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Article

A literature based critical analysis on the report population stabilization: The case for Pakistan

Pakistan Journal of Commerce and Social Sciences (PJCSS)

Provided in Cooperation with:

Johar Education Society, Pakistan (JESPK)

Suggested Citation: Nasir, Jamal Abdul; Tahir, M. H. (2012) : A literature based critical analysis on the report population stabilization: The case for Pakistan, Pakistan Journal of Commerce and Social Sciences (PJCSS), ISSN 2309-8619, Johar Education Society, Pakistan (JESPK), Lahore, Vol. 6, Iss. 2, pp. 325-331

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/188061>

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A Literature Based Critical Analysis on the Report Population Stabilization: The Case for Pakistan

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Abstract

Pakistan launched one of the first population control programs in the late 1950s, yet has lagged far behind other countries in effective implementation over the past five decades. The primary purpose of this note is to make a clear case for formulating an integrated and effective population policy in Pakistan. Therefore, this paper presents literature based demographic analysis on a recent report published by Ministry of Population Welfare: Population stabilization: the case for Pakistan (Khan 2010). The discussion presented in this paper should be viewed as the healthy criticism of the issue under debate. In addition, these comments are influenced by previous population research on Pakistan on the basis of the lessons which should be learnt from the previous population planning inputs. The paper presents the chapter by chapter analysis of the report and concludes that there is a weak relationship between family planning input and population policy in Pakistan.

Keywords:

1. Introduction

Pakistan ranks sixth among the most populous countries of the world, with a population of 184.8 million. Among South Central Asian countries Pakistan ranks second in fertility with a total fertility rate (TFR) of 4.0 (Population Reference Bureau 2010), despite having a long established population planning program. Similar population planning programs began in other countries of the region (for example Iran and Sri Lanka) about the same time as in Pakistan but these countries have managed to reduce their population growth much more substantially. To be sure, Pakistan's high population growth offers an unusually large demographic dividend, which should assist economic development; through the low skill levels in the population might reduce the impact of the dividend, and even reshape it so that it becomes a demographic threat (Durr-e-Nayab 2008). Pakistan's demographic transition is on-going: as stated in a recent report published by Ministry of Population Welfare—"Pakistan is in the midst of an unprecedented demographic transition" (Khan 2010, p. 1).

This article evaluates and analyses the Ministry of Population welfare's report in the light of previous population research in Pakistan which is viewed to be scarce in the report, discussion of which is considered rather scarce in the report. The primary purpose of the

discussion presented in this paper is to make a clear case for formulating an integrated and effective population policy in Pakistan. The paper is divided into three sections. Section 2 presents chapter by chapter analysis of the report. Within the chapters the discussion on the controversial items (as mentioned in the report) of interest only is presented. Section 3 contains some concluding remarks.

2. Chapter by Chapter Analysis

Chapter 1: Demographic transition in Pakistan-a description

For any population, the historical shift of birth and death rates from high to low level is referred as demographic transition. The demographic transition is academically portrayed in a standard format showing the historical trends of crude birth and death rates, net migration and rate of natural increase. It is surprising that this standard display is missing in the chapter, whereas two-thirds of the chapter is focused on the results of population projections. This said the correspondence between the title and the demonstration inside the chapter is felt to be satisfactory.

In the report, the population projections of Pakistan are made using two scenarios. In our view these two scenarios are viewed as unrealistic on the basis of the empirical evidence provided by the previous 60 years of population research in the country. In the first scenario, the total fertility rate (TFR) and life expectancy are assumed to be constant which is most likely to be close to the true situation. In the second scenario, it is assumed that the proposed targets of the latest 2010 Pakistan Population Policy (PPP) are achieved (a TFR of = 2.1 by 2030 and a contraceptive prevalence rate of 60% in the same year). This is equivalent to assuming that the implementation of population policy is 100 per cent effective. This is unrealistic for two reasons. First, historically, 1965-1970 is reckoned as the most successful period—so far as implementation is concerned in the 60 year history of the Family Planning Programme in Pakistan (Adil 1968, Adil et al. 1968, Robinson 1978). Even this period, however, did not achieve its target, and all subsequent periods have similarly not achieved their targets. Therefore, it seems most unlikely that targets will be achievement is future. This is a related question about whether only government intervention and the forceful implementation can bring the Pakistani nation to replacement level fertility? The fertility levels in the country surely depend also on the Pakistani nation's absorption or acceptance level to Family Planning policy input. Therefore we suggest that population projections should be taken into account the potential absorption level of contraception. In addition more useful projections could be made by replacing the deterministic approach of the report by a probabilistic approach.

Chapter 2: Demographic Situation of Pakistan-An Analysis

This chapter is focused on: fertility transition and its consequences. The report identifies the 12-year period between 1988 and year 2000 as the period of fastest fertility transition in Pakistan and notably indicates that recently the fertility declined has stalled or stagnated. The idea of stagnation in Pakistan's fertility has recently come under debate (Sathar 2007). We return to this issue later. In the meantime, we make some specific comments regarding to various items of chapter are given below.

Item 2.19: The author has suggested that only the implementation of the family planning services will reduce the fertility rates. Two remarks are presented here in response to this. First, family planning services have been available and operational in the country since the 1960. How much effect have these services had on Pakistani fertility? Previous

studies answered this question by saying they have had rather little effect. Second, why is it that better family planning-services are both necessary and sufficient to motivate the society to reduce fertility level or increase the use of contraception? What about the social understanding of and attitudes towards contraception? In 2006, only 30 per cent of couples, who protecting themselves from fertility by using contraception (National Institute of Population Studies [Pakistan] and Macro International Inc 2008). This probably means that close to 50 per cent of couples are potential family planning users as not all those who have been 'reached' by the family planning policy will be using contraception at any one time. It is stretching credulity to assume that simply by providing family planning services the remainder can be persuaded to imitate them.

Item 2.20: The lack of availability, accessibility and affordability of family planning services was held responsible for a high proportion of unwanted pregnancies among Pakistani women (24 per cent). The most common answer from the Pakistani women to unwanted pregnancy is: that these conceptions were 'up to God'. How does this answer relate to the lack of family planning services? In addition to this argument, is there no mention in the report of the influence of the husband's or mother in law's opinion on women's (lack of) choice about pregnancy which is quite enormous in Pakistani social settings (Masood Kadir et al. 2003)? A typical Pakistani woman might give an answer to questions about unwanted pregnancy along the following lines: 'actually, I have no family planning centre in my area, and I was worried but I got pregnant'.

Item 2.28: The author of the report has suggested that an increase in female paid work participation might reduce fertility on the basis of the previous research on female employment and fertility in Pakistan. Research in the developed world has certainly suggested inverse relation between women's employment and fertility and this relationship seems also to hold in Pakistan. However, through the promotion of female employment is easy to suggest in a formal document it is hard to achieve, particularly in the light of social and cultural norms prevalent in Pakistan.

Chapter 3: Population policy 2002 and program 2003-10

Item 3.1: An allocation of Rs. 5 million is mentioned but the figures provided in literature are different (0.5 million) for the period 1955-60, which needs to be taken into account (Mahmood and Ali 1997, Ali and Zahid 1998).

Chapter 4: Way forward

Item 4.6: A new population policy with clear guiding principles (explaining new goals and targets) is advised in the report. This strategy as a way forward is not a new strategy. It is similar to previously suggested strategies. These past strategies have failed to meet their targets, it is not clear that repeating them will have any greater success.

Item 4.13: In this section, four principles (designated as clear principles) are documented. The interesting thing to note is that these principles are based on the Program of Action of 1994-International Conference on Population and Development. They were retained in the 2002 Pakistan Population Policy. Given the recent stagnation of fertility in Pakistan, and the concomitant failure of the contraceptive prevalence rate to increase, readers may wish to query whether retaining these principles is likely to be the most promising way forward. Table 1 shows the similarities and differences between the 2002 and 2010 population policies of Pakistan. It can be seen that the main features of the two population policies are the same: only some of the numbers and time-frames are different.

Table 1: Similarities and differences between 2002 and proposed 2010-Pakistan Population Policy

Feature	PPP 2002	PPP 2010	S/D Status
Poverty Reduction Plan	Included	Included	Similar
Reproductive Health Plan	-do-	-do-	Similar
Reducing Maternal Mortality	-do-	-do-	Similar
TFR target	2.1 by 2020	3.2 by 2015 2.1 by 2030	
Reduce unmet need	25 per cent Current	from 25 to 5 per cent by 2030	Similar
CPR target	57 per cent by 2012	60 per cent by 2030 (30 per cent in 2010)	

PPP: Pakistan Population Policy

S/D: Similar/Different

TFR: Total fertility rate

CPR: Contraceptive Prevalence Rate

Items 4.26-4.33 (Research and evaluation):

In this section of the report, emphasis is placed on joint coordination of many departments and the restructuring of the ministry. A lesson should be learnt from the past. The proposal risks failing to learn from experience where the implementation of the policy was hindered by frequent shifts of ministries taking place in line with the frequent shifts of the Governments.

Another point made in this section concerns provincial departments as the sole administrative controllers of the Family Planning program. We think it would be better if we mentioned here that the field activities of the Family Planning Program were transferred to provincial governments since 1983. The state of Provincial Governments as administrative controllers has not been finalized in the past 27 years or even in the past seven years (when the Family Planning Program was de-federalized in 2001).

Finally in the annex to this research and evaluation section two sources for generating reliable family planning-statistics are suggested: the National Institute of Population Studies (NIPS) and the NRIFC. This suggestion ultimately leaves readers to view the other Government departments (the Federal Bureau of Statistics (FBS) for example), as producing unreliable statistics for the country. This assertion also increases the credibility of NIPS work because the FBS release the Population Demographic Survey (PDS) reports only. The data release of PDS reports prepared by FBS is an issue of the utmost importance.

Editorial review

The report contains some editorial deficiencies and typographical errors found in text, tables and figures. Table 2 pinpoints the missing titles of tables and figures. The specific details of typographical errors as well as missing bibliographical items are provided in an Appendix to this paper.

Table 2: Table and figure numbers with missing titles in Pakistan population report 2010

Chapter	Table numbers with missing titles	Figure number with missing titles
1	1.3, 1.4, 1.7	6-10
2	-	15-16, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27-31, 34

3. Concluding Remarks

Pakistan's family planning program has a long history and limited success. This article has been written as a contribution to the debate about how to improve it so that its success is more likely to be assured. We hope that these comments help to increase the understanding of readers of the report Population stabilization: the case for Pakistan, and especially of donor agencies who might provide future financial support and those charged for making family planning in Pakistan. The report as it stands largely reflects the author's own understanding and interpretation of population issue in Pakistan, and the author is to be commended and thanked for preparing this formal document published by the Ministry of Population Welfare, Government of Pakistan. Our purpose in this paper is to highlight, through a chapter by chapter analysis of the report weak rapport between family planning input and the behavioral outcomes (in terms of contraceptive use and fertility) in Pakistan. The past sixty year population research and family planning input of Pakistan highlights the key challenge facing policy: will repeating and strengthening the existing policy bring a gradual increase in contraceptive prevalence and hence a steady reduction in fertility in the Pakistani nation? The answer of course mainly depends on how the mind-set of the people changes, but lessons can be learnt from previous experience and previously implemented target-oriented or forceful family planning policies for example. Before proposing policy, policymakers should reflect on the history of the Family Planning Program. There has been little encouragement since the 'glamour period' of the Program in 1965-1969. Since then, the views of religious alliances opposed to family planning have created a wide gap between contraception and Pakistani nation. Ayub Khan' (President of Pakistan during the 1965-1969 period) made enthusiastic efforts to promote population planning has faced a strong protest from religious parties (Khan 1996), indeed the religious protest against family planning played a key role in the dismissal of Ayub's Government. The literature comments on the lack of change in fertility levels of Pakistan during 1970s but it does not highlight the core reason of no change (Shah et al. 1986). The views of religious leaders in Pakistan have important influence on the reproductive decisions of individuals (Nasir and Hinde 2011).

As far as the recent views of fertility stagnation are concerned, the correctness of these views should be examined by answering the following questions. Are the fertility estimates robust enough over the past twenty five years population research of Pakistan?

Is there anything ignored in measuring the fertility estimates, which might lead to revised estimated showing a different picture, in that the fertility transition of the Pakistani nation is not stagnant but continuing to decline slowly?

Answers to these questions may perhaps clear the way for future population planning of Pakistan.

APPENDIX

Chapter 2, section age at marriage (line 4): (Fig-23) needs revision

Chapter 2, section unmet need, item 2.21 (line 1-2): Complete sentence needs revision 'recent surveys....'

Chapter 2, section women's status and empowerment, item 2.25 (line 3): typographical error; 'tern' should be written as turn

Item 2.25 (line 7-8): [5.8] and [3.0] should be written as [TFR: 5.8] and [TFR: 3.0] respectively

Item 2.27 (line 11): '(the World Bank)' year in the citation and the bibliographic details in the provided list of bibliography are completely missing.

Item 2.28 (line 4-5): citation of '(Sathar and Kazi 2001)' do not match with the reference of '(Sathar and Kazi 1998) in bibliography

Item 2.41 (line 5-6): readers were referred to a graph in the sentence 'The rate of urbanization...', but the graph is missing in the document

The bibliographic details of Bongaarts and Feeney (1998) cited in the text but were completely missing in the list of bibliography provided.

Bibliography item no. 2: Tauseef (2009) bibliographic details missing

The following two unnecessary bibliographic details require one detailed reference (bibliography item 12 & 15): National Institute of Population Studies (NIPS) and Macro International Inc. 2008. Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2006-07; and National Institute of Population Studies. (2008). Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2006-07. Islamabad: National Institute of Population Studies (with Macro International, Inc., Calverton, Maryland USA). June 2008.

Acknowledgement

The authors are grateful to Dr Andrew Hinde, Head of the Division of Social Statistics and Demography, University of Southampton, United Kingdom, for giving valuable suggestions during the preparation of manuscript.

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