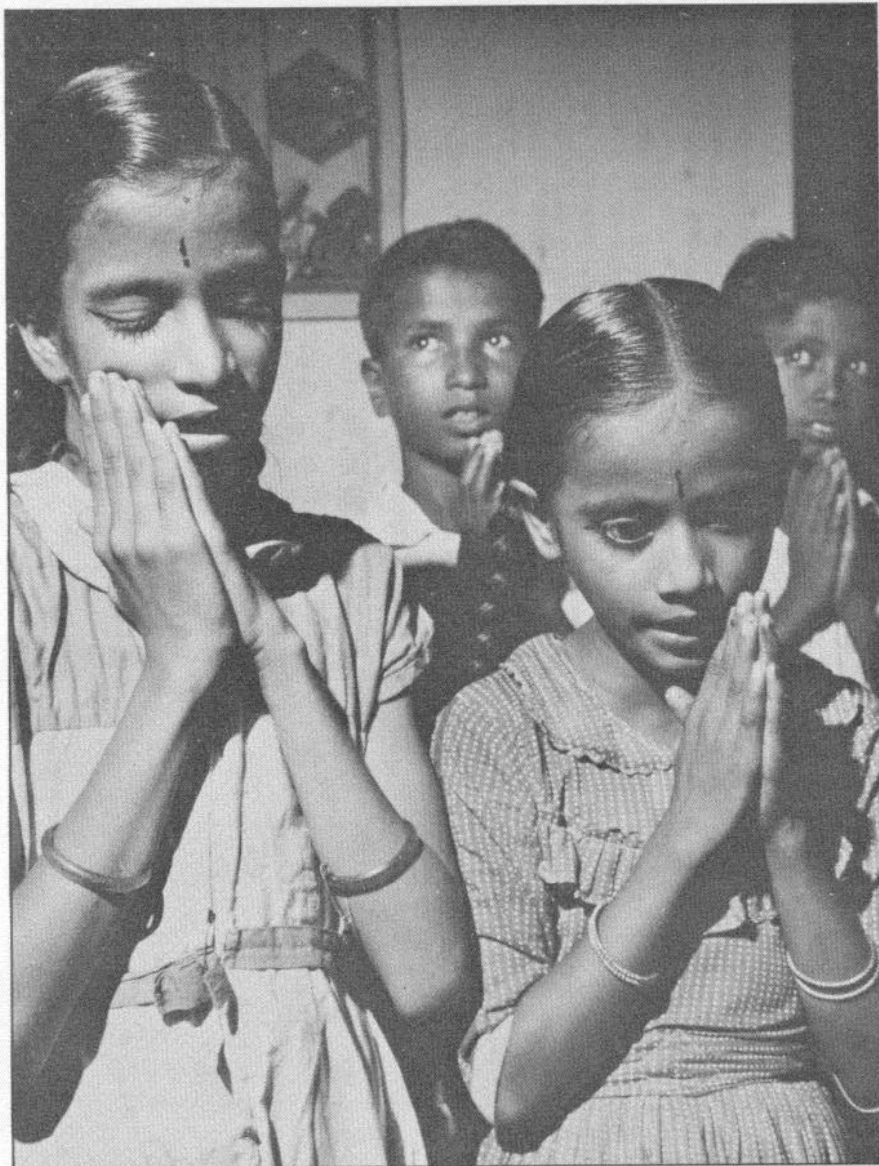
### **Other aspects related to the status of women**

The Council for Social Development (India) carried out a survey in 1972 specifically addressed to the matter of status of women and family planning in three states: Haryana, Tamil Nadu and Meghalaya. The survey covered three districts each in Haryana and Tamil Nadu, and 15 villages and two urban blocks in Meghalaya. A total of 1,872 married women were interviewed using a pre-coded schedule containing 132 questions. The status variables included in the survey were as follows:

- Educational level of the woman and her husband;
- Employment status;
- Economic status as measured by ownership of house, construction rating of the house and possession of utility items;
- Perception of one's status within the home and in the community;
- Decision-making role with regard to domestic affairs and family planning matters;
- Number of restrictions imposed on one's activities and freedom;
- Number of living sons; and
- Frequency of interspousal communication.

Each of these aspects of status was measured by a series of carefully selected and pretested questionnaire items. Likewise, the family planning measures included the following:

- Knowledge of family planning methods;
- Attitude towards the small family norm; and
- Adoption of family planning (users, ex-users and non-users).



*These girls from Orissa will have a brighter future than most of their peers in India because they have the opportunity to go to school. Education of females is the key to improving the status of women and for achieving a reduction in fertility. (United Nations photograph)*

The strength of the relationships between status variables and family planning variables was analysed by working out product moment correlations (Mukherjee, 1973; Mukherjee, 1974). The main findings of that study are summarized below.

Based on the scores pertaining to status within the community, the study inferred that women in Haryana enjoyed a relatively better position compared with women from Meghalaya and Tamil Nadu. However, women in Meghalaya enjoyed a better position than their counterparts in Haryana and Tamil Nadu in terms of educational level and proportion employed, participation in community life and greater role in decision making in the family. The subordination of women is observed in a variety of restrictions imposed by their husbands, the number of restrictions being apparently greater in rural than in urban areas.

The study also revealed that women's role in decision making in household affairs is positively correlated with the degree of awareness and knowledge of contraceptives as well as adoption of family planning. Women's "perceived status" in the community is positively related to the awareness and knowledge of contraception only in urban areas of Haryana and Meghalaya, but their status within their homes is positively correlated with the awareness and knowledge of contraception in both rural and urban areas. Except in the Meghalaya urban stratum, this status variable was also found to be related to the actual adoption (use or past use) of family planning.

Adoption of contraception was more frequent in the case of those eligible couples who decided jointly about the number and spacing of their prospective children. Interspousal communication was significantly related to the practice of family planning in the three states as well as in rural and urban areas. Surprisingly, the employment status of women showed no consistent relationship with knowledge and awareness of contraception or with fertility. Similarly, education of women had a strong positive relationship with knowledge of family planning, but had no significant relationship with adoption of family planning (Mukherjee, 1973). However, these variables were highly correlated with other status variables.

### **Policy implications**

This study shows that education of females is the key element for improving the status of women and for achieving a reduction in fertility. The 1981 census showed a literacy rate of 25 per cent for females compared with 47 per cent for males. The enrolment ratio of females in primary school (grades 1-5) is on the order of 82 per cent for girls in the age group 6-11 years, while enrolment in middle school (grades 6-8) is on the order of 37 per cent for

the girls in the age group 12-14 years compared with 100 per cent and 63 per cent for boys in the respective age groups.

These figures mask the considerable wastage in education, particularly among girls owing to their dropping out of school. Girls are either not sent to school or are easily withdrawn from school for manifold reasons (Caldwell *et al.*, 1985). The economic motivation for parents to send their daughters to school is less than that for their sons since daughters are not likely to support their parents once they are married. Girls are withdrawn from school because of the cost of education, i.e. direct costs incurred or the opportunity cost of labour foregone. Also, they are withdrawn because of the fear that once a daughter is educated, she must be married to a male with at least an equivalent amount of education. The situation is worsened by the dissatisfaction with the education provided, especially in rural areas.

Therefore, a vigorous thrust is called for on the educational front to make education attractive, meaningful and relevant for girls as well as boys. This should include introduction of more flexible curricula, improvement of the quality of teaching and efforts to reduce the cost of education to parents, so that full enrolment can be achieved.

An increase in the age at marriage is seen to be closely related to the adoption of family planning and consequent reduction in fertility. According to the 1981 census, the singulate mean age at marriage is 18.3 years for women and 23.3 years for men.

The current law prescribes 18 years as the minimum age for women to marry; however, the law is hardly enforced. Consequently, in some states (Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) the marriage of girls (below the legal minimum age) is still taking place. The proportion of married females in the age group 15-19 years for these states in 1961 was 62 per cent compared with 43 per cent for India as a whole.

From the point of view of reducing fertility and improving the health of the mother, there is a case for raising the legal minimum age for women to marry to 20 years. However, the mere passing of legislation will not be sufficient unless efforts are made to educate parents and to enforce the law by imposing penalties for default.

Another important factor for the adoption of family planning is employment of women, particularly in non-agricultural activities. According to the 1981 census, only 20 per cent of the female population were in the work-force, and among them only 20 per cent were engaged in non-agricultural activities. More women would join the work force if there were appropriate employment opportunities for them.



*This woman physician, who is explaining some of the details about a contraceptive method, has easier access to female patients than would male physicians in India. Health services is one of the areas that is considered an especially appropriate career for women in that country. (United Nations photograph)*

There is justification therefore for introducing “positive discrimination” in favour of women in certain types of occupations considered culturally appropriate for Indian women, e.g. catering, secretarial work, health services, education and janitorial services. Furthermore, training should be imparted in skills such as tailoring, food processing, secretarial practices and electronics so that women could acquire the skills necessary for productive work. Also, the Factories Act and the Shops and Establishments Act should be amended, reserving certain kinds of jobs for women, reducing the number of hours they must work, and providing facilities such as creches.

Women’s role in decision making, women’s “perceived status” in the community and interspousal communication were found to be substantially correlated with fertility behaviour at the micro level. Population education and communication efforts should therefore be directed towards improving women’s role in decision making and encouraging inter-spousal communication in family affairs.

The Family Welfare Programme in India currently views eligible women as “targets” and efforts are directed at convincing such women about the bene-

fits of family planning. Consideration should be given to discussions with the couple rather than with the individual, and incentives for acceptance of family planning should be given to both partners. This will also lead to improvement of the "perceived status" of women within the family.

The "perceived status" of the women in the community can be improved by including women in local administration (*panchayat*), strengthening women's associations (*mahila mandal*), and by encouraging the participation of women in the Minimum Needs Programme, employment loan schemes etc.

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