

## **BARRIERS TO FAMILY PLANNING IN OUR SOCIETY**

*By*

**DR. A.Z. MEMON**  
**Pak-AIMS, Lahore**

A desire for specifying family size cannot be regarded as something that is new. The term family planning as such has not been used for long but the underlying concept has been there for centuries. Contraception as a means of prevention of conception has various forms, and the Book of Genesis documents a method even in early biblical times. Evidence is there that Romans, Greeks, Asians and other nations were also taking measures of one form or the other to prevent live births. But the family planning movement is of recent origin.

During a period of 300 years starting from 1650, the world population had increased fivefold - with eight fold for the Europeans because they benefited first from commercial, agricultural, and industrial revolutions. This stimulus for unchecked population growth did not last long, and Europeans were the first to become more conscious about contraception. It could be the warning from Paul R. Ehrlich through his celebrated book "Population Bomb and Road to Survival" exposing possible ecological miseries in an overpopulated world and thus creating in man's mind a doomsday scenario, that gave importance to family planning. Or we may attribute it to the compelling economic factors that have raised a concern for controlling the pace of population growth. Whatever the reason for the change in one's outlook, the statistical reality is that the fertility rates have been continually falling in most of the countries during last fifty years or so. In some cases the reduction has gone to an unbelievable extent.

The fertility trends bear a reflection of the changing conditions, both economic and cultural, that may motivate or force people for smaller family sizes. It is estimated that the world average for the number of

births per woman has declined by 1.8 over the period 1963-1993. The following table provides similar information in respect of some countries in South Asia and other continents.

	Average Births Per Woman				
	1963	1993	Fall	%Fall	%PGR(1994)
Pakistan	7.0	6.1	0.9	12.9	2.9
Sri Lanka	5.1	2.5	2.6	51.0	1.5
Bangla Desh	6.7	4.3	2.4	35.8	2.4
India	5.8	3.7	2.1	36.2	1.9
China	5.6	2.0	3.6	64.3	1.1
Malaysia	6.6	3.6	3.0	45.5	2.3
Indonesia	5.4	2.9	2.5	46.3	1.6
Morocco	7.1	3.7	3.4	48.0	2.3
Egypt	7.0	3.8	3.2	46.0	2.3
UK	2.8	1.8	1.0	36.0	0.2
USA	3.2	2.1	1.1	34.0	0.7

In Pakistan as well, there has been a growing concern about family planning for many years. Federal / Provincial governments and some other agencies have been taking necessary steps to control the growth rate. During last few years, the Government's emphasis in this direction has been assuming momentum. A number of family welfare programs are now operating in the country for quite some time, and billions of rupees have been spent on these activities. Talks on family planning, workshops, advertisement through various media and banners, walks etc., are often organized

The above picture is certainly not encouraging. It shows that the country's performance has been relatively poor at least till 1994. Those who are not for family planning, may not look worried agreeing with the school of thought represented by Julian Simon, an economist, that "the

increase in population has redeeming aspects which must not be underestimated". But the situation is miserable, threatening and demoralizing when analyzed in an over all economic perspective. Is it the so called enormous manpower that has been a cause of economic miseries in the country?

The responsibility for the dismal statistics cannot be totally attributed to those in power. Their role is to enhance awareness about family planning, and provide knowledge and facility relating to it. So it is unfair to exclusively blame them because family planning is an individual's decision, a family's concern. Other reasons are also there. Let us see how important other factors are when we approach masses and seek their opinions.

In the past, various agencies have conducted a number of surveys to monitor the progress of family planning programs in the country, including the causes of low success of these programs. These surveys reveal that there is high awareness in the country about this subject, but not sufficient action for various reasons. In 1995 as well this hypothesis was investigated by AKIDA / Pak-AIMS. These AKEF institutions were engaged by the Population Welfare Department of the Punjab Government to organize a number of sample surveys immediately after its family planning campaign activity was held in July in the Punjab. The converge area was the vicinity of 775 Family Welfare Centers located in urban and rural areas of the Punjab. One of the objectives of these surveys was to identify the barriers that deter people from giving attention to the government's call for family planning. At least twenty randomly selected married women (in the 15 - 49 years age group) were contacted to indicate their reasons for avoiding family planning methods. The sample was fairly large. Geographic stratification was used to improve the precision of estimates.

As for FP awareness, more than 90% of women sampled were not ignorant of this concept. Among various sources of their information, TV was found to be a major contributor (75%). So that the people are now quite aware of family planning. But when it comes to practice this survey revealed about 45% of the married women were using FP methods.

Among married women who were not using any contraceptive, the information about the percentage giving specific reasons is given below.

Reason	BARRIERS TO FAMILY PLANNING	
	Urban Areas (%)	Rural Areas (%)
No FP service available	8.0	6.3
Want a son	33.0	22.8
Want another son	19.2	24.9
Want a daughter	12.0	20.1
Want another daughter	5.6	6.3
Opposition from husband	20.8	19.5
Opposition from in-laws	16.9	13.8
Religious beliefs	17.6	29.1
Unaware of FP methods	16.0	14.4
Costly	4.8	4.2
Inconvenient	9.6	7.2
Fear of side effects	34.4	17.1
Others	24.0	22.8

The figures speak for themselves about the gravity of each barrier that hinders or blocks people from accepting the family planning practice. Since there could be more than one reason, women were asked to indicate the reasons that prevented them.

Rural effect in the case of some barriers is quite pronounced as literacy rate is very low when compared with the one in urban areas. More or less similar information is provided by other surveys that were undertaken during last few years, leading one to conclude that illiteracy is an important factor affecting the population growth in Pakistan. A separate analysis also showed that regarding the use of FP methods there was a significant difference between educated and uneducated women. To

further verify this effect, educated women when compared to uneducated class in the survey had a smaller average family size about one child less.

Some reasons may not sound odd or irrational. For instance, respondents desire for at least a son or a daughter is a natural instinct. Other factors such as opposition from in-laws and husband, that constitute one third of the pressure against family planning, are inherent in our culture and traditions. These factors again have to do with lack of education.

Want of another son may also be a pressure from husband and relatives. But it is possible avoidable and is to do with the enhancement of FP services.

The above table indicates the presence of some other barriers. Through efficient services a number of barriers can be nearly or completely wiped out. It includes unawareness of FP methods, cost and inconvenient aspects, and fear of side effects which collectively constitute a conspicuous set of barriers.

As for the religious factor, it is a matter of one's opinion, formed personally or influenced by others. A sensitive point in our culture, and yet some people consider it controversial. In the case of a definite and clear injunction against family planning in Islam, the ulemas should have perhaps displayed unanimity in their position and launched an anti-family planning program. Respondents who gave a religious reason against FP activity in the surveys referred, out investigators felt they hardly had any knowledge of Islam. This is what they believe. So therefore no question to be raised. Our information is that they were simply told by some mullahs to stay away from the advocates of family planning.

All mullahs are not illiterate. A mullah may base his opinion against FP on religious grounds according to his own level of understanding. On the other hand, a majority of families may feel the necessity of family planning measures due to economic and other pressing reasons but they do not adopt them because they are confused and want to be sure that

family planning does not go against the teachings of Islam. Surely they want satisfaction

One may wonder **WHY** have other Muslim countries, as evident from the above statistical information, been able to reduce their family sizes? Religious conviction being strong there as well, why have these countries succeeded in getting their FP schemes through the masses? What do the religious scholars in view of Al-Azhar University of Egypt, an institution that usually provides leadership in settling controversies on various Islamic issues? These are the questions that are likely to arise in any body's mind regardless of whether he is religious or not.

The resistance against family planning also arose in these Islamic countries; the religious belief being a major factor. People were not clear and they needed guidance on this point from the religious scholars. A book entitled 'Islam wa Tanzee-ul-Usra' was written in Arabic by the religious scholars of Al-Azhar University which was intended to convince masses in Egypt and other Muslim Countries that the family planning activity is not anti-Islamic. It was this material that was widely circulated there to educate the people on the Islamic view of family planning - that is why and how the family planning scheme proved successful in Egypt and other Muslim countries.

As for the right of determining a family size, naturally it ought to be with the man and his wife. This liberty gives them pleasure of reproduction and a feeling of security. They could sense whether they would possibly be able to provide good education and raise their children in a decent and respectable way. When we look at the annals of history we find no empire, no country, and no nation in the past met its doom due to what they call overpopulation. Scarcity of resources has never been a cause. In the case of famines as well the cause had nothing to do with lack of family planning practice. Economic mismanagement and corruption are to be blamed. "And never did we destroy the township unless the folk thereof were evildoers" (Al - Quran).

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