



## Ideological Diversity and Birth Control Differentials in Pakistan: A Study of Islamabad

<sup>1</sup> Sajid Mahmood Awan

<sup>1</sup> Senior Research Fellow at the National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research (NIHCR), Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan: smawan2222@gmail.com

| ARTICLE DETAILS   | ABSTRACT  |
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| <p><b>History</b><br/>Revised format: May 2019<br/>Available Online: June 2019</p> <hr/> <p><b>Keywords</b><br/>Globalization, Employment<br/>Elasticity, ARDL, Pakistan.</p> <hr/> <p><b>JEL Classification:</b></p> | <p>Growing Population explosion was not a grave problem in the early days of Islam or in the period of Islamic legislation. Thus, no explicit negation or affirmation of it is available either in the religious texts or in the religious jurisprudence or law. That is why presently the ulema from both the ends □ the opponents as well as the proponents of family planning, extract some selective Quranic verses, Ahadith and inferences of jurisprudence in favour of their respective viewpoints. Such diverging views have made the future of family planning programmes doubtful in Pakistan. With this background, the present study shows that in the contemporary situation, it is solely the individual who makes the final decision about approving or disapproving family planning. This decision-making process is influenced by the personal attributes of the practitioners. In order to evaluate these attributes, the researcher has attempted to analyze and highlight the perception of family planning by Muslim residents of Islamabad i.e. the Capital city of Pakistan. The people surveyed are predominantly from different social, geographical and economic backgrounds and from different religious callings, along the sectarian continuum. The researcher's task has thus been to observe the responses and to point out whether the objective variables i.e. geographical, income and class, occupation and age factors etc. are more significantly associated with knowledge, attitude and practice of family planning or the subjective variables like religion and sect appear to be more important determining factor of family planning practice in a traditional society like that of Pakistan.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">© 2019 The authors, under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0</p> |

Corresponding author's email address: smawan2222@gmail.com

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### 1. Introduction

The Any question having multiple answers is generally meant that either there is something wrong with the question or with one, more or all the possible answers to it. To a social scientist it means that social researchers choose from alternative approaches to science. Every approach has its own specific set of philosophical assumptions and the doctrines along with its own carriage to do research. Generally, a researcher rarely declares the approach he follows in one's research, but in my personal view, it depends on one side upon the clarity of argument in writing and on the other side upon the clarity of thought of the reader to grasp the approach applied or followed in a particular research. The present investigation is made mainly in the positivist social science approach which is

generally applied in the natural science. The ontological and epistemological positions of the study enable it to resolve one of the more bitter contests of the issue in the contemporary Pakistan. The debate moves with an organised method for combining deductive logic with precise empirical observations of individual behaviour in order to discover and confirm the central argument of the study to predict the general patterns of Pakistani Society.

## **2. The Birth Control Movement in Pakistan**

Soon after independence, the government of Pakistan lost no time in directly or indirectly adopting birth control as a part of its national policy. For instance, at the time of launching the First Five Year Plan (1955-60), the economic planners pointed out the severe consequences of high population growth in Pakistan. Pakistan being an Islamic State has to get religious approval before the implementation of any new policy like birth control or family planning. That is why, the government's policy of family planning faced critical resistance in Pakistan. On the question of religion in Pakistan, Singer (1970) noted that Max Weber saw the Asian religions as a major obstacle to modernization because of their bulwark of traditionalism and religious duties. In Pakistan, the Islamic roots that underlie the social fabric of the people are deeply embedded in tradition and Islam and are not likely to change in the near future (Wriggins, 1975: 17).

The present study is intended to probe into the worldview of the Muslims in Pakistan. The aim is to discover, why both the opponents and proponents of family planning have such divergent attitudes towards birth control despite their reference to the same sources i.e. the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It is important to point out that the present work is not intended to decide as to who is right and who is wrong. It is meant to be a descriptive not a prescriptive study. Its main purpose is to trace out only the directions and dimensions of various sects and the Pakistani Muslims' worldview and family planning without going into the moral issues of the case.

## **3. Islam and Birth Control**

For Muslims, the sources of Islamic law are primarily two, the Quran and the Hadith. Based on these two sources are two more, called the derivative sources: the consensus of jurists (Ijma) and analogy (Qiyas). In addition, there are supplementary sources, interpreted in the spirit of the shariah (Principles of religion), which include: juristic preference (Istihsan), the examples of residents of Madina; the public welfare (al-masalih-al-mursalin), the rule of concomitance (Istishab) and prevailing customs (usf), (Omran, 1992: 73).

Muslims believe that the Quran is divine revelation and it is the very words of God. According to Omran (1992), none of the contenders has produced even a single verse from the Quran, which supports or rejects the idea of family planning in a clear or explicit way. It means that the Quran is silent on the question of family planning. This silence, in my opinion can be explained by the fact that in the early days of Islam, the problem was not as acute as compared to other problems like alcoholism, adultery or the low status of women among the Arabs. These problems thus figure prominently in the Quran (Marrak, 1974: 268).

As for the Hadith, both the opponents as well as proponents of family planning have quoted some ahadith of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) of Islam in support of their contention. But it can be easily observed that except the ahadith on azl (Coitus interruptus), no other Hadith is directly relevant to the issue of family planning (Mahmood, 1977; Omran, 1992). Azl or al-azl, is an Arabic word which stands for separation, to set aside, to dismiss or to set apart. Thus the literal meanings of this word are insulation, separation, dismissal, segregation or removal. In view of these denotations, azl is generally taken to stand for a particular method which means withdrawal of penis from vagina before ejaculation i.e. coitus interruptus.

Since the statement of the Prophet (PBUH) can be interpreted in various ways, there is still controversy whether coitus interruptus (azl) is allowed or not (Marrak, 1974: 268). Muslims should, therefore, use their own reasoning to interpret the prophetic traditions in order to determine the rulings which may qualify the pre-requisites of new advancement provided that they are in accordance with the real spirit of Islam.

## **4. Sectarian Landscape of Pakistan**

Mahmood (1997: 37) has reported that in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh the Sunni Muslims are invariably either Hanafi or Shafi. The Shias (Shiah) of India mostly follow the Athna Ashari School (Imami). The Maliki, the Hambuli and the Zaydi schools have almost no followers here. Here it is to be pointed out further that still another school of Shiah community (the Ismaili) has its own centers in Pakistan. Ismailis have thus a considerable number

of followers. Although a definite number of the followers of the schools mentioned above is not available. It can, however, be inferred that the Sunnis in Pakistan generally follow the Hanafi and Shafi. The case of Shiah community in Pakistan is somewhat different. The Shiahs in Pakistan mainly follow either the Imami School or the Ismaili School. So the views of only these four schools regarding family planning are discussed here in detail.

## 5. Theoretical Positioning of Sects in Pakistan

### 5.1 The Hanafi School (Sunni)

The majority position of this sect is to permit al-azl as a contraceptive measure with differences as to the requirement of the wife's consent. The older and more popular position is that it is not allowed without the wife's consent. Later jurists, however, bypassed the wife's or husband's permission in times of religious decline 'bad times', (fasad-al-zaman) and in fear of begetting delinquent children (Al-walad-al-sou) (Omran, 1992: 153)

### 5.2 The Shafi School (Sunni)

The characteristic position of the Shafi school is that al-azl is allowed without the wife's consent. However, there is some verbal disfavour or Karaha tan-zihyya. Thus, when the wife is disliked, they mean it is less than impeccable. They argue that the woman has the right to intercourse, but not to ejaculation. Several jurists adopt the jumhour (majority) position by requiring the wife's consent. A few have disallowed al-azl altogether. (Omran, 1992: 159).

### 5.3 The Imami School (Shiah)

The majority position of the Imami school (almost consensus) is in agreement with the jumhour position i.e. al-azl is permissible subject to the wife's consent. The Imami jurists add, however, that consent can be obtained at the time of the marriage contract, once and for all. Al-azl is legal thereafter, even if the wife changes her mind. So important is the wife's consent that a few jurists allow monetary compensation to the wife every time the husband violates this condition. A position much similar to the Maliki except that the compensation here is fixed at ten dinars and is called diya-o-nutfa (compensation for the sperm)(Omran, 1992, 165).

### 5.4 The Ismaili School (Shiah)

The majority position of Ismaili school is equivalent to jumhour position, i.e. al-azl is permissible with the wife's consent. The consent can however, be obtained at the time of marriage contract. (Omran, 1992, 167).

Hence, the majority ruling given by eminent jurists is permissibility of al-azl with the wife's permission. Hence, it is very safely concluded that theoretically speaking Islam is not against family planning. A number of researchers go beyond the need of family planning at family level and even think that it can be implemented at the national level also, if it is in the real benefit of family and Muslim community. (Sharif, 1996: 91; Mahmood, 1977; Omran, 1992; Marrak, 1974; Akbar, 1994; Ahmad, 1995: 8).

## 6. Sectarian Differentials on the Idea of Birth Control

So far, only the textual or theoretical position of Muslims towards family planning has been discussed. We have not, however, touched upon the opinion or attitudes of the Muslims of Pakistan concerning this issue. A probe into the practical attitudes of Muslims in Pakistan reveals a great divergence among them. Some Pakistanis theologians have exhibited a modernist attitude in interpreting the religious texts and find nothing against Islam in family planning. However, their sphere of influence is very limited. Consequently, a large number of Pakistani Muslims believe in the position of ulema like Maulana Maududi who believe it to be impermissible (Mahmood, 1977: 67).

Wajihuddin Ahmad (1974) has further pointed out that despite a religious sanction for contraception and encouragement to family limitation in the Islamic orthodoxy; the contemporary religious attitudes are still resilient to the idea of family planning. He indeed suggests that the change is always influenced by non-religious factors. Most of the leaders of the orthodox Deobandi theological school, till the mid-forties, allowed both contraception and abortion. Some prominent names in issuing these religious edicts (fatawas) are Mufti Muhammad Shafi, Mufti Azizur Rehman and Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi. Yet the contemporary disciplines of these authorities have made the most virulent attacks on family planning in Pakistan (Ahmad, 1974: 287-288)<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The present researcher has gone through all the edicts of these three *ulema* but is unable to find out any edict for or against contraception or abortion. So, the authenticity of this source is not fully reliable.

In an agro-based society of Pakistan more children are required not only to enhance manpower but also the family's social status. Large families, especially those, who have more male children, are considered socially prestigious and more secure than others. Thus people oppose the notion of family planning traditionally and not exactly religiously. Eventually, they tend to have more children and family planning efforts do not succeed fully in Pakistan.

Thus, it is hypothesized that the real genesis of the opposition to family planning, both by religious ulema as well as ordinary Muslims, is derived from the prevailing agro-traditional worldview of the society and not from the religion itself.

The present study claims that all apparently religious doctrines against family planning are actually the expression of their local worldview. Accordingly, the people consider their opposition to the idea of family planning justified in Islam, though in reality they derive their feelings from their own worldview.

## 7. Muslim Worldview and Family Planning

Since the main purpose of this study is to deal with the worldview of the Pakistani people regarding family planning, the same is done through a field survey in Islamabad with an attempt to cover all the characteristics of national demographic landscape.

### 7.1 Geographical Factor

In the present investigation, a sample of 200 Muslim respondents was taken from a total population of 805,235 from the urban established sectors, semi urban areas or townships and villages. The total area of the selected geographical universe consists of fourteen urban established sectors, six urban slums, 5 smaller townships and one hundred villages and "dhoks" (smaller rural settlements).

Concerning the urban proportion a total of 35 respondents were interviewed, with 28 from 14 established urban centers and 7 from urban slums. Before surveying the rural areas, ten groups were designed, consisting of ten villages each. One village was selected from each group while six respondents were interviewed from each selected village. Thus, a total of 60 respondents were interviewed in this way. Five respondents were interviewed at random from the smaller townships. The same proportion and criterion of distribution was applied to both male and female respondents.

**TABLE 1: URBAN-RURAL FERTILITY DIFFERENTIALS**

| Locality | Male                     |                       |                         | Female             |                 |                         |
|----------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
|          | Total No. of respondents | Total No. of children | Average No. of children | No. of respondents | No. of children | Average No. of children |
| Rural    | 65                       | 281                   | 4.32                    | 65                 | 242             | 3.72                    |
| Urban    | 35                       | 148                   | 4.22                    | 35                 | 112             | 3.20                    |
| Total    | 100                      | 429                   | 4.29                    | 100                | 354             | 3.54                    |

The Table 1 shows the urban rural fertility differentials. It points out that, in case of both the rural males as well as the rural females, the average number of children is higher. However, the rate of urban-rural differentials is much higher as compared to females. The male differential is  $4.32 - 4.22 = 0.10$ , while in the case of females it is  $3.72 - 3.2 = 0.52$ , which is considerably lower.

### 7.2 Literacy Level and Birth Control

The area under consideration has a maximum literacy level in the whole country. Its literacy rate ratio is 72.45%. Literacy rate in urban areas is 77.3% while in rural areas it is 62.5%. Further, the male literacy ratio is 80.6% as compared to 62.4% of females (Population Census, 1998).

The sample of this study comprises both illiterates and literate. The section on the literate is further graded into the respondents with primary, middle, matric, intermediate, and bachelor and master levels of education. A separate proportion is also set for those with the professional education. The researcher took every care to represent almost all the major disciplines and faculties of education, like commerce, arts, science, medicine, engineering and law etc. in the sample.

An inverse relationship between the fertility and level of education is well established. The level of education influences the fertility both through direct and indirect methods (UN, 1973). Such effects of fertility rate are also confirmed by the findings of Sathar (1984). The present study also traces out an interrelationship between the variables of literacy level and the number of children, which is shown in the Table 7.

**TABLE 2: LITERACY LEVEL AND THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN**

| Level of literacy | Male respondents |      |              |                   |       |     |              |                   |       |              |                   | Female respondents |      |              |                   |       |      |              |                   |       |              |                   |
|-------------------|------------------|------|--------------|-------------------|-------|-----|--------------|-------------------|-------|--------------|-------------------|--------------------|------|--------------|-------------------|-------|------|--------------|-------------------|-------|--------------|-------------------|
|                   | Urban            |      | No. of chil. | Ave. No. of chil. | Rural |     | No. of chil. | Ave. No. of chil. | Total | No. of chil. | Ave. No. of chil. | Urban              |      | No. of chil. | Ave. No. of chil. | Rural |      | No. of chil. | Ave. No. of chil. | Total | No. of chil. | Ave. No. of chil. |
|                   | No               | %    |              |                   | No    | %   |              |                   |       |              |                   | No                 | %    |              |                   | No    | %    |              |                   |       |              |                   |
| No education      | 17               | 48.6 | 70           | 4.1               | 33    | 5.7 | 163          | 4.9               | 50    | 223          | 4.4               | 14                 | 40   | 61           | 4.3               | 36    | 55.4 | 145          | 4.2               | 50    | 206          | 4.1               |
| Primary           | 1                | 2.8  | 3            | 3                 | 4     | 6.1 | 18           | 4.5               | 5     | 21           | 4.2               | 3                  | 8.6  | 5            | 1.6               | 5     | 7.6  | 26           | 5.2               | 8     | 31           | 3.8               |
| Middle            | 1                | 2.8  | 3            | 3                 | 4     | 6.1 | 18           | 4.5               | 5     | 21           | 4.2               | 3                  | 8.6  | 11           | 3.6               | 4     | 6.1  | 15           | 3.7               | 7     | 26           | 3.7               |
| Matric            | 2                | 5.7  | 10           | 5                 | 5     | 7.6 | 12           | 2.4               | 7     | 22           | 3.1               | 3                  | 8.6  | 8            | 2.6               | 5     | 7.6  | 20           | 4                 | 8     | 28           | 3.5               |
| Intermediate      | 5                | 14.3 | 19           | 2.2               | 5     | 7.6 | 15           | 3                 | 10    | 26           | 2.6               | 4                  | 11.4 | 6            | 1.5               | 5     | 7.6  | 11           | 3.2               | 9     | 17           | 1.8               |
| Bachelor          | 4                | 11.4 | 24           | 6                 | 5     | 7.6 | 19           | 3.8               | 9     | 43           | 4.7               | 3                  | 8.6  | 7            | 2.3               | 5     | 7.6  | 13           | 2.6               | 8     | 20           | 2.5               |
| Master            | 1                | 2.8  | 4            | 4                 | 3     | 4.6 | 10           | 3.3               | 4     | 14           | 3.5               | 2                  | 5.7  | 5            | 2.5               | 2     | 3.1  | 5            | 2.5               | 4     | 10           | 2.5               |
| Professional      | 4                | 11.4 | 23           | 5.7               | 6     | 9.2 | 26           | 4.3               | 10    | 49           | 4.9               | 3                  | 8.6  | 9            | 3                 | 3     | 4.6  | 7            | 2.3               | 6     | 16           | 2.6               |
| Total             | 35               | 100  | 148          | 4.2               | 65    | 100 | 281          | 4.3               | 100   | 419          | 4.1               | 35                 | 100  | 112          | 3.2               | 65    | 100  | 242          | 3.7               | 100   | 354          | 3.5               |

Chil: Children. Ave: Average.

The Table 2 shows that the total sample is equally divided into literate and illiterates with the ratio of 50% each for male and female respondents. Although this 50% proportion does not confirm with the real statistics of the area, it however, suits to the requirements of the present study. It seemed impossible for the researcher to divide such a small sample according to the real literacy rate of the area into all the above mentioned levels of literacy. Secondly it seems coherent with the national literacy level of the country which is 62.4%.

Keeping in view the actual literacy rate of 62.4% for females in the area, a literacy rate of 50% seems a bit unrealistic. With this discrepancy, males and females in computation will be dealt and analyzed separately, wherever needed. The Table also mentions a detailed description of all the respective levels of education. It reflects that at the primary, middle and the matric levels of education, female proportion is higher than that of the male respondents. Nevertheless, it does not mean that they have actually high, but that they have got duly low proportion in the upper levels of education. Concerning the professional education also, females have got a considerable proportion (although lower than males). Indeed, the lady doctors and the LHV's (Lady Health Visitors) have mainly contributed to this proportion.

Concerning the fertility differential with reference to literacy levels, the present study confirms the findings of previous researches (UN, 1973; and Sather, 1984), but with little differences. The Table 2 shows clearly that the fertility level of the respondents with no education is considerably higher than the fertility level of educated respondents. Then from the primary to the intermediate level of education it follows the trend that higher the education level is lower is the fertility level there. At bachelor and master's levels of education, however, a slightly higher level of fertility is evident. It may be because of better economic positions, better health conditions, better child and maternal care or less mortality level and older age level of the respondents. As it has been explored previously in the topic of age distribution and fertility differential that the people with more age have considerably high fertility level, it can be inferred that an increase in education, people are realizing the intensity of the situation more rigorously. However, the proper reason of this differential is not traced out here. The Table also shows that the people with professional education have comparatively high level of fertility; this effect is lesser, however, in case of female. This is mainly because most of the females with professional education are themselves working as doctors and nurses. Finally, the effect of education on the fertility differentials is stronger in the case of females than in males.

A detailed description of the basic characteristics of the sample reveals that a number of factors like: geographical location, age distribution, income, class, level of literacy and occupational distribution have considerable influence to impress upon the fertility differentials in Pakistan. The average number of children is higher in the rural areas than in the urban areas and the older age groups show higher level of fertility than the younger ones. As far as the variable of class difference is concerned, it does not affect the number of children in rural areas. In urban areas, however, fertility patterns are influenced by income and class differential. Consequently, the urban lower class has more children than that of urban upper class. The study also finds out an inverse relationship between literacy and fertility. This variable seems more effective in females. Finally, those attached with agricultural occupation have considerably higher number of children, as compared to those engaged in the services sectors.

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