

CORRELATION BETWEEN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND REDUCED FERTILITY RATES: A PRE-REQUISITE FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to review the studies that indicate the importance of empowerment of women and its link in the reduction of the number of children born in the family. The developing countries are witnessing a dramatic increase in the population. In these developing countries too, the families where the women of the household is educated or has some exposure to skills and knowledge have less number of children who are better taken care of and provided good nutrition. The educated and empowered women are more and more sticking to a lesser number of children who are therefore provided with the basic healthcare and minimum elementary education. An observation was made in a slum of South Delhi (in the city of New Delhi, India) and a close understanding pointed to a positive result of empowering women. In families where the woman was into some employment, had certain minimum literacy or had certain vocational skills had fewer children as against those who were not exposed to education or opportunities to step out of their homes. On the basis of this qualitative analysis, a major need of the hour is to empower women and more importantly those belonging to the developing countries so that gears up their way to development and progress.

Keywords : Developing countries, women empowerment, slum, UNFPA, population, literacy, family planning, children, education

INTRODUCTION

One major problem that the world faces today is the rapid growth of population. The world population was estimated to have reached 7.5 billion in April 2017. This enormous increase of population is a result of better food, hygiene and above all advances made in medicine. With developments in modern medicine many diseases have been conquered and consequently the death rate has decreased. Undoubtedly this demographic potential offers countries and their economies an unprecedented edge, where the population becomes a resource. The recent advances in farming have made many countries enough productive to feed their people but the reality is at bay. It is believed that once women make their own decisions and get equal say in the domestic sphere as well as public sphere, issues of family planning can be rightfully addressed. Thus, empowering women can meaningfully look into the dramatic increase in the population of many developing countries.

A British mathematician and economist, Thomas Malthus, said that if unchecked, human population would grow in geometric progression (i.e. 1,2,4,8,...) while food production could grow in only arithmetic progression (i.e. 1,2,3,4,...),(Thomas Malthus,1798). Thus, population growth would mean less food but more mouths to feed. If this becomes a reality then it's no doubt that we're digging our own graves whereby drastically increasing the number of persons inhabiting this planet.

While income levels in cities may appear to be higher, the cost of living is also constantly increasing, resulting in shrinking savings, inadequate access to healthcare and lack of quality education. Maternal mortality remains at the top cause of death among young women. Further, in most developing countries, more than half of young urban women are anaemic, pointing to inadequate food and nutrition. Thus, the need of the hour is to empower the better half of mankind.

RESULTS

Access to safe, healthy and voluntary family planning is a human right. It is also central to gender equality and women's empowerment, and it therefore becomes a key factor in reducing poverty. Yet, according to the UNFPA, some 214 million women in developing countries who want to avoid pregnancy are not using safe and effective family planning methods, for reasons ranging from lack of access to information or services to lack of support from their partners or communities (UNFPA, 2017). The poorest countries on the earth are those where the demand for contraceptives is not met. The results of the case study that had been undertaken were astonishing. The results have come to claim that with empowering and educating women, there is a reduction in the number of children that a family possesses. The domestic ideology emphasized the importance of a woman's resistance to sexual desires as essential to her primary role as moral defender of the system of nuclear family. Women having more education have lower fertility rates all over the world. Women who have greater autonomy in the family are more equipped to cross various barriers that often prevent their easy access to family planning.

DISCUSSIONS

Recently, on 11th July we celebrated the World Population Day with the theme of 2017 being "Family Planning: Empowering People, Developing Nations". Celebration of the World Population Day started in the year 1989 by the Governing Council of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) after the global population had outgrown 5 billion mark on July 11, 1987.

Various studies indicate that higher the level of a woman's educational attainment, the fewer children she is likely to bear. Given that fewer children per woman and delayed marriage and childbearing that can be invested per child and better health and survival rates for both mothers and children. A study conducted on education and fertility in Ethiopia estimated that with an additional year of schooling of women in Ethiopia, a reduction of 7 percentage point was seen in the probability of teenage birth and a 6 percentage point decrease in the probability of marriage (Pradhan and Canning, 2015). The economic theory of fertility emphasizes on an incentive effect, i.e., women with more education have higher opportunity costs of bearing children in terms of lost income. The household bargaining model suggests that when women attain more education, they become more able to support themselves and have more bargaining power, including on their family size. Also, according to the Ideation theory, more educated women are exposed to and get themselves acquainted with different ideas of desired family size through

school, community, and exposure to global networks of communication. Finally, well-educated and literate women know more about prenatal care and child health, and hence might have lower fertility because of greater confidence that their children will survive.

A close study of the reproductive autonomy in Ghana shows that fertility rates started falling in Ghana in the early 1980s, and by 1993 the total fertility rate was down to 5.3 children per woman (Bryan Walsh, 2013). Though certainly still high, that level was a full child lower than the 6.3 of 1983. In other words, the total fertility rate had fallen 16 percent in a single decade. The term “reproductive autonomy” is a strange one because the definition of autonomy includes independence, and human reproduction cannot occur independently. And yet it is often assumed that as women become empowered to make choices in their lives, they will gain reproductive autonomy. That would mean that they could make reproductive decisions independently, and so they would be able to decide unilaterally how many children to have, even when they have them through relationships with men. When the barriers are few, as in Indonesia, the use of contraception and the Total Fertility Rates among the highest- and lowest-income quintiles are similar. When the barriers are numerous, as in the Philippines, have more children as well as a greater unmet need for family planning.

Initiatives to Tackle with the Problem of Growing Population:

The government cannot ignore the problem of population growth, for entire development of the country depends on how effectively resources are generated and used.

(i) Family Planning: Need of the hour- There is a need to provide safe, voluntary family planning programmes to curb down the ever increasing population. There should be proper use of contraceptive measures even in the remotest villages. Many debates have been characterized by whether family planning programs were an effective means of lifting developing countries out of the poverty trap.

(ii) Need to Empower Women- The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) studies conducted in more than forty developing countries show that birth rates fall as women gain equality and make their own decisions. An empowered woman of the family would further help towards the progress of the family.

(iii) Awareness and Sensitization- Awareness programmes should be conducted in rural as well as urban areas, targeting the youth and the adults.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A closer analysis and study was conducted in a slum in South Delhi (in the city of New Delhi, India). On a hot summer day, a small slum adjacent to the University of Delhi's South Campus was blooming with small children who were running carelessly on the roads. Most men of the slum had gone out to earn their hardwork in the capital city of the second-most populous country in the world after its Asian neighbour China.

The most anticipated observation was to be conducted in the four walls of the dingy and small houses made of tin, muds and very few made of cement. With the prior permission of the members of the household to visit their homes, it was observed that majority women were indulged in the household chores which were never ending. While many women worked as domestic servants in the affluent

households of the nearby areas, only a handful of them were educated with basic elementary education from the government schools of the areas they belonged to.

It was observed that the women who had minimum educational qualifications stuck to having less children with majority of them having two children and planned to have no further of them. Many unmarried females who were attending schools or having some vocational skills were also firm with the idea of having less children in the family. Literate women are likely to have more surviving children. This is because they are more aware of good health practices, and they tend to and choose to live in better circumstances. Thus, couples need fewer births to reach their desired family size.

CONCLUSION

In developing, third-world countries, overpopulation is considered to be one of the most basic causes of underdevelopment. These countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America are now dealing with this acute problem, which tends to cut down the efforts to encourage development. Any government programmers launched with the hope for a more skilled economy will hold no value if its benefits don't reach one and all. Thus, if population is controlled by proper family planning, we can also control issues relate to development. With less population growth, food security can be ensured to maximum people.

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