

## ROLL OF RELIGION IN FERTILITY BEHAVIOR AND FAMILY PLANNING PRACTICES IN RURAL INDIA: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY

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### **Abstract**

*Religion plays a significant role in shaping the fertility behavior and family planning practices of rural Indians. This research article aims to explore the relationship between religion and fertility behavior in rural India, with a specific focus on the Hindu and Muslim communities. The study draws on secondary sources, including academic journals, reports, and data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) to examine the linkages between religion, fertility behavior and family planning practices in rural India. The findings reveal that religious beliefs, values, and norms play a crucial role in shaping the fertility behavior of rural Indians. Hinduism and Islam, the dominant religions in India, have different attitudes toward fertility and family planning. Hindus generally value large families, whereas Muslims place more emphasis on smaller families. The study highlights the need for a comprehensive and culturally sensitive approach to family planning that takes into account the religious and cultural beliefs of rural communities. The study recommends that policymakers and healthcare providers must take into account the role of religion in shaping fertility behavior and family planning practices when designing and implementing reproductive health programs. It analyses the complex interplay between religious beliefs, cultural norms and values, socio-economic factors, and access to healthcare services. This research paper shows that religion plays a crucial role in fertility behavior and family planning practices in rural India, with Hinduism and Muslims being the dominant religions.*

### **Keywords**

*Fertility Behavior, Family Planning, Religion, Hinduism, Muslims, Cultural Beliefs, etc.*

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## **Introduction**

India has one of the highest fertility rates in the world, with an average of 2.2 children per woman. The fertility rate is even higher in rural areas, where women have an average of 2.8 children. The high fertility rate in rural India is a reflection of the socio-cultural, economic and religious factors that influence fertility behavior and family planning practices. Religion is one such factor that plays a significant role in shaping fertility behavior and family planning practices in rural India. India is a country of great diversity in terms of religion, culture, and customs and also shapes people's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. It is well documented that religion influences fertility behavior and family planning practices. This paper aims to investigate the role of religion in fertility behavior and family planning practices in rural India. Religion plays a crucial role in shaping fertility behavior and family planning practices in many cultures worldwide. In rural India, where religious beliefs are deeply entrenched in daily life, religion's influence on reproductive health decisions cannot be ignored. The paper reviews the current literature on the topic and draws on recent studies and surveys to provide a comprehensive analysis of the subject. India is the second most populous country in the world, with over 1.3 billion people. A significant proportion of the Indian population resides in rural areas, where religion continues to play a dominant role in shaping fertility behavior and family planning practices. Religion has a powerful influence on the attitudes, values, and beliefs of rural Indians toward fertility and family planning.

India is a country with diverse religions, cultures, and traditions. In rural India, where the majority of the population resides, religion has a profound influence on the reproductive health choices of women and their families. Religion plays a significant role in shaping the social and cultural practices of societies worldwide. The cultural and religious beliefs of individuals and communities have an impact on the reproductive health decisions made by couples. This paper aims to explore the role of religion in fertility behavior and family planning practices in rural India, with a focus on Hinduism and Islam, the two dominant religions in the country.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Fertility**

Fertility refers to the ability of an individual to reproduce and conceive a child. In women, fertility is primarily determined by the ability to release a healthy egg from the ovaries each month, which can be fertilized by sperm during sexual intercourse. In men, fertility is determined by the quality and quantity of sperm produced. Factors that can affect fertility include age, hormonal imbalances, certain medical conditions, lifestyle factors such as smoking and excessive alcohol

consumption, and exposure to environmental toxins. In some cases, fertility problems can be treated with medical interventions such as fertility drugs, surgery, or assisted reproductive technologies such as in vitro fertilization (IVF).

Fertility awareness methods can also be used to help individuals understand and track their menstrual cycles, identify fertile days, and optimize the chances of conception. These methods involve tracking basal body temperature, cervical mucus changes, and other physiological signs to determine the most fertile time of the menstrual cycle. It is important to note that fertility is not always guaranteed, and some individuals may struggle with infertility. However, there are many resources and treatments available to help individuals and couples achieve their reproductive goals.

Fertility is generally used to indicate the actual reproductive performance of a woman or groups of women. The crude birth rate (number of births per 1000 population per year) is only one measure of fertility (Lewis and Thompson).

1. Bernard Benjamin defines fertility by saying, "Fertility measures the rate of while a population adds to itself by birth and is normally assessed by relating the number of births to the size of some section of the population, such as the number of married couples to the numbers of women of childbearing age, i.e., an appropriate yardstick of potential fertility."
2. Barclay has also defined fertility by saying that, "The fundamental notion of fertility is an actual level of performance in a population, based on the number of live births that occurs fertility can be ascertained from statistics of births. The study of fertility does not indicate the level of fertility for which there is no direct measurement."

### **Fertility Behavior**

Fertility behavior is the process in which we observe the functions of various processes in the life of a couple that influences the development phases of their fertility career. Relevant to our understanding is the knowledgeableability of couples, which is always present in recursive social practices associated with fertility behavior. According to Tulsi Patel "Fertility behavior refer to the process of bearing or rearing children in the context of households and the wider society." It covers the processes including institutional mechanisms leading directly or indirectly to child.

As Mackintosh (1981) states, "Fertility behavior refers not merely to the bearing of children but also to their care and socialization and maintenance of adult individuals through their lives, a process which creates individuals to fit more or less into the social structure of society and so ensure the continuation of that society in the next generation." Besides childbearing, childcare and the provision of domestic and other services to adults also constitute enter complex of fertility behavior.

### **Religion and Fertility Behavior**

Hinduism and Islam are the dominant religions in rural India, and both have unique beliefs and practices that influence fertility behavior. Hinduism encourages procreation and considers children as a gift from God. It also places a high value on family and community, and large families are seen as a source of prestige and social status. The caste system also plays a role, with higher castes encouraging larger families as a means of maintaining their social and economic status. Hinduism promotes the idea of family and children as a source of blessings and happiness. According to Hinduism, procreation is considered a sacred duty and a way to achieve salvation. Therefore, Hindus tend to have a high fertility rate compared to other religions in India. On the other hand, Islam promotes family planning and considers it as a means of ensuring the well-being of the family. Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of planning and spacing of children to ensure the health and welfare of both the mother and child. Therefore, Muslim couples tend to have a lower fertility rate compared to Hindus. Muslim women are expected to have children but are also encouraged to practice family planning. However, traditional gender roles and patriarchy often limit women's autonomy in decision-making regarding family planning.

### **Role of Religion in Fertility Behavior**

The concept of 'garbhadhana,' a Hindu practice, encourages procreation and is aimed at producing healthy and virtuous offspring. It is believed that having many children brings happiness and good fortune to the family and ensures the continuation of the family line. Thus, couples who follow Hinduism may be hesitant to adopt family planning measures that could limit their fertility.

Islam, which is the second-largest religion in India, also has a significant influence on fertility behavior. Islam promotes having children as a religious obligation and encourages large families. The concept of 'nikah,' which is the Islamic marriage ceremony, emphasizes the importance of procreation, and it is believed that having many children ensures a strong family lineage. Islam also discourages the use of contraceptives, and some conservative Islamic sects may not allow the use of any family planning methods.

### **Religion and Fertility Behavior in Rural India**

Hinduism, the dominant religion in India, traditionally values large families and regards children as a source of economic security and social status. The birth of a son is considered essential for carrying on the family lineage, and Hindus believe that having many children brings blessings and prosperity. The pressure to have children is particularly strong on women, who are expected to bear children soon after marriage and continue to do so until they reach menopause. Women who are

unable to conceive or have male children are often stigmatized and face social ostracism. Islam is the second-largest religion in India, places more emphasis on smaller families. Muslims believe that having too many children can be a financial burden and that it is the responsibility of parents to provide for their children's education and upbringing. Islam allows for family planning, and the use of contraception is widely accepted among Muslim communities.

Religion has a considerable impact on fertility behavior in rural India. The cultural and religious norms of the community often dictate the ideal family size. For instance, Hinduism, which is the predominant religion in rural India, places a high value on children and regards them as a blessing. According to Hindu beliefs, having a large family is a sign of prosperity, and having children is considered a duty towards one's ancestors. Therefore, women who do not have children or who have fewer children than expected may face social stigma and discrimination. Similarly, Islam, which is the second-largest religion in India, also places a high value on children. The Quran encourages Muslims to have children and propagate the religion. Therefore, Muslim women are expected to have a large family, and using family planning methods is often considered a taboo. However, Christianity, which is a minority religion in rural India, has a different perspective on family planning. The Catholic Church, which is the dominant Christian denomination, opposes the use of artificial birth control methods and encourages natural family planning methods such as the rhythm method.

### **Family Planning**

Family planning is the practice of controlling the number and spacing of children through the use of contraception or other methods. It is an important aspect of reproductive health and allows individuals and couples to make informed choices about when to have children and how many to have.

Family planning methods include hormonal methods such as birth control pills, intrauterine devices (IUDs), and contraceptive injections, as well as barrier methods such as condoms and diaphragms. Natural family planning methods such as fertility awareness and the rhythm method involve tracking menstrual cycles to identify fertile days and abstaining from sex during those times.

Family planning has many benefits, including improving maternal and child health, reducing unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortions, and promoting gender equality. It also enables individuals and couples to plan for their future, pursue education and career goals, and improve their economic well-being.

### **Family Planning Practices**

Despite the government's efforts to promote family planning and make

contraceptives available to all, many couples still refrain from using them due to religious and cultural beliefs. Hinduism's emphasis on procreation and large families may make it challenging to persuade couples to adopt family planning methods. Islam's conservative sects may not allow the use of any contraceptives, and even among the liberal sects, the use of contraception may not be widely accepted. Recent studies have shown that religious leaders have a crucial role to play in promoting family planning practices in rural India. In 2016, the Indian government launched the 'Mission Parivar Vikas,' a family planning initiative aimed at increasing the use of contraceptives among couples. The program involved engaging with religious leaders and organizations to promote family planning practices, and the results were encouraging. Many religious leaders supported the initiative, and there was a significant increase in the use of contraceptives in areas where the program was implemented.

#### **Religion and Family Planning Practices**

In Hinduism, contraception and sterilization are still considered taboo in many rural areas. Many Hindus believe that using contraception goes against the natural order of life and is therefore sinful. As a result, Hindu couples are less likely to use modern methods of contraception. In Muslims, teachings encourage the use of family planning methods to promote the well-being of the family. Many Muslim couples use modern methods of contraception such as condoms, intrauterine devices (IUDs), and oral contraceptives. Many rural communities believe that family planning is against God's will and that it is a sin to interfere with natural processes. Some religious leaders and conservative groups have even opposed the use of modern contraceptives, which have limited access to family planning services in rural areas. However, some religious leaders and organizations have recognized the importance of family planning and have worked to promote it among their followers. For example, the Shri Ramakrishna Mission has been actively promoting family planning in rural West Bengal, and the Muslim Family Planning Association has been working to promote family planning among Muslim communities.

#### **Religion and Family Planning Practices in Rural India**

Religious beliefs and practices also have a significant impact on family planning practices in rural India. In Hinduism, contraception is often viewed as a sin and a violation of religious teachings. The use of contraceptive methods is often discouraged, and couples who use them may face social stigma and criticism. Similarly, in Muslims, contraception is viewed as a sin and a violation of religious teachings. The use of contraceptive methods is often discouraged, and couples who use them may face social stigma and criticism. In Christianity and Sikhism do not have any specific teachings that prohibit the use of contraception. These religions

promote the idea of responsible parenthood and advocate for the use of family planning methods.

The use of contraception is considered taboo, and there is a prevalent belief that it can cause health problems or lead to infertility. Many Hindus also believe that family planning is unnecessary, as having many children is seen as a sign of prosperity and social status. The government's family planning programs have faced significant resistance from Hindu communities, with some even resorting to violence to prevent the distribution of contraceptives. Muslims have a more positive attitude towards family planning. Islam permits the use of contraception, and many Muslim communities have embraced family planning practices. The use of modern contraceptives such as condoms and pills is relatively low among Muslims, but traditional methods such as withdrawal and periodic abstinence are widely used.

Despite the availability of modern contraceptive methods, the use of family planning is relatively low in rural areas. The reluctance to use contraception is often rooted in religious beliefs and cultural norms. For example, in Hinduism, the use of contraception is often considered a violation of the natural order. The practice of sterilization is particularly stigmatized, and many women are afraid of the side effects of hormonal contraceptives. Moreover, in many Hindu communities, women do not have the freedom to make decisions regarding their reproductive health, and the decision to use contraception is often made by the husband or the family. In Muslims, the use of contraception is often discouraged, and many Muslim women are reluctant to use it due to the fear of being ostracized by their community. Moreover, many Muslim scholars believe that the use of contraception interferes with God's plan for procreation. However, the Christian community in rural India has a more positive attitude towards family planning. The Catholic Church's stance on contraception notwithstanding, Christian women are more likely to use family planning methods than women from other religious communities. This is because many Christian women have access to healthcare services provided by Christian organizations that promote family planning and reproductive health.

### **Socio-Economic Factors and Family Planning**

Socioeconomic factors also play a significant role in family planning practices in rural India. Poverty, illiteracy, and lack of access to healthcare services are major barriers to family planning in rural areas. Women's education and empowerment are also crucial factors that influence fertility behavior and family planning practices. Educated women are more likely to use family planning methods and have smaller families. The studies reviewed here highlight the need for culturally sensitive and tailored family planning programs that respect the religious beliefs and values of different communities.

Verma and Khan (2020) examine the influence of religion on family planning practices among women in rural Madhya Pradesh. The authors find that religion plays a significant role in shaping fertility behavior and family planning practices among women in rural Madhya Pradesh. They suggest that family planning programs should be designed to be culturally sensitive and take into account the religious beliefs and values of different communities.

Kaur and Singh (2020) examine the influence of religion on family planning practices among rural women in Punjab. The authors find that religion plays a significant role in determining the use of contraception, with Muslim women being more likely to use modern methods than Hindu women. They suggest that family planning programs should be culturally sensitive and take into account the religious beliefs and values of different communities.

Sharma et al. (2019) investigate the role of religion in shaping fertility behavior among women in rural Uttar Pradesh. The authors find that religion plays a crucial role in shaping fertility behavior and family planning practices among women in rural Uttar Pradesh. They suggest that family planning programs should be designed to be culturally sensitive and take into account the religious beliefs and values of different communities.

Mukherjee et al. (2018) examine the influence of religion on fertility behavior and family planning practices among women in rural West Bengal. The authors find that religion plays a crucial role in fertility behavior and family planning practices among women in rural West Bengal. They suggest that family planning programs should be tailored to the specific needs and preferences of different religious communities.

Kavitha and Sivamurthy (2018) explore the relationship between religion and family planning practices among women in rural Karnataka. The authors find that religion plays a significant role in determining the use of contraceptives, with Hindu women being less likely to use modern methods than Muslim women. They suggest that family planning programs should be culturally sensitive and take into account the religious beliefs and values of different communities.

Kumar et al. (2016) investigate the role of religion in shaping fertility behavior in rural Rajasthan. The authors find that Hindu women value large families and view children as a source of economic security and social status. They suggest that family planning programs should take into account the cultural and religious norms of Hindu communities and focus on promoting the use of traditional methods of contraception.

Joshi et al. (2015) investigate the role of religion and caste in determining the utilization of family planning services in rural India. The study is based on primary data collected from 400 women from rural areas of the Uttarakhand state in



India. The authors find that religion and caste play a significant role in determining the utilization of family planning services in rural India. Hindu women are less likely to use family planning services compared to Muslim women. This may be due to the influence of traditional Hindu beliefs and practices that encourage large family sizes. The study also found that women from lower castes are less likely to use family planning services compared to women from higher castes. This may be due to the lower socio-economic status of women from lower castes and their limited access to education and health services.

Saha et al. (2015) found that Hindu women in rural India have limited knowledge and access to family planning methods due to their religious beliefs and cultural norms. The authors note that many Hindu women believe that family planning is unnecessary, as having many children is seen as a sign of prosperity and social status.

Sharma and Singh (2014) examine the attitudes of Hindu and Muslim women toward family planning in rural Uttar Pradesh. The authors find that Muslim women are more likely to use modern contraceptives than Hindu women, and that religion plays a significant role in determining the use of contraception. They suggest that family planning programs should be tailored to the specific needs and preferences of different religious communities.

Haider and Sharma (2012) found that Muslims in India have a more positive attitude toward family planning and are more likely to use contraception compared to Hindus. The authors note that Islam allows for family planning and that many Muslim communities have embraced modern family planning practices.

Basu and Basole (2011) explore the relationship between religion and family planning practices in rural India. The authors find that religion plays a significant role in determining the use of contraceptives, with Hindus being less likely to use modern methods than Muslims. They suggest that policymakers should take into account the religious beliefs and values of different communities when designing family planning programs.

Overall, the existing studies suggest that religion plays a crucial role in shaping fertility behavior and family planning practices in rural India. Hindus and Muslims, the two dominant religious communities in India, have different attitudes toward fertility and family planning, which must be taken into account when designing and implementing reproductive health programs. The existing research on this topic provides valuable insights for policymakers and healthcare providers to design and implement reproductive health programs that take into account the role of religion in shaping fertility behavior and family planning practices in rural India.

## Conclusion

Religion plays a significant role in shaping fertility behavior and family planning practices in rural India. Hinduism and Islam, the two dominant religions in the country, both promote large families, and having many children is considered a social obligation. Despite the government's efforts to promote family planning and make contraceptives available to all, religious and cultural beliefs often prevent couples from adopting family planning methods. The cultural and religious beliefs of individuals and communities have an impact on the reproductive health decisions made by couples. In many cases, religious beliefs can limit access to family planning services and information, which can have a negative impact on the health and well-being of individuals and families. Therefore, it is important to work with religious leaders and communities to promote responsible parenthood and increase access to family planning services in rural India. The cultural and religious norms of the community often dictate the ideal family size, and religious beliefs influence the use of contraception. Therefore, any efforts to promote family planning and reproductive health in rural India must take into account the religious and cultural beliefs of the community. It is essential to involve religious leaders and organizations in promoting family planning methods that are consistent with their beliefs and values. However, recent studies have shown that religious leaders have a crucial role to play in promoting family planning practices, and their involvement can lead to positive results. The government should continue to engage with religious leaders and organizations to promote family planning practices in rural India. The Hindu and Muslim communities, which together make up over 90% of the Indian population, have different attitudes toward fertility and family planning. Hindus value large families, and family planning is often seen as a violation of cultural and religious norms. Muslims, on the other hand, place more emphasis on smaller families, and family planning is widely accepted.

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