# Children's Career Preferences: Is the Economic burden changing the traditional approach of large family size in Pakistan?

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## ABSTRACT

The present study examines the role of economic hardships in reducing fertility or family size in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Primary data were collected from randomly selected 384 households belonging to six communities of District Peshawar. Chi-Square and Kendal Tb results revealed positive behavioral changes towards small family size due to economic hardships. The layer of inflation in the country for the last 30 years has compelled people to have a quality of life with few but successful children. The traditional assumption of the developing world where children are considered an economic asset is rapidly changing in Pakistan, and children are now considered a financial burden. The study recommends enhancing the process by increasing family planning practices and masses motivation through mass media and community and religious leaders. Special measures are also needed to check the people's economic hardships, especially the price hike, to bring prosperity through the decline in family size at a voluntary level.

## Introduction

Since the groundbreaking effort of Thomas Malthus in 1798, the relations between demographic trends and financial comfort have produced some heated debates among sociologists. Malthus postulated that given the centrality of food in human existence and the necessity of continuous conjugal passion, population growth would inevitably lead to an imbalance between people and available resources (Odusola, 2018).Pakistan is one of the countries facing numerous threats in almost all spheres of life. These threats include economic, terrorism, ideological, sectarianism, provincialism, corruption, political instability, national & international security concerns, deforestation, pollution, inflation, etc. Nevertheless, the real threat to Pakistan's stability and prosperity is the population explosion (Muhammad, 2018). The severe and grave consequences of population explosion are more vicious than its current problems. So far, the government has miserably failed to control population growth (Ezeh, Bongaarts, & Mberu, 2012). With the highest growth rate of 2.40 percent, Pakistan tops South Asian countries' list and is the sixth most populous country with 207.8 million people in 2017 (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). The country's population has increased by more than six-fold since the first-ever population census in 1951.

The population growth remained low at independence (1947) but accelerated with advancements in living standards and especially health (macrotrends, 2020). By the 1980s, population growth reached 2.7 (GOP, 1998). It became a threat to national security, forcing governments to take precautionary measures to curtail the problem. Under Pakistan's family-planning program started in the 1960s, productive outcomes resulted in a significant population decline during the late 1990s (Khan, 2010). The country made considerable progress in the 1990s, with the fertility rate dropping to around four births per woman on average. The data collected from 1990 to 1997 showed a constant decline. The census in 1998 showed that population growth had slowed down to 2.6% from more than three percent in the 1980s (Gul, 2018; Sathar, 2001). The National Institute of Population Studies, NIPS, in 2013, reported that all couples in Pakistan that were either recently married or before prefer to have four children. On average, in the case of women (4.1), men (4.3), urban (3.9), rural (4.5), Punjab (3.9), Sindh (4.5), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (4.9), Baluchistan, among illiterate (4.9) and all types of literates (4.0). These figures are supported by the current popular trend that a

decrease in family size occurred from more than six children till the mid-1980s to four children (NIP, 2013). For the Americans, the ideal small family size is an average of 2.5 children (Berge, MacLehose, Larson, Laska, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2016), which is still very low compared to Pakistan. Besides some encouraging results, massive population growth has raised some serious questions on the concerned department (Hassan & Malik, 2017).The taboos such as early marriages (Hashami, 2018), son preference (Channon, 2017), religious constraints (ul Huda, 2014), patriarchy (Zaidi & Morgan, 2016), and seeing family planning as a sin or a foreign agenda (Ataullahjan, Mumtaz, & Vallianatos, 2019) has forecasted a gloomy future for the coming generations (Mahsud-Dornan, 2007).

Similarly, several factors also affected the phenomenon adversely and compelled to decrease family size. These factors included women's inclusion in the industrial arena (Uwannah, 2019), economic independence (Goli, Reddy, James, & Srinivasan, 2019), urbanization (Hew, 2003), modernization (Breton, 2019), behavioral changes, and access to better health & education amenities that positively scale down a family size (Dreze&Murthi 2000; Garenne& Joseph 2002; Bhargava 2003; Golden Essay, 2005; Som & Mishra, 2020). The decline in mortality, particularly infant mortality and better MCH (Mother-Child Health) facilities, are other fertility determinants. The availability of better MCH facilities regulates family size by ensuring the limited number of children (Cleland,2001;Gulati & Das, 2018; Malema, 2020; Motkuri & Hansda, 2018). Women's education is also closely related to fertility; educated women are inclined to adopt family planning campaigns. It reduces the number of births, infant mortality, and access to contraceptives and their use (Barham, Macours, & Maluccio, 2018; Frejka, Goldscheider, & Lappegård, 2018; Nisén, Martikainen, Myrskylä, & Silventoinen, 2018; Nozaki, 2017). The late marriage trend, especially in women, is also an essential factor of small family size (Beaujouan & Sobotka, 2017; Beydoun, 2001; Hertrich, 2017; Raymo, Uchikoshi, & Yoda, 2021; Sharif et al., 2007; Kakar*et al.,* 2011; Song, Ahn, Lee, & Roh, 2018). Moreover, the high socioeconomic status of the family is also positively associated with small family size. The increase in family's income

motivates people to choose a better quality of life, quality children, and better future for children over large family size (Asim & Nawaz, 2018; DallaZuanna, 2004; DallaZuanna, 2007;Dribe, Oris, & Pozzi, 2014; Klüsener, Dribe, & Scalone, 2019; Nieuwenhuijsen et al., 2014; Owuamanam and Alowolodu; Patel, Rai, & Rai, 2020; Sheppard & Monden, 2020; Zheng et al., 2016)

Dealing with the issue that children are an economic burden or a productive asset, the phenomena is also dual dimensions. The high number of children are considered assets in developing countries and an economic burden in the developed world. In the developing world, the parents outlook the children as a source of labor, power, social prestige, and old-aged security. In contrast, there is more focus on children's cost and the Quantity- Quality Trade-off in the developed world (Owuamanam&Alowolodu, 2010). The quality and quantity tradeoff models state a negative relationship between high quantity (high number of children) and child quality. Quality of life is compromised when the family size goes beyond the amount required to feed the family. Parents with low endowments prefer high-quality children to those having higher endowments. This results in more children among the families having more resources. However, this is also found in many of the other cases that low endowment parents have more children and low educational attainments as compare to the high endowment families (Angrist et al. 2010; Conley and Glauber 2006). Various sociologists clinched that family is the most important institution and primary socialization agent in children's development. The family depends on the number of resources, the number of children, and the time of their distribution ((Black *et al.* ,2007; Caceres, 2006; Conley and Glauber, 2006; Iacovou, 2008; Jaeger; 2008; Lee, 2008). The quality can be measured through the current and future well-being of children. The increase of children decreases the amount of time, money, and patience a child entitles from his/her parents.

On the other hand, the reduced investments in children enable parents to move up on the social ladder (Black *et al.*, 2005; Maralani, 2008; DallaZaunna, 2007). Population growth has become a global problem and has adverse effects on the lives of all species of the entire globe. This study assesses the attitude towards the global

problem of population growth with particular reference to economic hardship as a factor toward family size.

## Materials and Methods

The present study aimed to determine the association between the economic hardships (independent variable) in reducing family size (dependent variable) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. To examine the phenomenathe study has applied a cross-sectional research design. The study's universe was district Peshawar where primary data were collected through a comprehensive pre-tested interview schedule. Three communities were randomly selected from District Peshawar's rural and urban areas to have equal representation of different socioeconomic background respondents. The district Peshawar comprised 234,434 households (1998 population census), 119,515 of the totals belonged to the urban areas, and 114,919 households were from rural areas. The study adopted a systematic sampling technique, and a total number of 384 respondents were proportionally selected on the analogy of (Sekran, 2011) for more details see table 1. The collected data were then analyzed through SPSS version 24, and results were obtained at univariate and bivariate levels. The univariate analysis comprised the distribution made on the basis of frequency and percentages, whereas bivariate analysis was applied to obtain the association between dependent and independent variables (Ullah& Muhammad, 2020). The chi-Square and Fisher Exact tests were applied. To measure the strength of association, Kendal T$^b$ was applied.

### Table 1 Sample Size

| Sr. No. | Name of Locality | Total Households | Sample Size |
|---------|------------------|------------------|-------------|
| 1. | **Rural Localities** | | |
| | Mulazai | 613 | 39 |
| | KafoorDheri | 1714 | 110 |
| | Mian Gujar | 601 | 39 |
| | Total Rural | 2928 | 188 |
| 2. | **Urban Localities** | | |
| | Hayatabad Phase-3 | 371 | 44 |
| | Tehkal | 854 | 101 |
| | Saeed Abad | 435 | 51 |
| | Total Urban | 1660 | 196 |
| 3. | **Total** | 4588 | 384 |

## Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Small Family Size (Independent Variable)

In connection with the sampled respondents' perception about small family size in Pakistan, 46.1 percent reported agreedwith the statement describing a decline in family size from the last 20-25 years. Those who stated disagreed or were uncertain were 26.3 and 27.6, respectively. However, 57 percent of the total reported a decline in family size in their families. At the same time, 87.5 percent called more children the blessing of God.

Several factors affected the fertility decline; 67.4 percent of the respondents reported that small family is a norm nowadays, and consequently, 69.5 percent preferred small family size over the large one. Furthermore, 2-4 children were considered ideal family size by 74.0 percent of the respondents because small family size has better future according to 71.1 percent of the total. Another 79.2 percent thought it is better to have less but productive children instead of unproductive ones. Similarly, for 48.7 percent of the respondents, people feel shame in describing if family size is large. The results as a whole reveal a strong orientation of the sampled respondents towards the decline in fertility. The concept of small family size was found widespread in the study area, and 2-4 children were considered an ideal family. The incline towards small family is to invest more in children future. However, it does not mean that people do not consider more children as God's blessing, which shows their attachment to religion.

**Table 2Small Family Size**

| S. No. | Statement | Agrred | Disagreed | Do not Know |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Family size in Pakistan is on the decline for the last 20 to 25 years. | 177(46.1) | 101(26.3) | 106(27.6) |
| 2. | There is a decline in the size of the family in your family. | 219(57.0) | 138(35.9) | 27(7.0) |
| 3. | Small family size is a norm nowadays. | 259(67.4) | 93(24.2) | 32(8.3) |
| 4. | You prefer a small family size over a large one. | 267(69.5) | 85(22.1) | 32(8.3) |
| 5. | More children are the blessing of God. | 336(87.5) | 24(6.3) | 24(6.3) |
| 6. | 2-4 children is nowadays considered as an ideal family size | 284(74.0) | 67(17.4) | 33(8.6) |
| 7. | People feel shame in describing if family size is large. | 187(48.7) | 165(43.0) | 32(8.3) |
| 8. | It's better to have less but productive children than more unproductive ones. | 304(79.2) | 59(15.4) | 21(5.5) |
| 9. | Small family size has a better future. | 273(71.1) | 55(14.3) | 56(14.6) |

## 3.1. Economic Factors and Small Family Size

Table 3 reported that majority of 67.4, 67.7, 93.5 and 53.1 percent were found to agree that children were no longer earning hands, a large number of children was an economic burden on the family, the cost of raising children was high and due to high-cost people were compelled to have small family respectively. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents 79.4, 72.7, 93.5, and 90.1 percent, were found agreed that rich families have small family size, liked to have few but successful children, quality of life is a major goal, and the respondents liked to invest more on children's future respectively. The univariate results revealed that economic burden was a major cause of fertility decline. Due to economic pressure and orientation towards quality life, a very large number of the respondents preferred the smaller size of the family.

**Table 3: Economic Factor**

| S. No | Statement | Agree | Disagree | Uncertain |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | children are no longer economic assets/earning hands. | 259(67.4) | 91(23.7) | 34(8.9) |
| 2. | A large number of children is an economic burden on the family. | 260(67.7) | 117(30.5) | 7(1.8) |
| 3. | The cost of raising children is very high nowadays. | 359(93.5) | 23(6.0) | 2(0.5) |
| 4. | The high cost of children compels you to have a small family size. | 204(53.1) | 160(41.7) | 20(5.2) |
| 5. | Rich people mostly have small family size | 305(79.4) | 60(15.7) | 19(4.9) |
| 6. | You like to have few but successful children. | 279(72.7) | 72(18.8) | 33(8.6) |
| 7. | A quality life is your major goal. | 359(93.5) | 17(4.4) | 8(2.1) |
| 8. | You like to invest more in children's future. | 346(90.1) | 32(8.3) | 6(1.6) |

Source:Field Survey

## 3.2. Association between Economic Factors and Decline in Fertility

Table-4 while describing the association between an economic factor and small family size, depicted positive and significant association between small family, i.e., independent variable with the dependent variable statements that children are no longer economic assets/earning hands ($T^b$ = 0.060 & P=0.003), a large number of children is an economic burden on the family ($T^b$ = 0.202 & P=0.000), cost on raising children is very high now a day ($T^b$ = 0.075 & P=0.005) and it compelled you to have a small family size ($T^b$ = 0.275 & P=0.000). Similarly, positive and significant association was obtained between small family size and rich people have small family ($T^b$ = 0.139 & P=0.000), people like few

but successful children ($T^b$ = 0.231 & P=0.000) quality life is your major goal ($T^b$ = 0.228 & P=0.000) people like to invest more on children future ($T^b$ = 0.178 & P=0.000). Results reported a shift in sampled respondents' perception and action towards the decline in fertility due to economic pressure or quality life both for the family and children in the future. A huge number of respondents wanted to have few but successful children.

**Table 4 Association between Economic Factors and Small Family Size**

| S.No | Economic factor (Independent Variable) | Dependent Variable | Statistics |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Small children are no longer economic assets/earning hands. | Small Family Size | $\chi^2$=10.688 (P=0.003) $T^b$= .060 |
| 2 | A large number of children is an economic burden on the family. | Small Family Size | $\chi^2$=25.506 (P=0.000) $T^b$= .202 |
| 3 | The cost of raising children is very high nowadays | Small Family Size | $\chi^2$=14.801 (P=0.005) $T^b$= .075 |
| 4 | High cost on children compels to have small family size | Small Family Size | $\chi^2$=36.032 (P=0.000) $T^b$= .275 |
| 5 | Rich people mostly have small family size | Small Family Size | $\chi^2$=29.726 (P=0.000) $T^b$= .139 |
| 6 | You like to have few but successful children | Small Family Size | $\chi^2$=28.235 (P=0.000) $T^b$= .231 |
| 7 | A quality life is your major goal | Small Family Size | $\chi^2$=24.152 (P=0.000) $T^b$= .228 |
| 8 | You like to invest more in children future | Small Family Size | $\chi^2$=22.842 (P=0.000) $T^b$= .178 |

*Source: Field Survey*

## Conclusion

This study concluded a positive trend towards small family size due to economic hardship in the country. Being in the developing world, the countrymen considered children no more earning hands but rather an economic burden which was hard to afford in such high inflation time. These reasons compelled them to follow rich peoples' small family trend and decrease the size of the family to have few but successful children. The main purpose for adopting small family size is to live and enjoy a good quality of life and invest in children's future. Based on study findings, it was recommended that the fundamental purpose behind fertility decline was to have a quality life. The government should devise such policies that improve life quality, consequently motivating people to opt for a small family. Furthermore, the government should involve religious, change agents, and political leaders to mobilize people to adopt small family sizes to have a few successful children, decreasing economic hardships.

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