

Role of Women in Population Education

Mrs. S.A. SAMUEL

WE are living in an era when countries have started recognising that women have an important role in national development. It is equally true in our country. While inaugurating a ministerial level conference of the nonaligned and other developing countries on the role of women in national development our Prime Minister Shri Rajiv Gandhi called for a determined struggle at various levels to accord women equal status and opportunities on a par with men. He said: "We are trying to ensure women's progress in all fields in India. Women's education has been made free upto high school and we want to make women equal partners in building the nation." This bestows a heavy responsibility on the women of India in all aspects of national development.

Specific Role of Women in Population Education

1. Education of Women: Education plays a vital role in the health status of the people. And women's education is of paramount importance. It is rightly said, "Teach a mother to be healthy and she will teach the rest of the mankind". Hence we must concentrate on teaching women the need for containing the ever increasing population. Studies have shown that educated women upto university level have an average of only two children compared to illiterate women who have an average of six children. This has been proved effectively in Kerala. The female literacy rate in Kerala is as high as 65% as against 25% for the entire country. And because of education, increase in age at marriage, expectation of life at birth, decrease in maternal mortality and decrease in crude death rate, infant mortality rates have become 56 per thousand live births, the lowest in the country. The whole process leads the people of Kerala to be aware of the population problems and accept family planning voluntarily. It is noteworthy that Kerala will achieve the targets for health for all before 2000 A.D. In an Indian study children born to illiterate mothers had a mortality rate of 132 in rural areas and 81 in urban area but in the case of literate mothers it fell to 90 and 53 respectively. This is a clear indication for popularising women's education.

Studies have also shown in West Africa that women in the higher income groups have lower fertility than the poorer women; rural women have higher fertility than urban women, and women with even a few years of schooling have a lower fertility

than illiterate women. The more educated the woman, the higher her social status, the greater her economic power, the more she will demand and achieve control of her own fertility. Hence women must try to motivate the Government and the public to accelerate women's education and employment. Every parent must be influenced to afford equal educational opportunities to their daughters like their sons.

Another area that should be added is adult education programmes. Educated women can take this as a challenge to follow the dictum 'Each one teach one' and promote this aspect. This can also be merged with the activities of Mandalas in rural areas and slums which mainly concentrate on social activities, health education, etc.

2. Creating an awareness of the Concept of Small Family Norm among Women and Children: The advantages of having a small family for the health of the mother, children and for providing better educational and other facilities need to be brought to the notice of the public. India's women are not taking full advantage of nation's improving services in these aspects. Studies have shown that the rates of men to women seeking health services was about 5 to one. Why is it that women are not seeking help? Most probably because of their ignorance and increasing household responsibilities, they ignore their own needs. They are also dependent on others often to take them to the centres. Hence more emphasis must be placed on providing information and service at their door-steps.

Children can be taught the implications of a large family on their bringing up and the health of all family members. If they can't influence the elders, at least they will learn to practise when they grow up as today's children are the citizens of tomorrow.

3. Education of Women and Children of the Population Problems and its Effects on Future: The threat to the society due to over population need to be brought to the notice of the public. To the society already crippled with poverty, ignorance and disease, the ever increasing population acts like a bomb which is gradually nearing its explosive stage. We are all victims afflicted by the adverse effects of overcrowding. We are constantly facing a mad rush in all walks of our daily lives, due to overcrowding in schools, colleges, buses, trains, markets, cinema houses, hospitals and what not. Long queues are a common sight everywhere resulting in pollution of air, water, food and improper sanitation. If this is our fate today, think of tomorrow. Deterioration in standards of living is imminent, with problems of food, housing,

This paper was presented at the workshop of the Principals and College Lecturers Panjab University on 'Population Education.' The author is Principal, College of Nursing, PGI, Chandigarh.

clothing, education and health needs. By 2000 A.D. almost 50% of the Indians may go without houses to live in. All the advances we have made after independence have been diluted by our fast growing population.

Childhood education is never a waste. Once I saw too little children watching curiously a herd of piglets running after its mother—One said to the other, "Look, Look, it has so many children. Why is it not eating Nirodh?". The other one retorted, "Fool, who will give it to Pigs"? The first one said "Yes, I didn't realise". He continued, "Yar, if people are to have only one or two children now, by the time we grow up and get married, we can not have even one child". And they laughed. I was glad to note that even children of that age, now know, that there are devices to reduce the number of child-birth. Of course they need proper education. They also know that they have a responsibility to contain the ever increasing population. It is heartening to note that they are not only thinking of the present, but of the future. The concern for future and action at present is what we need. If properly trained, children can be our effective messengers.

Women and children understanding such implications are sure to search for alternatives and solve this problem for themselves and others.

4. *Identifying Personnel who Need Special Attention and Helping them to Adopt Correct Approach*: Women can be engaged in identifying vulnerable groups and specially locating personnel who need specific help. Constant dialogue and counselling is necessary to advise them to adopt correct approach towards their personal problems. Creating a feeling of self confidence in them is must alongwith extending moral support. Cooperation and support of their family members may also be sought where necessary.

5. *Publicising the Agencies Dealing with Such Assistance and Helping them in their Work*: The vastness of the country and the low educational status especially of women are the major causes for people for not knowing the available facilities and resources. A concentrated effort need to be made by women in finding these and disseminating this information to the masses. Government agencies alone can not do this work. Social and private organizations can help in making it a people's movement and assist the agencies in doing their best. If women increasingly use their leisure time for this purpose, it will be a constructive work for the building of the nation.

6. *Reassuring People that Side-Effects are Minor and Rebutting Rumours*: Fear of side effects that may come as a result of adopting family planning measures by a temporary or permanent method keeps many people away from approaching the agencies for help. Often these are based on rumours that may be spread by illiterate or undesirable elements or people who have a strong conviction that it is not a right approach to limit the family. This needs to be taken seriously and efforts made to educate the public. A satisfied user is the best propagator. An association of satisfied acceptors of family planning may be formed in

each panchayat to discuss and solve their own problems and popularise family planning, e.g. Kaludi, a tribal woman in Rajasthan meets eligible women and convinces them on family planning. Her message is useful as she herself underwent sterilisation. Her testimony is taken by women as she is a living example in front of them. Her district has recorded 339 sterilisations in 3 months in 1984.

7. *Reminding Women for Follow-up Service*: The success of any programme depends upon its continuity. Acceptors of family planning services must maintain follow up contact with the agencies so that the right practice can be carried on. Women can take the role of reminding people to do so and also communicate to the agencies of the dropouts. Thus they can serve as the liaison between the agencies and the public in their own areas. As this deals with a very sensitive aspect of human lives, people need a lot of reassurance from the health workers. This is specially true of people who are suffering from infertility and a thorough understanding of these psychological aspects is essential for helping them. They need someone to motivate them to carry on with the follow up services which often takes very very long.

8. *Teaching Women of Healthy Child Rearing Practices*: In the services for the community, the mother and child group constitutes a major portion. President Zail Singh, while inaugurating the 23rd annual conference of the Indian Association for Advancement of Medical Education stressed the need for special attention for women and children. He said that mothers and children tend to be vulnerable to deviations in health and constitute nearly 70% of our population. If we study the health care facilities, we can see that its distribution or fixation of priorities are not in line with it especially in rural areas.

The magnitude of this problem can be seen by studying the statistics of children's survival. Of the 122 million children born each year in the world, more than 12 million die before reaching their first birthday. More than 10 million of these occur in developing world. Special efforts will have to be made to accelerate mother and child care services and reduce infant mortality rate. Women can increasingly participate in this effort. Need for health check-up, proper diet and immunization can be taught to mothers individually and in groups both formally and informally for success.

Every mother is unique in her relationship with her own offspring. The development of the child into an emotionally and physically mature adult depends upon the care the mother provides in an atmosphere of trust and love. The childhood experiences have a strong impression in the minds of people and determine their future relations. For most of the emotional problems of the child, the parents need to be counselled. Abraham Lincoln, born in a log cabin, with a happy go lucky father, repeatedly proclaimed that he owed everything to his mother—his success, fame, position and character. It can be said that 'the hand that rocks the cradle, rules the world, for better

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She/he also has a responsibility to ensure that nursing personnel are not unduly subjected to hazardous practices, e.g. working double shifts, which not only pose a potential threat to their own health and welfare but also expose their patients to the risk of inferior standards of nursing practice as a result of excessive fatigue. The nurse manager has the responsibility to adapt working conditions according to the particular needs of different work environments, such as emergency units, home care, ambulances. Part of these responsibilities may be met by ensuring that an effective channel of communication exists between the nurse manager and those whom she manages.

The nurse manager has the responsibility to provide, or ensure the provision of, adequate training in new techniques or in the use of new equipment, which may form part of an on-going programme of continuing education. A further aspect of this responsibility is the need to ensure that new nursing personnel are properly oriented to the ward, department, community service and/or entire agency in which they are going to work. The nurse manager has the right to expect cooperation in the training and maintenance of acceptable standards of performance on the part of the health service administration and the nursing personnel.

The role of the national nurses' association in the promotion of health and safety in the work place

Many of the problems surrounding the issue of health and safety in the work place are created, or at least exacerbated, by factors external to nursing, over which nurses do not have total control, but which they can influence. An example of this arises when the money allocated to the provision of nursing services is being decided. It is highly pertinent for national nurses' associations to pursue such matters through appropriate channels in support of both the nurse manager and the nurse staff member, whose interests are totally compatible even though approached from differing standpoints.

ICN urges national nurses' associations to :

- defend, promote and recommend ratification of ILO Convention 149 concerning employment and conditions of work and life of nursing personnel, which includes provision of occupational health services for health care personnel (if already ratified, press for implementation);
- defend, promote and recommend ratification of ILO Occupational Health Services Convention (No. 161) which provides guidelines for the provision of such services;
- seek participation in safety committees which may be established in health care institutions;
- promote/initiate/maintain an open channel of communication between nurse employees and nurse managers;
- assist nurses' efforts to negotiate with their employer for improved facilities or working practices by including such provisions in contracts;
- support nurse managers in their efforts to improve standards of care, staffing levels and safety measures by making representations to the govern-

- ment, the employer or any other relevant body;
- promote the development of programmes of continuing education which help to identify potential health and safety problems and how to deal with them effectively;
- encourage and seek support for research in the area of health and safety in the work place of nursing personnel;
- communicate recent research findings to the membership, health service officials and the public at large as appropriate.

Conclusion

Although much progress has been made in the improvement of safety in the workplace, much remains to be achieved and nurses, both individually, and collectively through their national nurses' association, have a vital contribution to make to such activity.

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or worse'. A child when asked by the teacher why God make mother? replied, "because God can't be everywhere". What does it mean? For a child, mother is next to God. Every mother must try to live up to this expectation.

9. *Helping Women to Collectively Work for the Welfare of Women and Children*: Women need to be encouraged to express their problems so that measures can be taken to remedy it. They can be organised in to various groups where they can share their problems and become increasingly aware of its nature. Joint consultation often yields quick results or at least gain an understanding that one is not alone. Socialisation also helps in improving mental health status.

10. *Need to do Surveys or Small Studies on Women's Role and Preparing and Publishing Literature*: Those women who are capable to study the problems and role of women scientifically need to be encouraged to do so and publish results to focus the attention of planners of the country. This can be used as a baseline data for future planning. Literature on women's role is meagre and women must make an effort to prepare it. Women's views on the best number of children also need to be published.

Often we hear women of various walks of lives talk about their own success or failure in this area. Every failure can be used as a stepping stone towards future victory in this field.

I would like to conclude by saying that we women have a lot to do and a long way to go in this direction. Be it victory or defeat, we must be patient, maintain confidence and never lose good cheer in our efforts to establish the rightful place for women in the control of their own fertility. The 15th point in the 20 point programme of our Hon'ble Prime Minister is to "accelerate programmes of welfare for women and children and nutrition programmes for pregnant women, nursing mothers and children". Let us share our responsibility in achieving this national aim and promote population education in the country for the dawn of a better tomorrow.