Multiple Factors and Multiparity

By Miss Inderjit Walia

Family Planning, a part of preventive obstetric and preventive paediatric, places importance on limiting the number of births and proper spacing. Our country has evolved an impressive organizational set-up for the implementation of the family planning programme. With the available facilities mothers of today can limit the number of pregnancies thereby raising the standard of living and improving the "physical, social and mental well being" of the family. But unfortunately many factors obstruct the mothers from utilising the available facilities which ultimately lead them to multiparity.

Many studies have been conducted and many articles have been written on the various factors which are detrimental to the use of family planning methods. The author conducted a survey on the population of Ramanaikepalayam of Vellore Town in Tamil Nadu. The population study was selected on the following criteria:—

(1) Mothers with 3-4 months pregnancy ; (2) mothers with three or more living children and (3) mothers whose mother tongue was Urdu so that investigator could converse with the in their language.

The questions under study were : why the mothers become multiparous ? Why do they want more children even after having three living children in the family ?

The percentage of mothers under present study who confided that they did not plan for the present pregnancy was 74.2 and 61.3% of the mothers said they did not want more children in the family. Then why did not they prevent pregnancy ?

This article by Miss I. Walia, Lecturer, College of Nursing, PGI, Chandigarh is based on a study conducted by her in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Masters in Nursing.

John St. George[3] who analysed the notes (2582) from the hospital records about grand multiparous mothers wrote in his report : "... Not considering the danger or burden that grand-multiparity will cause, these women continue to reproduce year after year until nature by one form or another stops the process." In the present survey 67.7% of the mothers did not know the danger of many pregnancies on their health. Among the mothers who said they did not mind having any number of children, 80% of them were unaware of its effects on the health which appeared to be the reason why they did not give much importance in preventing pregnancies. But 22.6% of the mothers who knew the danger were pregnant while 57.1% of them did not want more children and others did not mind having more children in spite of their knowledge of ill-effects of pregnancies on the health of the mother.

The question still remains unanswered as to why these mothers did not prevent pregnancies although majority of them did not want more children ? Dr. K.G. Krishnamurthy[4] summarising the attitude studies done in India writes : "Even though most people are favourable to family limitation, they do not have any knowledge about contraceptive techniques, but 71% of the mothers under present survey knew the methods of preventing pregnancies. Of course 48.4% of the mothers did not know where to go and get such information which corresponds with the National Surveys that those who knew the methods have vague knowledge about it and only few had crystalized the information on family planning. This is proved on the further analysis that from those who had the knowledge, only 22.8% had ever used one or the other methods but unfortunately had unplanned pregnancies due to ignorance of the use of the method or complications. Augusto and others[7] who studied 100 pregnant mothers attending ante-natal clinic about their "psychosexual response and attitudes towards family planning" also found that 14% of the unplanned pregnancies were from 70 mothers who formerly used family planning methods.

Not only just the knowledge, but the type and depth of knowledge affects the adoption of methods in limiting the pregnancies. National surveys show that very few of the mothers know more than one or two techniques. This was also true in the present survey in which 99.5% of the mothers knew about two methods of preventing pregnancies including operation. It is also interesting to note that the majority of the mothers (77.2%) came to know these methods only after having three or more children. It could be that these mothers did not have much time to think, consult others and decide on taking important steps for their future life. Of course the investigator is unaware of facts and figures that how much time is needed by people to learn and practice methods of limiting pregnancies.

"Most people are under the impression that family planning methods would lead to health hazards, thus people had a general fear of taking to family planning"—reported Palocaren[6] and others who interviewed 335 married persons in Vellore town to assess the knowledge and attitudes to family planning as an evaluation process of their programme on family planning. In the present study 72.7% of the mothers who had the knowledge of family planning methods also knew of complications of the methods ? But 51.6% of the mothers who said that it was possible to limit the pregnancies if one wanted, 68.8% knew complications. But those mothers who said there were no complications of methods to limit pregnancies did not say it was possible to limit the pregnancies.

It makes clear that besides the lack of knowledge and availability

of appropriate mathods to limit pregnancies other factors also caused the mothers to become multipara.

Dudhey Kirks[5] writes : "Moslem influence is strongly conservative. Children are among the richest blessing that Allah bestows..... He will provide for the soul he permits to come into the world.....that might well dispose them against conscious efforts to control family size or on occasions to adopt health measures that would reduce illness and postpone death—Moslem doctrine holds that pleasures of the flesh and specially sexual intercourse, are a God-given virtue to be enjoyed and conjugal obligation to be fulfilled—Islam historically put pressure on men to produce numerous children....."

In the study 69.3% of the mothers said that limiting the pregnancies is against their religion but 16.1% did not subscribe to this view and the same number expressed willingnes to limit the number of children. As Siddique writes : "Quran says that procreation is a serious affair for the men like sowing the seed to reap the harvest without injuring the soil" and also "Allah desireth for you ease ; he desireth not hardship for you (2 : 185) and "hath not laid upon you in religion any hardship (22 : 78-quoted from Fagly : 104)."

It is not religion alone which prohibited the use of methods of limiting pregnancies for some mothers. It was stated by 32.2% of the mothers that their husbands and other relatives (and 12.9% reported other people in the community) did not recommend the use of these methods. On further analysis it was found that husbands did not agree to adopt methods to limit pregnancies (because of religious prohibition or complications of the methods) in the case of 25.8% of the mothers and the same was the case with other relatives and people in the community. It could therefore be said that husbands, other people in the community, religion and lack of appropriate methods to limit the pregnancies are all factors playing a negative role in the family pla n ning programme.

Mr. Addeke thinks[1] : "Children act like a social security system and people like to have more children in order to be sure that at least few will survive and the National Surveys also show that couples with four or more children are in favour of limiting the size of their families and the same is shown by the analysis of the data collected in present study. Only 47.1% of the mothers with three children did not want more children whereas 70% of the mothers with four living children and 100% of the mothers with five and above children did not want more children. Not only total number of children in the family makes the mothers realise the need to limit the pregnancies but also increasing number of male children in the family increases the percentage of mothers who did not want more children in the family.

John St. George[3] concluded from his study of the psycho-social factors leading to multiparity that 45% of the grand multipara mothers had from 1 to 7 abortions. In the present study personal or relative's experience with mortality rates have no bearing on the mothers desire for more children.

From the analysis, it is found that a combination of many factors is associated with the multiparity of mothers. Ronald[2] explanins in his diagram that factors which may be biological, social, psychological or cultural effect the fertility in a limited set of variables and writes :— "When one suggests that in a particular society, some particular factors affects fertility—for example, male dominance, the power of the resident mother-in-law, the extended family, bureaucratic work settings, education of women etc., we need always to ask through which combination of the intermediate variables does the factor in question produce a distinctive fertility effect."

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