

RELIGIOUS LEADERS AS ADVOCATES: PROMOTING FAMILY PLANNING IN RURAL PAKISTAN

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Abstract:

This paper explores the perception of religious leaders towards family planning in rural areas of Pakistan. With a population of over 200 million, Pakistan faces the challenge of managing its high birth rate to promote prosperity and happiness in society. The authors emphasize the significance of including religious leaders in family planning programs since they have a considerable influence on their followers. The study analyzes the socio-economic attributes, level of awareness, perception, and reflection of religious leaders on family planning. The results indicate that although religious leaders understand the negative impact of a large population size, their general and religious education is low, and they do not use contraceptives themselves or counsel their followers about family planning. The authors recommend organizing mobilization programs for religious leaders to familiarize them with the concept of balancing family size and economic resources. The findings imply that it is difficult to succeed in family planning programs in rural areas without bringing religious leaders into the mainstream of life.

Keywords: family planning, religious leaders, rural areas, population control, socio-economic attributes.

INTRODUCTION

Family planning is one of the means to create a reasonable balance between the numbers and economic condition of the families. It implies that with the help of modern scientific knowledge, wise parents can control the size of their families in accordance with their resources. Family planning is, therefore, the revolutionary practice by which high birth rate can be reduced to a manageable level.

Family planning helps save women's and children's lives and preserves their health by preventing untimely and unwanted pregnancies, reducing women's exposure to the health risks of childbirth and abortion and giving women, who are often the sole caregivers, more time to care for their children and themselves. The concept of family planning is not a new one, it has deep roots because in early days of Islam, Sahaba Ikraam (RU) used to withdrawal during their intercourse. On many occasion it was brought into the notice of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) that some Sahaba Ikraam used to undergo this practice but the Holy Prophet (SAW) did not forbid this.

The Quran does not prohibit birth control, nor does it forbid a husband or wife to space pregnancies or limit their number. Thus, the great majority of Islamic jurists believe that family planning is permissible in Islam. The silence of the

Quran on the issues of contraception, these jurists have argued, is not a matter of omission by God, as He is "All-Knowing" and Islam is understood to be all times. The proponents of family planning also note that coitus interrupts, or withdrawal, was practiced at the Prophet time by his companions. The majority of theologians from almost all school of Islamic jurisprudence agree that withdrawal is permissible with wife consent. In Islam, a wife has the right to both sexual pleasure and reproduction. (Some jurists would argue that ejaculation is necessary for women to have orgasm, and therefore it is necessary to have prior consent from a wife before practicing withdrawal. (Omran, 1992)

Allah says in the Glorious Qur'an "...kill not your children on a plea of want; we provide sustenance for you and for them;" (Al-Qur'an 6:151)

"Kill not your children for fear of want: We shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you: verily the killing of them is a great sin." (Al-Qur'an 17:31)

There are many Hadis that advocated family planning. Some of them are narrated as follows:

"Hazrat Jaber (RU) "we used to withdrawal even in the life of Holy Prophet (SAW). This was brought in the notice of the Holy Prophet (SAW) but He did not forbid us "(Saeedi, 2002). Furthermore, the four Imams of Muslims (Imam Ahmad Bin Hanbal, Imam Abu Hanifa, Imam Muslim and Imam Bukhari) unanimously agreed that withdrawal is not a bad thing. It would be appropriate if this practice is done with the consent of wife because during withdrawal the level of pleasure of both the counterpart is on its peak and no one easily afford to reduce this (Saeedi, 2002).

According to Malthusian theory, population increases in geometrical ratio where as food supply increases in arithmetical ratio. This disharmony would lead to widespread poverty and starvation which would only be checked by natural occurrences such as disease, high infant mortality, famine, war or moral restraint. According to this theory there are steps to control the population, preventive and positive check. Preventive means control in birth rate, uses of different method to control birth and positive check means natural calamities, war etc. He pointed out that population increased at a much more rapid rate than did the production of food, and, as such, it was useless to think of human prosperity. Young people need want and have a right to sexual and reproductive health services. Ignoring their sexuality will not make their problems go away. It only makes them worse. It only leaves them vulnerable to unsafe abortion, unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease. That's no way to protect a future of promise. In fact, young people themselves want to protect their own health and future. Pakistan is facing the problem of over population and about 33% population is living below the poverty line. The community facilities are either not provided or under provided and are being over utilized. Moreover, the unemployment, misery, high infants and mother mortality rate, low health standards, environment pollution, illiteracy, crime rate and drug abuse are increasing day by day. The root cause of all these social issues and problems is the over population. The traditional religious teachers (mosques" Imams) are not in favor of Family Planning and normally they preached against the Family Planning. However, they have close interaction with majority of population and especially with rural illiterate traditional society members. This segment of population is the true followers of religious leaders and they have blind faith on the sayings of mosques" imam. The previous empirical researches provide contradictory and inconclusive evidence on the different aspects of family planning and people"s perception about it as well as role of religious leaders to properly implement it and its socio-economic milieus in society. Therefore, the present research is designed as a step towards this end. In this study we are going to find out the educational level of religious leaders, their awareness level about family planning, their perception about it impact on social development and what role they are playing to restrict the people from Family Planning Practices especially in rural illiterate population, so that some appropriate strategy can be devised.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

In the past many researches had been conducted on different aspects of Family Planning. The review of these researches is essential in order to learn from them, check their context and make our research authentic. Some of them are placed as:

Qalqili (1964) said "There is agreement among the exponents of jurisprudence that coitus interrupt us, as one of the methods for the prevention of childbearing, is allowed. Doctors of religion inferred from this that it is

permissible to take a drug to prevent childbearing, or even to induce abortion. We confidently rule in this *fatwa* that it is permitted to take measures to limit childbearing”.

Kats (1983) said that the question of whether family planning is compatible with Islam is not a new issue. An eminent 11th century teacher declared that the earliest followers of the prophet (PBUH) practiced contraception with the knowledge of the prophet (PBUH), who did not forbid it. The issue has always been controversial, but the usual attitude has been one of tolerance. The question has become more pressing in the past few decades with the increased urgency of controlling population growth. The success or failure of the birth control program will depend partly on the active support of the Islamic leadership.

Aghajanian (1995) suggested that religious leaders should not be ignored as potential proponents of family planning. Indeed, some studies have shown that religious leaders are respected members of community, can be effective advocate for family planning the Islamic Republic of Iran, for example, has developed a highly successful family planning program in the past decade, and much of this success has been attributed to the support and guidance provided by the country’s religious leaders.

Neaz (1996) stated that the family planning association of Bangladesh (FPAB) introduced family planning in Bangladesh-previous East Pakistan during 1953; very little progress was achieved before the 1980s. It was noticed during the 1980s that program success was impeded by religious leaders’ opposition. In an effort to win the support of religious leaders, the FPAB established an Islamic Research Cell (IRC) in 1984 and launched targeted advocacy and orientation programs. An expert with religious education and background ran the IRC. The leaders were taught that Islam directly or indirectly promotes family welfare from the viewpoint of the health and economic needs of the family, and that the Quran nowhere argues that family planning is forbidden. Orientation courses, seminars, a national conference, and the distribution of educational printed material eventually convinced the religious leaders to support family planning.

Tantawi (1996) believes that all religions have the common objective of offering happiness to all humans; children can be the source of happiness if taught morality and ethics. He discusses the meaning of family planning, explains that family planning is allowed from the religious point of view, and explains that there is no official decree-fatwa which approve of family planning. Family planning does not contradict Islam’s faith and belief in destiny, and any method approved by knowledgeable senior doctors which fails to violate the rules of Shari-ah are approved by Islam. Therefore, Islam is a religious supportive of family planning. Underwood (1998) concluded the notion that religious leaders are less favorably disposed than the general public toward family planning is not unique to scholars and policymakers. A study conducted among Egyptian married couples found that 85% of men and women personally approved of contraception, but only 65% though their religious leader would do so.

Bloom *et al* (2002) concluded *Family planning violates the teachings of some religious traditions*. Concerns about respecting religious teachings in particular regions and localities have been a long-standing consideration for some family planning programs. Perhaps the strongest opposition comes from the Catholic Church, which prohibited artificial contraception in 1930. The Church opposes interfering with the process of conception and also views contraception as immoral because it may promote marital infidelity and lead to the debasing of women. However, the teachings and beliefs of most religious traditions are diverse and complex, making it difficult to generalize about religious responses.

Seltzer (2002) viewed that research is a severely limited tool in assessing religious or ethical appropriateness”. Studies have shown, however, that religious concerns over family planning programs vary widely in developing countries, and that such programs are not surprising that the majority of couples in predominantly Catholic and

Islamic countries use contraception. One important observation from research is that involving religious leaders in policy development has improved acceptance and understanding of family planning programs.

Sa'diyya (2003) found that Contraception has a long history in Islam that needs to be situated in relation to the broader Islamic ethos of marriage and sexuality. In Islam if one chooses to marry, this is not automatically linked to procreation. Within the Islamic view of marriage, an individual has the right to sexual pleasure within marriage, which is independent of one's choice to have children. This type of approach to sexuality is compatible with a more tolerant approach to contraception and family planning.

Zafar (2003) says that Islam with its distinctive character is considered a major hindrance to the assimilation of the family planning programme and small family norms. The quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that Islam opposes the idea of small family norms and use of family planning for birth spacing. The pronatalist tendencies in Islam stem less from direct injunction to procreate than from the support of others socio-cultural values and misinformation about the religion. Flexibility and tolerance commanded by religion in family life and birth control are not taken in their real sense in Pakistan.

Alipala (2004) stated that the Muslim religious leaders have joined the campaign to curb the country's runaway population growth by issuing a fatwah (edict) that would allow Muslim couples to practice family planning without fear of censure. Mufti Sheikh Abdullah Hamzautoh, Muslim religious leader from Basilan, said the family planning fatwah-decree was not contrary to Islam as it would promote the family health and welfare of the Philippine Muslim community. Married couples have all the "freedom" to ensure a healthy and happy family and that would include family planning with the use of the contraceptives.

Zakria (2004) said that most of the Muslim countries have, since long, been practicing family planning; some of them like Bangladesh and Indonesia achieving remarkable success. Egypt and Pakistan are struggling hard to control their population. Jamia al-Azhar, the 1,000-year old Centre of Islamic Theology, which is accepted by Muslims all over the world as the most authentic voice of Shariah and Islamic jurisprudence, has issued several fatwahs-decrees in favor of family planning.

Ali, (2005) told that, "Under three main broad perspectives of population growth and development, mother and child health, and gender equity, the idea is to have experts' views on Islamic teachings and the key issue of family planning. Some progress has been made in population control in Pakistan. A series of initiatives in the eighties and nineties has reduced the growth rate from over 3 percent in 1981 to the current level.

Khan, (2005) says that experts are divided on what role religion plays in low contraceptive use and low take-up of family planning services in Pakistan. A combination of factors like non-availability of services, baseless traditional beliefs and misconception play a big role. But, still a fairly large number of the population believes in the use of artificial contraceptives for family planning is against nature and also against Islam. Aulwes (2006) viewed that Iran is a model for lesser-developed countries in their efforts to reach development goals set by international agreements such as the 1994 Cairo Consensus. According to Roudi, about 74% of married women in Iran use modern contraception.

Azmat (2008) viewed that all leaders supported the central theme, that „mothers are treated as machines“ by the husbands and in-laws, and disapproved of consecutive pregnancies. Islam does not approve of acts of subjugation upon the weak, especially mothers. Further themes identified by opinion leaders include „mutual decision making in childbirth and family planning as valued“; the benefits of family spacing and planning“; and „willingness of the people to accept new ideas and ways of treatment“. Songa (2009) Family planning gives individuals and couples the freedom and means to choose the number, timing and spacing of their children, which improves overall quality of life for families. At the household level, smaller family sizes allow parents to give their children

better education and health, and improves overall family wellbeing. At country level, it contributes towards improving maternal health and child survival and poverty alleviation.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

According to Nachmias and Nachmias (1992) the Research Methodology is actually a conceptual sketch or it is track that how to collect and analyze the information during a research. The first step in methodology is to decide the universe of the study, where the research will be conducted. According to Dixan and Marry (1957) “any set of individuals or object having common observable characteristics constitute a population or universe”. Simply, it is that area where you are going to conduct the research. The study was conducted in the rural areas of Tehsil Chiniot, a very ancient city situated on the left bank of River Chenab near Sargodha Road Bridge. There are 44 union councils-local level electoral constituencies in Tehsil Chiniot and out of them 32 union councils have rural catchment’s area. Five union councils from those which are situated in rural areas were selected randomly. These union councils were the universe of the study. Almost every union council consists of about eight villages. The list of mosques and religious schools (madrassas) situated in selected five union councils was prepared. The list of all Imam Mosques-religious teachers-leaders was also prepared. These religious teachers were the sampling frame of the study. Fifty (50) respondents were selected by simple random sampling technique. Instrument used to collect quantitative data for analysis was “Interview Schedule”. It was prepared both in English and Urdu and efforts were made to develop comprehensive interview schedule as far as possible. The data were collected in face-to-face interview. Many social scientists advocated the merits of Interview schedule as interview schedule enables to get information accurately (Good and Hatt, 1952). The collected data were analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Both descriptive and inferential analyses were carried out. The following statistical techniques were used for data analysis:

Frequency and Percentage

In order to bring the data into comparable form, percentages of various categories of data were worked out in the present study. The percentages were calculated by following formula:

$$\text{Percentage} = \frac{F}{N} \times 100$$

Where:

$$\begin{aligned} F &= \text{Frequency} \\ N &= \text{Total} \\ &\text{number} \end{aligned}$$

Hypotheses Testing

A hypothesis testing is a method of making statistical decisions using experimental data. The relationship of two variables (independent and dependent) was explored through hypothesis testing that is also called sometimes as conformity data analysis. The validity of this relationship (between independent and dependent variables) was confirmed through the Pearson's Chi-Square (χ^2) Test. The formula for Chi-square is as under:

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O-E)^2}{E} \quad \text{Where;}$$

O = Observed value

E = Expected value

Σ = Denotes total sum

To know the significance relationship, the calculated values of Chi-square were compared with corresponding table values at 0.000 levels of significance. The results were considered significant, if the calculated values of

Chi-square were greater than the table values. On the other hand if calculated values of Chi-square were smaller than the table values then it was regulated as insignificant. Following hypotheses were tested:

H1: The higher the Religious Education, there will be higher the Numbers of Children.

H2: The higher the educational level more will be the knowledge about Family Planning Methods.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

To achieve generalization and prediction of results the analysis and interpretation of data are presented briefly in this section.

Socio-Economic Attributes of Respondents

The socio-economic characteristics of the respondents have major influence on their reflection and participation in the social stratum. The summary of research results is as under:

Table 1: Summary of Socio-Economic Attributes of Religious Leaders

Socio-Economic Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Educational Level of Religious Leaders		
Primary	18	36.0
Middle	15	30.0
High school	12	24.0
Intermediate	2	4.0
Graduate	3	6.0
Total	50	100.0
Religious Educational Level of Religious Leaders		
No religious education	33	66.0
Al Sanvia-tul-Aama	5	10.0
Al Sanvia-tul-Hassa	2	4.0
Sahada-tul-Alia	5	10.0
Sahada-tul-Aalmia	5	10.0
Total	50	100.0
Total No. of Children of Respondents		
3-Jan	19	38.0
Table 1 – Contd.,		
6-Apr	14	28.0
7 Above	4	8.0
No Child	13	26.0
Total	50	100.0
Respondents' wish for more Children		
1 children	3	6.0
2 children	3	6.0
3 children	3	6.0

4 children	4	8.0
5 children	37	74.0
Total	50	100.0

The above Table No. 1 shows that majority (90.0%) of the religious leaders has education up to secondary school. In other words most of the religious leaders were not well educated. Aghajanian (1995) suggested that education of religious leaders should not be ignored as they can be effective advocate for family planning. The analysis of data further reveals that majority (66.0%) of the respondents has no religious education as well, then how can they understand the importance of family planning from Islamic point of view. It is also revealed from the same Table that when asked about their desire to have more children, almost all respondents replied to have more children and majority (74%) of the respondents replied that they wish to have 5 more children which is amazing and alarming one. It is concluded that due to lack of education they do not realize the meaning of creating balance between the number and economic condition of their families.

Awareness Level of Religious Leaders about Family Planning

The to date knowledge and interest in Family Planning issues help a lot to advocate the implementation of this programme. The summary results about Religious Leaders' level of awareness about Family Planning are presented below:

Table 2: Learning Attitudes and Preference of Religious Leaders Regarding Family Planning

Attitude and Preference Regarding Family Planning	Frequency	Percentage
Frequency of Reading Newspaper by Religious Leaders		
Daily	2	4.0
Once a Week	24	48.0
Few Time a Week	12	24.0
Never	12	24.0
Total	50	100.0
Frequency of Watching Television		
Daily	16	32.0
Once a Week	2	4.0
Few Time a Week	3	6.0
Never	29	58.0
Total	50	100.0
Interest and Emphasis on Family Planning Programmes on TV		
More duration	5	23.8
Increase frequency	3	14.2
Debates	13	62.0
Total	21	100.0

Attending of Seminar Religious Leaders on Family Planning		
Yes	0	0.0
No	50	100.0
Total	50	100.00

It is revealed from Table No. 2 that how much is the awareness level of religious leaders and knowledge about family planning.

It is evident that majority of them are not acquaintance with different mass media like Newspaper, and Television that can be the best source for disseminating the knowledge about family planning. Further all of them (100.0%) had never attended any seminar on Family Planning.

This reflects that they have very poor knowledge about contraception and have no interest to increase their awareness level and knowledge regarding family planning.

Perception of Religious Leaders about Impacts of Large Population on Development of Pakistani Society

Table 3: Perceptions of Religious Leaders about Impacts of Large Population on Development of Pakistani Society

Perception Regarding Impacts of Family Planning	Frequency	Percentage
Opinion of Religious Leaders about Unemployment		
Job not Available	23	46.0
Over Population	16	32.0
Underemployment	3	6.0
Any other	8	16.0
Total	50	100.0
Opinion of Religious Leaders about Son Preference		
Yes	1	2.0
No Preference	49	98.0
Total	50	100.0
Opinion about Effects of Rapid Increase in Population		
Natural Resources are being Depleted Rapidly	2	4.0
Agriculture Land is being Converted into Residential Use	7	14.0
Unemployment being Increased	26	52.0
Higher Problem in Feeding and Educating Children	4	8.0
Increase in Street Crime	11	22.0

Total	50	100.0
Opinion about Ideal Number of Children		
2-Jan	1	2.0
4-Mar	6	12.0
7-May	5	10.0
God's Will	38	76.0
Total	50	100.0

Table No. 3 shows that Religious Leaders have no opinion about son preference, however they are aware about the unemployment due large size of population of Pakistan and its bad effects. But they did not agree on the ideal number of children and support the idea of God's will.

Reflection of Religious Leaders about Population Welfare Programme-Family Planning

The views of the Religious Leaders were ascertained about the effectiveness and appropriateness of Family Planning-Population Welfare Programme, as presented below

Table 4: Views of Religious Leaders about Population Welfare Programme-Family Planning

Reflection Regarding Family Planning	Frequency	Percentage
Opinion about Women's Education		
Yes	42	84.0
No	8	16.0
Total	50	100.0
Opinion about Female Age at Marriage		
Early Age	48	96.0
Late Age	2	4.0
Total	50	100.0
Opinion about Population Welfare Programme as Good for Family Welfare		
Yes	11	22.0
No	39	78.0
Total	50	100.0
Opinion about Spacing between Consecutive Pregnancies		
1 year	4	8.0
2 year	15	30.0
3 year	31	62.0
Total	50	100.0
Opinion about Working of Family Planning Workers in Their Villages		
Knew about them	19	38.0
Did not Know	31	62.0
Total	50	100.0
Knowledge about Family Planning Methods		

Knew	10	20.0
No Knowledge	40	80.0
Total	50	100.0
Usage of Contraceptives by Religious Leaders		
Yes	0	0.0
No	50	100.0
Total	50	100.00
Opinion of Religious Leaders for Counseling of Followers about Family Planning		
Agreed	2	4.0
Did not agree	48	96.0
Total	50	100.0

The data in above table portrays that huge majority (96.0%) of Religious Leaders is in favor of early marriage of women, majority (78.0%) did not agree that population welfare programme is good for family welfare, a huge majority (80.0%) had no knowledge about family planning methods, and all Religious leaders (100%) did not use family planning methods. All this presents a worse and very alarming situation about implementing family planning programme in rural areas of Pakistan. The only positive sign is that majority (80%) agreed with women's education and they all agreed with proper spacing (1-3 years) between two consecutive pregnancies. Awadhi (2002) also found in his study that the success of birth-spacing programme attributes to the inclusion of Muslim religious leaders at all stages of planning and implementation to reflect and to educational out reach. Their views about counseling to their followers about Family Planning were also explored but a huge majority (96.0%) did not agree with this idea, but only 4.0% agreed with this proposal. Similar views were ascertained by Underwood (2000) in one of the studies that among religious leaders, 36 percent reported that they had preached about family planning in the year.

Hypotheses Testing

The conformity test was used to find out the relationship between two variables (X, and Y, independent and dependent) in the data. It explores the concept of association between two variables. Following hypotheses were tested.

Hypothesis: 1 The higher the Religious Education, there will be higher the Numbers of Children.

Table 5: Association between Religious Education of Religious Leader and the Numbers of Children

Religious Education Level	How Many Children Do Have				Total
	3-Jan	6-Apr	7& above	No Child	
No religious Education	19	12	4	3	38
Al Sanvia-tul-Aama	0	1	0	4	5
Al Sanvia-tul-Hassa	0	0	0	2	2
Sahada-tul-Alia	0	1	0	4	5
Total	19	14	4	13	50

$$X^2 = 28.444$$

$$\text{Significance} = .001$$

$$\text{Gamma} = 0.16$$

The above mentioned values show a significant association between religious education of religious leaders and the numbers of children. The gamma value shows that there is strong association between both the dependent and independent variables. So, the hypothesis, “The higher religious education, there will be higher the numbers of children” is accepted.

Hypothesis: 2. The higher the educational level more will be the knowledge about Family Planning Methods.

Table 3: Association between Higher Education and Knowledge about Family Planning Methods

Description	Methods		Total
	Yes	No	
Primary	10	8	18
Middle	0	15	15
High School	0	12	12
Intermediate	0	2	2
Graduate	0	3	3
Total	10	40	50

2

X = 22.222 Significance = .000 Gamma = 0.40

The above mentioned values show a significant association between educational level and knowledge about family planning methods. The significance value shows that there is strong association between both the dependent and independent variables. So, the hypothesis, “The higher the education level, more will be knowledge about family planning methods” is accepted.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Religious Leaders (Mosques’ Imams) are not in favor of Family Planning and normally they preached against the Family Planning in Pakistan. Our country is facing the sever problem of over population and about 33% population is living below the poverty line. The facilities are either not provided or under provided and are being over utilized. A huge majority (80.0%) of the Religious Leaders had no knowledge about the family planning methods and did not like to use contraceptives (100.0%) and to discuss about family planning program and methods. Moreover, most (96.0%) of Religious Leaders did not agree to preach their followers about Family Planning. Those few Religious Leaders, who were educated, appreciated the family planning program as they know that these days over population is big problem for country. They also said that if people follow the Islamic values then they never faced any difficulties and they can live with happy life.

On the basis of above findings of present study, some important suggestions are made as follows:

- The religious leaders must be brought into main stream of social stratum for disseminating the true Islamic norms regarding family size.
- The literacy rate must be enhanced especially in rural areas and outmost efforts must be made to transform a civilized society through education.
- More educational reforms should be introduced to involve maximum number of people for getting education in urban as well as in rural areas.
- The misperceptions regarding family planning and small family norms must be eradicated through dialogue, seminars, mass media and panel discussion.
- All media of communication must be used for delivering the true Islamic education regarding family planning and limiting the family size on massive ground as this has been very effective in Bangladesh.

- Our social and cultural norms regarding early female marriages and lack of Islamic knowledge are the basic hindrance in limiting family size. So, in order to change the attitude of entire nation, we must change this trend of early female marriages and lack of Islamic knowledge.

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