

# **Fertility pattern among working women in formal and informal sector**

## **Introduction**

Research findings in developed countries has suggested that the participation of women in salaried work force has depressing effect on fertility, however the findings in least developed countries show different results in different settings<sup>1</sup>. The impact of women's work on fertility has gained scientific attention in developing countries as these countries on one hand are experiencing the high fertility and declined mortality resulting into population growth and on the other hand with growing urbanization, are undergone through various socio economic changes among the women.

Though under growing urbanization and competitive labour market and employment situation and increased nuclear family structure, our society still is living in such a set up where for example use of cheap labour and parental surrogates in joint families to provide childcare and economic and social benefits of children specially a son, is prevalent. As the researches suggested inconsistent findings in developing countries regarding the women work force and the fertility, more in depth and specific attention is needed to understand the impact on fertility, of women labour force participation and other various factors such as education, family structure, status of women in workplace etc.

Different national level surveys showed that total fertility rate of Nepal is in decline from 4.6 in 1991 to 3.1 in 2006<sup>2</sup>. This could be explained in terms of increasing age at marriage, age at first birth, ideal number of children, desire to stop child bearing, family planning methods, education and socioeconomic status etc. However, changing role of women in economy and society may have distinct effect on the fertility behavior. However, the labour force participation of women, which could have marked effect on fertility, needs to have careful examination because as seen in many developed countries and some of the developing countries<sup>3</sup> showed similar results.

The unmet desire for the children is one of issues not addressed properly so far. Competition in labour market and lack of incentives during pregnancy and childbirth in workplace, changing women's status and family structure, education and socio economic situation may have impact on declining fertility in many of the developing countries where many women live with unmet desire for more children. These issues need to be discussed thoroughly in our context.

Data from surveys show that the desire to stop childbearing continues to increase, from 59 percent among currently married women in 1996 to 66 percent in 2001 and 71 percent in 2006<sup>2</sup>. As we can see that 16.5 percent of women in Nepal and around 71 percent women in Kathmandu are engaged in economic activities through salary/wage or own economic enterprises<sup>4</sup>, it is necessary to understand whether the declining fertility is the choice of these women or the result of the problems they face in their profession due to their childbearing.

Hence this study is designed to understand the fertility pattern and unmet desire for the children among women participating in labour force in Kathmandu.

## **Objectives**

- To describe the fertility pattern among women participating in labour force.
- To determine the factors associated with unmet desire for the additional children among these women.

## **Survey area**

Kathmandu Metropolitan City is one of the densely populated areas of Nepal, where most of the people from different areas of the country cumulate for various political and socioeconomic reasons. Around 71 percent of women in Kathmandu are engaged in salary/wage or own economic enterprises. In the proposed study, women working in different government and private institutions as well as informal sector are studied.

## Sample Size

Total of 197 married women with at least one child, working in different fields and between age group of 15 to 49 are selected from different households of Kathmandu metropolitan city. Housewives are excluded from this study. An interview with these women using semi structured questionnaire is conducted to collect data. Data analysis is done by using statistical software and tools like Excel and SPSS.

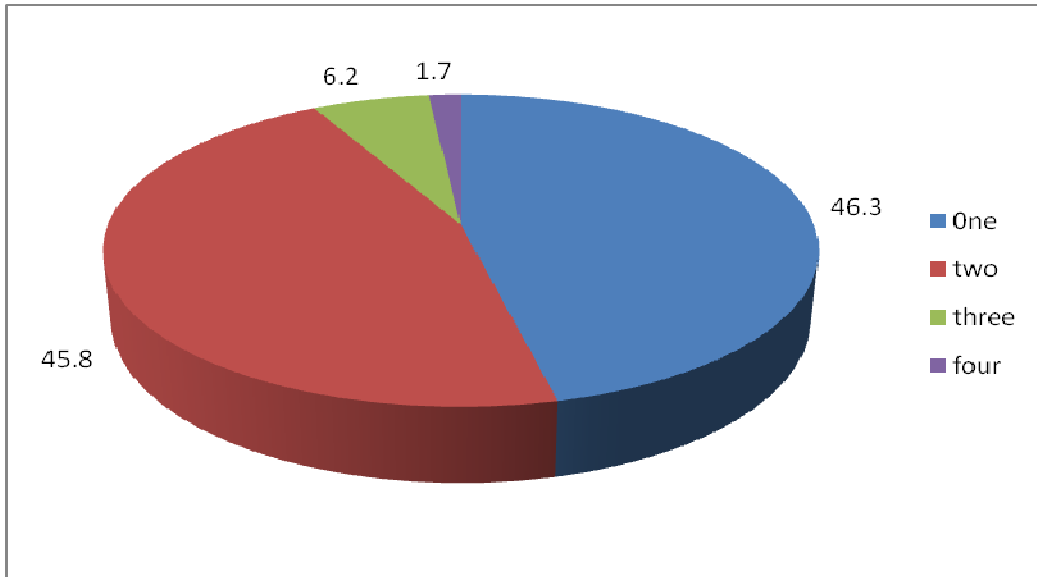
## Result

**Table no. 1: Age at marriage for the respondents, their husbands and age at first birth for the respondents**

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>
<b>Age at marriage of the respondents</b>	<b>22.7</b>	<b>4.2</b>
<b>Age at marriage of the husbands</b>	<b>26.2</b>	<b>4.0</b>
<b>Age at first birth of the respondents</b>	<b>23.3</b>	<b>6.3</b>

Source: Field survey 2007

**Fig. 1: Percent women with different number of children**



Source: Field survey 2007

**Table no. 2: Unmet desire for additional children by different background variables**

VARIABLES	ODDS RATIO	P VALUE
<b>Age</b>		
25-29	8.23	0.04
30-34	4.94	0.10
35-39	0.81	0.85
>40 (reference)		
<b>Monthly income (Rs.)</b>		
1500-6000 (reference)		
7000-15000	2.95	.06
25000-33000	7.62	.04
<b>Sector</b>		
Informal	0.19	0.06
Formal (reference)		
<b>Type of family</b>		
Joint	0.50	0.23
Nuclear (reference)		
<b>Desired number of children</b>	7.44	0.001
<b>Actual number of children</b>	0.30	0.04

Source: Field survey 2007

## Discussion

We have heard so many cases of women of developed countries, where the women in paid work force, due to the career objectives delay the child birth and hence denied of motherhood as a result of their late reproductive age. However one quarter women in Nepal have first birth by 18 and half of the women give first birth by age 20 and almost 90% have given first birth by age 25. This study shows that 12.8% women give birth by age less than 19 and 7.6% women at the age of 20. At the age of 25, 11.2% women and at the age of 28, 10.2% women

give birth. Results also suggests that there is a positive relationship between educational attainment and median age at first birth, but the impact of education is more obvious at secondary and higher level of education. Women with no education or only primary education give birth to their first child at least three years earlier than women who have an SLC and higher level of education<sup>2</sup>. This study results show that mean age at first birth is 19.8 and 20.4 among illiterate and literate women respectively. But for secondary, higher secondary and graduate or above women, it is 23.4, 22.3 and 24.4 respectively. Similarly, among women working in informal sector the age at first birth is  $23.2 \pm 4.1$  as compared to formal sector with  $24.7 \pm 4.2$  ( $p=0.04$ )

There is no significant difference found in number of children among women working in formal and informal sector. Majority of the respondents have one or two children. Women from joint and nuclear family do not have significant differences in this regard.

Women who do not want another child have given different reasons. Among which time factor (39.7%), fulfillment of their ideal number of children, age factor, having big children etc. (37.6%) and economic conditions (22.7%) are the major concerns. Majority of women do not want additional children even they get the maternity facilities from their respective organizations. In addition they wish for other women that their organizations provide certain facilities such as paid leave of at least 6 months so that they can breastfeed their babies and reduction of working hours for certain time is another facility they wish for child rearing. This shows that these women want certain policies that can be beneficial for the women to continue their job even in vulnerable period of pregnancy and lactation, and even when they have to look after their small children. Moreover they are aware about the fact that breastfeeding is essential exclusively at least for six months. And they understand the professional difficulties in child bearing for other women too.

The education and economic status have prominent effect on fertility. The mean ideal number of children of currently married couple is declining from 2.9 in 1996 to 2.4 in 2006<sup>2</sup>. In these ten years our country has passed through various political and socioeconomic changes. These changes brought about a lot of differences in women's status as well. The

movement of people from remote rural areas to some semi-urban or urban areas may have influenced women to have smaller families for various social and economic reasons. Furthermore, exposure to modern means of communications and easy access to modern family planning methods also may have had an impact.

The average ideal number of children of all these women is 1.78 with standard deviation of 0.71 whereas the average actual number of children of these women is found to be 1.63 with standard deviation of 0.67 ( $p = .03$ ). This shows that ideal number of children for working women is significantly higher than the number they really have. This shows their unmet desire to have additional children.

Around 13 percent of the respondents want additional children however due to various reasons they do not intend to have another children. Out of these reasons, time factor (61.5%) and economic condition (23.1%) are found to be the major causes. Though they are employed, they worry about the economic difficulties for more number of children. This shows their awareness as well as the economic pressure of upbringing the children in current era of urbanization and competitive labour market. Another major factor is time management. Because giving birth to a child means a vulnerable pregnancy period followed by sleepless nights and backbreaking work burden for many years as well as compromise of professional life. Similar results are seen for a study from Pakistan<sup>3</sup> which shows professional difficulties during child bearing and rearing are the main reason for less number of children among employed women.

All the illiterate women do not want to have additional children whereas women with bachelor or masters degree desire to have more children.

Formal sector women have higher desire for additional children though not found significant ( $p=0.06$ ). Women in age group of 25-29 ( $p=0.04$ ) followed by 30-34 ( $p=0.10$ ) years of age have higher desire for more children as compared to women in more than 40 years of age. Women who earn 25000-33000 rupees per month have significantly more desire for another child ( $p=0.04$ ). However, women with more than 33000 income per month, do not have higher desire for more children. This may be due to the nature of job of these women.

Generally, women working in international organizations earn more money but at the same time their nature of job is temporary. So they can quit job during pregnancy and infancy of their children.

Increased desired number of children is accompanied with significantly more unmet desire for additional children ( $p=0.001$ ) and increased actual number of children significantly decreases unmet desire for additional children( $p=0.04$ ).

Majority of the women i. e 67.5% received help from the family members like mother and mother in law to take care of their children during their office hours however these women have to maintain the triple burden of home, office and childcare. Few women had to quit the job for child rearing.

Though found insignificant, the women in joint family have lesser desire for additional children as compared to women in nuclear family ( $p=0.23$ ). Women in nuclear family may not get child care support from their family specially in laws, this can be one of the reasons for limiting the child birth in spite of the desire.

## **Conclusion**

The women with high income are found to have unmet desire for additional children. The women in economically active age of 25 to 34 have higher desire as compared to other age group. Time factor and economic conditions play vital role in fertility pattern. Majority of women who already have only one child regardless of sex, do not want another child. All the women with two or three sons do not want other child. However 20% of women with two daughters still like to have another child. This could be due to the son preference. Family help in child rearing in the form of parental or in laws is found to be the privilege for these women.



## References

1. Kolllehlon, K. T. women's work role and fertility in Liberia. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (1984), pp. 31-45
2. Nepal Demographic and Health Survey. 2006. Population Division, Ministry of Health and Population, Government of Nepal, New ERA, Nepal, Macro International Inc. Calverton, Maryland, U.S.A.
3. [Kazi S](#), [Sathar Z.A](#). Informalisation of women's work: consequence for fertility and child schooling in urban Pakistan. 1993. Entrez PUBMED.
4. Women in Nepal Some Statistical Facts. 2006. Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Nepal, Kathmandu.