

Value of Children Concept: A Framework

B.B.L. SHARMA

THE acceptance of limitation in family size can not be without reference to norms and values of family building in society. Such norms are set up on the existing level of mortality and other environmental factors which place value judgement on variables associated with family building like age at marriage, expectation about the first pregnancy, birth interval between successive pregnancies and the completed family size. So, it is certain that values that parents ascribe to children do not develop in a *vacuum*. These values reflect physical and social environment in which the parents of today have lived as children earlier. Children assume certain roles and values, and families continue with such perception. International experience indicates that even those so called modern families are quite slow in changes when it comes to the values of children and their role. Family building practices continue unchanged even when living pattern undergoes substantial changes.

It will be seen, therefore, that change in the factors associated with the family building and use of family planning methods means a major change in the attitude of individuals. A major break may be required from traditional norms and set practices of the society. Such transformation requires basic understanding of how the norms and values have been formed and then hitting at their roots to change those norms. In-depth understanding has to be developed as to why people need early and large family. From the supposed favourable attitude towards large families, people must gradually understand and realise that large families are a 'liability' and not an 'asset'. This idea has to be reinforced with the advantages of small family size. Thus, acceptance of family planning will, to a large extent, depend on the realisation that large family is a liability and small family an asset.

With this hypothesis in mind, this paper makes an attempt to discuss why our society places high value on large number of children. What are the aspects of living which need changes before changing the operating norms of high value of children? The implications are that it will be necessary first to understand why children still have very high value in our society before one can make efforts to change the norm of early and large family size.

Factors affecting Values of Children

Several socio-economic factors determine values of children in a society. Some might emphasize large family, while others may assume it to be a burden which parents have to bear. Such positive and negative factors contribute towards developing a norm

about value of children. The value an individual places on children is composed of this set norm and his individual circumstances. In the following paragraphs, an attempt will be made to review various studies reflecting values which are placed on children.

(A) Factors assigning positive values to number of children:

(a) *Economic Factors:* In an agricultural country like India, children can provide extra hands to work on the farms. They can supplement family income by working for others or they can take care of smaller children in the house so that mother can go for outside work and bring earnings for the family. This economic contribution of the child starts from very young age. Thus, they become economic assets from very early age. In addition to being assets, their economic liability is almost nil, specially so in families where there are already large number of children.

Besides the general economic value of children, a couple of studies have indicated utility of children for a specific need like meeting fuel needs of the family. They are sent to collect dung used for fuel in the household.¹ Another study has estimated the number of children required to collect fuel enough for the family, it is reported that a poor household needs as many as 4.5 children to forge and collect fuel adequate enough to meet its very modest energy needs.²

In summary, it has been reported that (i) economic value of work of children is more than their upkeep and consumption, (ii) their earnings are some times essential to meet the family expenditure—such earnings can start from very young age, (iii) their help in the agricultural field or family business is better and more consistent than available on hire basis, and (iv) economic security of the family is more certain.

(b) *Social and Psychological Factors:* In lower and middle class families in India, the number of children are associated with social status, more the number of living children higher the prestige. Larger family and particularly larger number of sons reflect strength, power and prosperity.

An early birth is generally preferred to secure respectable and stable position for the bride in the home of mother-in-law. Second child is borne to give company to first. She lives in an environment where larger number of children of her older sister-in-law has given her more powers in the family, thus reproduction goes on to acquire more powers, more social prestige in household affairs by bearing more sons. This is a great source of emotional and psychological satisfaction. It has been reported that—

The author is Assistant Professor, National Institute of Health and Family Welfare, New Delhi,

- (i) women's place in the home of her mother-in-law is more secure if she has larger number of children, especially sons;
- (ii) her social power is dependent on the number of children she has;
- (iii) her living environment in home is more conducive to positive association between emotional satisfaction and number of children.

(c) *Family Building Factors:* The important considerations in family building in India are (i) early maternity to prove fertility of women and make her place secure in the family, and (ii) to have sons as old age economic and social security for parents, continuity of lineage and to perform last religious rites. While the first consideration indicates early beginning of reproductive life, the second and third ones suggest continuation of reproductive life for longer time period. The latter becomes essential because of high mortality, particularly infant mortality. Two hypotheses are generally stated in regard to high infant mortality. First deals with the replacement idea for lost child and second with the insurance for possibility of loss of a child in future. Both these hypotheses suggest that several extra children are borne by couples either to make up for the loss of children which might have occurred or to make sure that some survive even after future toll of mortality. An idea of the extra number of children which are required because of high infant mortality can be had from a simulation study which shows that it would be necessary for a mother to bear five children to be 95 per cent certain that one son survives father's 50th birthday.³

(d) *Preference for Sons:* The parents feel the need for at least one surviving son for the family to fulfil its economic, social and religious roles. Therefore in a study, 83 per cent couples had reported that they would have four or more girls before halting their attempt to have a son and 50 per cent were prepared to have six or more girls to get a son.⁴ A review of literature indicates that couples have indicated preference for two surviving son family, one can easily guess the family size required to have two surviving sons—about six children on an average.

(B) Factors assigning negative values to larger number of children:

(a) *Economic Factors:* Bringing up a child is a full time job for a mother. With infant or small child at home she has to discontinue her activity outside home especially in nuclear families. Therefore, bearing child deprives the household of the extra income brought in by the lady of the house.

Larger number of children in a family means distribution of limited resources of the family among all its members. This is especially so in families where children are sent to school (involving some minimum expenditure). This attitude is reflected by parents (in various surveys) when they reported that they do not want more children because they are unable to provide bare necessities to large number of children or "can not afford more children".

(b) *Changing Social System:* More and more parents have started realising that children provide economic security is a mere myth. It has been almost impossible for people to provide for their dependents adequately and, therefore, grown up children from their own families move away from joint family and utilise their meagre income to provide for their own wife and children. In this way, parents do not receive support. This changing social system has been reflected by Kumudini Dandekar⁵ when she brought out that links between child bearing and economic security in old age to parents is not strong as is usually imagined.

Schooling, clothing and giving nutritious food has been now well accepted responsibility of the parents towards their children, more so because of recent phenomena of relative comparison of one's own children with neighbours. This changed concept of child rearing has increased cost of rearing children and created negative value for large number of children.

The notions on role and functions of female and male children are gradually changing. Preference for sons still persists but its 'intensity' has definitely changed. Therefore, people accept female children, and are not prepared to go in for indefinite number of female children to have a specific number of sons.

(c) *Mortality reductions:* Though mortality has started declining from the thirties, it is only recently that its realisation has come to individuals. The perception about mortality of children has undergone change. This changed perception will tend to reduce the need for large family, as replacement and insurance to mother in larger family size will not be important consideration any more.

(d) *Health Factors:* An idea that smaller number and well spaced children are healthier has taken roots in the society. Similarly, the perception of association between mother's health and number of children has also led to realisation for small family. The larger number of children borne too often and too close are detrimental to their own health and that of their mother. Similarly, maternity at earlier ages and later ages of the reproductive life has been seen to be harmful both for the mother and the child.⁶

A Research Framework

Factors have been listed, some of which assign positive value to number of children and some negative. A sum total of this decides how much value an individual couple places on children. Though overall value of children is determined by sum of the positive and negative values, there are separate set of variables which affect value of children for mother, father or the family as whole. Therefore, an interesting framework will be to consider the variables which determine value of children to each of these groups (Mother, Father, Family separately). This framework not only has benefit of clarifying the factors which go into making the level of value placed on children, but also provide readymade areas which can be taken while formulating educational (extension) activities

for bringing about change in them. The framework on the variables affecting value of children can be expressed in the following three main categories and eleven sub-categories.

1. *Variables affecting the value of children for mother:*

- (a) *Health of mother*
 - (i) Early age at first birth distorts physical growth of mother;
 - (ii) Children at shorter intervals affect mother's and children's health;
 - (iii) Too many children exhaust her.
- (b) First child establishes place of mother in her in-law's home.
- (c) *Value of daughter*
 - (i) help in household chores;
 - (ii) help in taking care of other children;
 - (iii) help to mother if she works outside.
- (d) *Value of son*
 - (i) security after husband.
- (e) *Sacrifice*
 - (i) social life;
 - (ii) work opportunity.

2. *Variables affecting value of children for father:*

- (f) *Son provides helping hand*
 - (i) Agricultural work;
 - (ii) Household business.
- (g) *Son shares household chores*
 - (i) Inside the house;
 - (ii) Outside the house.
- (h) *Religious values*
 - (i) Funeral rites;
 - (ii) Other religious rites.

3. *Variables affecting value of children for family:*

- (i) *Source of increasing affection*
 - (i) Between husband and wife;
 - (ii) Between parents and grand parents.
- (j) *Economic condition of family*
 - (i) Bringing additional income;
 - (ii) Provides additional hands reduces need for hiring labour from outside;
 - (iii) Economic security in old age;
 - (iv) Economic burden-shares limited resources of the family.
- (k) *Social and cultural value*
 - (i) Social prestige;
 - (ii) Emotional satisfaction during young age and old age (through grand children);
 - (iii) Continuity of lineage;
 - (iv) Social cost-parents have to sacrifice social life;
 - (v) Source of friction-parents disagreement on certain decisions about children.

Discussion

As indicated in the above framework, information on factors related to value (or cost) of children is available in scattered fashion in various studies. More stress is given to other economic value in Western culture, where attempts have been made to dabble with values and cost of children either by building a theoretical frame based on logic or on the basis of field enquiries^{7 8 9 10 11}. Anthropological approach has been made by Moni Nag¹² in Java and Nepal to observe actual functioning of children and assess their values. This approach, though very realistic has great limitation in terms of time and effort it requires. The coverage of aspects on value of children by this approach is also limited.

In India, not much efforts have been put to study value of children except some macro estimates on the saving or benefit or preventing one birth.¹³ There are other studies dealing with cost of bringing up children^{14 15 16 17}.

These studies are limited in scope because—

- (1) No systematic field study based through composite approach has been undertaken on socio-demographic, psycho-economic and health aspects of children in India. Only aspects covered are financial, costs and economic value.
- (2) Studies done so far do not bring out differences in value of children, rearing practices by religion.
- (3) It is not known whether impact of changing family structure alongwith changed or altered economic activities of family make large number of children disfunctional particularly in non-agrarian and urban solutions.
- (4) No study except one or two case studies on time devoted by parents to each of their children or time devoted by other family members on children's rearing up activities have been attempted.
- (5) Studies do not explain how the cost of the second, third or fourth child varies from the cost of rearing the first child.

The above framework is based more on individual observations. Some variables are known to affect value of children but details like whether specific variable operates for a specific setting like rural, urban is not known. Also not known is the fact whether some particular parity orders have a greater effect on particular variable. The reason for lack of such details is because no effort has been made to study value of children in a systematic fashion. The discussion given above is also based on scattered information in various studies.

A study is overdue to explore all (or most) of the variables listed in the above framework. This study should confine not only to positive or negative effect of the factors on the value of children but should also assess changes which are coming alongwith the changed environment. It also has to assess the reasons why people still feel positive value of the variables when society is undergoing social, cultural and economic changes rapidly. This type of study will be very useful for the family welfare programme educa-

(Continued on page 22)

Uttar Pradesh

SNA L.L.R. Hospital, School of Nursing, Kanpur	101-00	College and Hospital, Calcutta	101-00
SNA Unit, School of Nursing, S.V.B.P. Hospital, Meerut	101-00	SNA Unit, N.T.C., Darjeeling	150-00
SNA Unit, School of Nursing, U.H.M. Hospital, Kanpur	201-00	SNA Unit, N.T.C. National Training Centre, Krishnagar	50-00
SNA Unit, School of Nursing, Balrampur Hospital, Lucknow	51-00	SNA Unit N.R.S.M.C. Hospital, Calcutta	201-00
	454-00	SNA Unit A.G. Hospital, School of Nursing, Calcutta	100-00
		SNA Unit Burdwan Medical College Hospital, Burdwan	121-00
		SNA Unit E.S.I. Hospital, Calcutta	225-00
		Ms. Chitra Chouhan, Treasurer, West Bengal Branch	100-00
		Mrs. Malabika Das Gupta & Safali Das, Calcutta	153-00
			1,502-00

West Bengal

TNAI West Bengal State Branch	201-00
SNA Unit Kalimpong Branch, Darjeeling	100-00
SNA Unit, Calcutta National Medical	

(Continued from page 18)

Gents

100 metres—1st Prize: Mr Moses Gaikwad, Training, College of Nursing, Miraj Medical Centre, Miraj, Maharashtra; 2nd Prize: Mr. P. Pradeep, College of Nursing, Trivandrum, Kerala; 3rd Prize: Mr Dharmendra Bhatti, School of Nursing, Jamnagar, Gujarat.

Shot Put—1st Prize: Mr Tony Thomas, College of Nursing, Kottayam, Kerala; 2nd Prize: Mr Michael Devkule, College of Nursing, Wanless Hospital, Miraj, Maharashtra.

Discuss Throw—1st Prize: Mr Michael Devkule, College of Nursing, Wanless Hospital, Miraj, Maharashtra; 2nd Prize: Mr P. Pradeep, College of Nursing, Medical College, Trivandrum, Kerala; 3rd Prize: Mr Bindhachal, LLR Hospital, Kanpur, UP.

Javelin Throw—1st Prize: Mr Michal Devkule, College of Nursing, Wanless Hospital, Miraj, Maharashtra; 2nd Prize: Mr P. Pradeep, College of Nursing, Medical College, Trivandrum, Kerala; 3rd Prize: Mr Ramanuj Pal, School of Nursing, Balrampur Hospital, Lucknow, UP.

(Continued from page 14)

tional activities. Keeping this need in mind, the National Institute of Health and Family Welfare is planning to undertake a detailed study on the value of children.

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