

# The Effect of Status of Women on Fertility in an Urban Setting of Tamil Nadu

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This paper throws light on the status of women (at the household level) and fertility linkage with data drawn from 300 currently married women residing in a small town of the state of Tamil Nadu, India. Cross-tabular, hierarchical and multiple classification analyses have been used. Results, suggest that all the dimensions of the status of women have played a crucial role in influencing their cumulative fertility (children ever born).

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## **Introduction**

Several empirical studies in the field of population science research have confirmed that improvement in various dimensions of the status of women reduces the level of fertility, maternal mortality, infant and childhood mortality and promotes rapid implementation of family planning programme ( Mahadevan, 1989; Mason, 1984; 1995.). In view of this fact, enhancement of women's status has emerged as an important policy objective in the development plans and population policies of many less developed countries.

In demography, however, the role of the status of women did not receive adequate attention till recently. Most of the empirical researches on the status of women-fertility relationship dealt with the 'proxies' (Mason, 1995) namely, women's age, age at marriage, education, employment/occupation and age difference between husband and wife. Thenmozhi (1993) has proposed a framework for studying the status of women-fertility relationship wherein these proxy measures have been taken into consideration as Status Affecting Variables (SAVs) and are thus highlighted as the factors contributing to raise women's status at the family level. Of course, it has been widely discussed and argued by researchers that the status of women

cannot be described or expressed by a single quantitative measure and is thus multidimensional in nature. It also highlights that the women's status (autonomy) at the household (familial) level is the crucial one which will exercise a greater bearing on their reproductive behaviour.

In view of this background, this paper makes an attempt to examine and discuss the effect of the selected components of the status of women (at a familial level) on their fertility behaviour.

### **Theoretical and Empirical Evidence**

In the present context, the status of women has been defined in terms of their autonomy in certain personal, material and domestic affairs. These include: consultation of women for finalising their marriage; women's control over jewels brought from natal family; extent of sex-segregated interaction; extent of restrictions imposed by husbands on women to do certain tasks; and the extent of women's participation in decision-making on household matters. Of course, strictly speaking, all these five are not separate but interdependent components of women's status.

#### *Consultation of "Women for Finalising their Marriage*

In the Indian context, arranged marriages are quite common and, thereby, the brides are rarely consulted in selecting their life partners or in finalising their marriage. Thus, the system of arranged marriage takes away all the freedom of two concerned partners, especially that of the bride. Such lack of (or little) autonomy of women on the one hand leads to early age at marriage (Audinarayana, 1990; 1993) and on the other hand, it encourages the subordinate status of women (Dubey and Bardhan, 1972) at the familial level even after marriage, which in turn may increase their level of fertility.

#### *Control over Jewels Brought from Natal Family*

Women's control over economic and material resources is considered to be one of the basic aspects of female autonomy (Dixon, 1978). In India, where a patriarchal society exists, women do not get a share in immovable property such as house or land. However, it is of general practice in this part of the country that women are sent to their in-laws' place with gold jewellery, mostly as part of dowry or at times as gift(s) from the natal family. Nowadays, it has become a status symbol too. But once the woman reaches the husband's place (after marriage), control over such jewellery may not likely to be in the hands of the

concerned woman, because, in most cases, the husband holds (controls) the purse and even the control in other economic/material resources of the family. In such a situation, the woman experiences subordinate status, which is likely to lead to higher fertility.

#### *Extent of Sex-segregated Interaction*

Interaction of women with men is not that common in the Indian society. The cultural/traditional codes followed by women namely, taking meals only after the husband/all other male members of the family; absence, or negligible participation in the discussions when husband/male members are discussing either amongst themselves or with close male relatives/friends; negligible help of husband in household chores; not accompanying husbands either for shopping or social functions and so on, reflects the sex-segregated interaction from both within and outside the family. In a way, these practices indicate the physical and interactional segregation of the sexes through observation of *purdah* or female seclusion (Basu, 1989; Dubey and Bardhan, 1972; Dyson and Moore, 1983). This shows the women's inequality with men and the lower status of women, which may exercise a greater bearing on their fertility.

#### *Extent of Restrictions Imposed on Women by Husbands to do Certain Activities (Tasks)*

With the dominance of a patriarchal and patrilocal society in India, within the family, women are mostly in a subordinate position, which may be expressed in a variety of restrictions imposed by husbands on their wives in performing certain activities (Mukherjee, 1974). These include: going to shopping and films; spending money on women's giving clothes, cosmetics, and so on; entertaining their friends/guests; and giving financial assistance to their relatives. Majority of these activities are usually not allowed by husbands or are sometimes allowed only with proper permission, which indicates their personal autonomy (Visaria, 1993) at the familial level.

#### *Extent of Women's Participation in Decision-making on Household Affairs*

Majority of Indian women have a greater say in matters like preparation of food, care of children and home, though they do not have the necessary power and authority in all spheres of home-making. This also reflects their subordinate role in the familial level and this, in turn,

is likely to have a greater bearing on their level of fertility. With this assumption in mind, the respondents have been asked to what extent they have been involved (participated) in decision-making related to certain day-to-day household matters and based the responses to these items an index has been calculated.<sup>1</sup>

Empirically, in India, a few studies have taken into consideration one or the other and/or at times all the above components of the status of women (autonomy), and examined their role on influencing the fertility (Audinarayana and Thenmozhi, 1992; Dyson and Moore, 1983; Jejeebhoy, 1991; Mukherjee, 1974; Sundar, 1989; Thenmozhi, 1993; Visaria, 1993; Vlassoff, 1992). Most of these studies have supported the fact that the higher the level of female autonomy (status) at the familial level, lower will be the fertility and vice versa at different levels of significance.

For the present study, all these dimensions of the status of women, have been taken into consideration as predictor variables in determining fertility besides the duration of marriage as a covariate.

## Methodology

### *Data Source and Variables Used*

Data used for the present analysis have been taken from the study entitled 'Women's Status and Fertility in an Urban Setting of Tamil Nadu', carried out by the author during 1991-93. Information was collected from 300 (randomly selected) currently married couples — both husbands and wives (wives aged between 15-44 years)— of Suler Town of, Coimbatore District, Tamil Nadu, who had at least one living child at the time of survey.

To examine the effect of the selected dimensions of the status of women (at the familial level) on fertility behaviour, the following variables have been used.

### *Dependent Variable*

Children Ever Born (CEB)                      Actual Number of Live Births

### *Covariate*

Duration of Marriage                              Actual Completed Years

### *Predictor Variables*

Consultation of Women for Finalising their Marriage	Categorised as Not Consulted and Consulted
Control over Jewels Brought from Natal Family	Categorised as Not Brought Jewels, No Control and has Control
Extent of Sex-segregated Interaction (Index)	Pooled Score Categorised as Higher (12), Moderate (13-16) and Lower (17+)
Extent of Restrictions Imposed on Women by Husbands to do Certain Activities (Index)	Pooled Score Categorised as Higher (9), Moderate (10-13) and Lower (14+)
Extent of Women's Participation in Decision-making on Household Affairs (Index)	Pooled Score Categorised as Lower (27), Moderate (28-33) and Higher (34+)

### *Techniques Used for Analysis*

For the purpose of analysis, the differentials in CEB are examined, through bivariate (cross-tabular) analysis, across the selected dimensions of status of women controlling for duration of marriage. In the next stage, the multivariate techniques of hierarchical analysis and Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA)<sup>2</sup> have been used to identify and examine how strongly (in terms of quantitative assessment) each of these selected dimensions of the status of women has contributed to the variation in fertility.

### *Socioeconomic Profile of the Sample Women*

The data presented in Table 1 indicates that an overwhelming proportion of sample women (94 per cent) are Hindus and a greater majority belong to the backward class (71 per cent) as per the Tamil Nadu Government Order on classification of castes. The sample women seem to be better educated. While the percentage of illiterates is only 11, eight per cent were educated upto primary level (1-4 standards) and around 28 per cent upto middle school (5-8 standards) level. Interestingly, majority of them (44 per cent) have studied upto high school/higher secondary school level (11-12 standards) and about one-tenth (nine per cent) have completed college education.

TABLE 1  
Socioeconomic Profile of the Sample Women

<i>Socioeconomic Characteristics</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<b>1. Religion</b>		
Hinduism	282	94.0
Christianity	12	4.0
Islam	6	2.0
<b>2. Caste</b>		
Schedule Caste/Scheduled Tribes	16	5.3
Most Backward Castes	29	9.7
Backward Castes	213	71.0
Forward Castes	40	13.3
<b>3. Education Status</b>		
Illiterate	33	11.0
Primary (1-4 standards)	24	8.0
Middle (5-8 standards)	83	27.7
High School/Higher Sec. School	132	44.0
College and above	28	9.3
<b>4. Work Status</b>		
Non-Working	189	63.0
Working in Unorganised Sector	62	20.7
Working in Organised Sector	49	16.3
<b>5. Monthly Family Income (in Rs.)</b>		
1,500 or less	128	42.7
1,501-2,500	90	30.0
2,501 and above	82	27.3
Total	300	100.0

In terms of their work status they are somewhat lagging behind. For example, a large majority (63 per cent) of them are not participating in any income generating activities either within or outside the home. On the other hand, one-fifth (21 per cent) of them are engaged in the unorganised sector, that is, as labourers (including agricultural), service workers (maidservants, and so on) and petty business. The remaining one-sixth (16 per cent) are working in the organised sector of employment, that is, as textile mill workers, clerical and related work, teachers, and so on. Thus the sample women are not well placed in economic pursuits, in spite of living in urban areas, where the avenues for employment are comparatively higher. Economically, the sample women are moderately better off. For instance, while 42.7 per cent belonged to a monthly family income bracket of Rs. 1,500 or less, 30

per cent belonged to the Rs. 1,501-2,500 income group and the remaining 27.3 per cent to higher income group, that is, Rs. 2,501 and above. The average family income of the sample women is Rs. 1,840. On the whole, socioeconomically, the sample women may be placed at a moderate level and thereby, their status would be expected to be at moderate to higher level in their respective families.

TABLE 2  
Mean Children Ever Born of Women by Various Dimensions of Status of Women and Duration of Marriage

<i>Dimensions of Status of Women</i>	<i>Mean Children Ever Born</i>			<i>No.</i>	<i>'F' Ratio</i>	<i>Level of Sig.</i>
	<i>Duration of Marriage</i>					
	<i>10</i>	<i>11+</i>	<i>Total</i>			
<b><i>Consultation of Women for Finalising their Marriage</i></b>						
Not Consulted	1.93	2.52	2.37	113		
Consulted	1.57	2.23	1.85	187	33.53	0.000
<b><i>Women's Control over Jewels brought from Natal Family</i></b>						
Not Brought Jewels	2.00	2.44	2.19	36		
No Control	1.96	2.57	2.36	136	30.36	0.000
Have Control	1.34	2.07	1.67	128		
<b><i>Extent of Sex-segregated Interaction (Index)</i></b>						
High ( $\leq 9$ )	1.88	2.81	2.50	106		
Moderate (13-16)	1.61	2.13	1.87	97	33.15	0.000
Lower (17+)	1.55	1.98	1.73	97		
<b><i>Extent of Restrictions Imposed on Women by Husbands to do Certain Activities (Index)</i></b>						
Higher ( $\leq 9$ )	1.89	2.81	2.50	82		
Moderate (10-13)	1.66	2.29	2.05	107	27.19	0.000
Lower (14+)	1.54	1.98	1.71	111		
<b><i>Extent of Women's Participation in Decision-making on Household Affairs (Index)</i></b>						
Lower (27)	1.86	2.63	2.35	96		
Moderate (28-33)	1.62	2.23	1.91	114	30.93	0.000
Higher (34+)	1.51	2.24	1.89	90		
Total	1.65	2.38	2.05	300		

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Children Ever Born: Bivariate Analysis***

Table 2 presents the results based on the bivariate analysis about the average number of children ever born by various dimensions of women's status controlling for the duration of the marriage. At the outset, these results highlight that all the five components of the status of women namely, consultation of women for finalising their marriage, women's control over jewels, extent of sex-segregated interaction, extent of restrictions imposed on women by husbands to do certain tasks and extent of women's participation in decision-making on household matters have explained significant (at 0.001 level) variations in CEB and also in the expected direction. Further, it may also be seen that the differentials in CEB are considerable across the duration of marriage categories. However, the point to be borne in mind here is that, through this analysis it is only possible to examine the gross effects of each of the independent (predictor) variables on CEB inclusive of the effects that may be attributed to other variables. Therefore, in the next section, multivariate statistical techniques have been applied for the same data.

### ***Children Ever Born: Hierarchical Analysis of Covariance***

Table 3 provides the results of the hierarchical analysis of covariance of the children ever born on their duration of marriage as covariate, and the other five dimensions of status of women, which are listed in the earlier section, as predictor variables.

The hierarchical analysis of covariance results indicate that all the predictor variables (including the covariate) together have explained 47.2 per cent variation in CEB. Further, it also highlights that 'women's control over jewels' contributes 10.5 per cent of the total variation in the CEB (significant at 0.001 level). The 'extent of women's sex-segregated interaction', and 'consultation of women for finalising their marriage' have also exhibited a high predictive power (7.0 and 4.8 per cent, respectively) in explaining significant (at 0.001 level) variation in CEB. On the other hand, though the 'extent of women's participation in decision-making' and the 'extent of restrictions imposed on women by husbands' have shown gross independent effects on CEB (through bivariate analysis), controlling for other preceding variables used in the analysis, their role in influencing the CEB is observed to be at moderate (significant at 0.005 level) and low

(significant at 0.010 level) respectively. As expected, the covariate — marital duration — explains the highest variation (22.9 per cent out of 47.2 per cent) in fertility.

TABLE 3  
Hierarchical Analysis of Covariance of Children Ever Born on Various Dimensions of Status of Women

<i>Variables Added at Step</i>	<i>Sum of Squares Added at Step</i>	<i>D.F. Added at Step</i>	<i>Mean Squares</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Partial R<sup>2</sup> x 100</i>	<i>Multiple R<sup>2</sup> x 100</i>
<b><i>Covariate</i></b>						
Duration of Marriage	43.31	1	43.31	125.24*	22.87	22.87
<b><i>Predictor Variables</i></b>						
Consultation of Women for Finalising their Marriage	9.09	1	9.09	26.27*	4.80	27.67
Women's Control over Jewels Brought from Natal Family	19.88	2	9.94	28.75*	10.50	38.17
Extent of Sex-segregated Interaction (Index)	13.27	2	6.63	19.18*	7.01	45.18
Extent of Restrictions Imposed on Women by Husbands to do Certain Activities (Index)	1.58	2	0.79	2.29!	0.83	46.01
Extent of Women's participation in Decision-making on Household Affairs (Index)	2.27	2	1.13	3.28+	1.20	47.21
<b><i>Explained</i></b>	<b>89.40</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8.94</b>	<b>25.85+</b>	<b>47.21</b>	
<b><i>Residual</i></b>	<b>99.95</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>0.35</b>			
<b>Total</b>	<b>189.35</b>	<b>299</b>	<b>0.63</b>			

Notes: ! Sig. at .010 level, + Sig. at .05 level and \* Sig. at .001 level.

#### *Children Ever Born: Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA)*

Table 4 gives the information on the mean number of children ever born to women under study in the following two forms — unadjusted and adjusted — for variation accounted for by all the independent variables and covariate. Along with the category of means, the table also provides an Eta ( $\eta$ ) value, which is a common correlation ratio associated with the set of unadjusted category effects of each category.

The Eta ( $\eta^2$ ) indicates the proportion of variance as explained by a given predictor variable (all categories combined). Associated with the adjusted category effects for each independent variable, there is a partial correlation ratio, which is represented by Beta ( $\beta$ ) in the table. These Beta ( $\beta$ ) values can be valued as standardised partial regression coefficients. Finally, the MCA provides a multiple 'R' value, which is a multiple correlation between the dependent variable and all factors and the covariate.

TABLE 4  
Results of Multiple Classification Analysis

<i>Dimensions of Status of Women</i>	<i>No. of Women</i>	<i>Mean Children Ever Born</i>	
		<i>Unadjusted (<math>\eta</math>)</i>	<i>Adjusted for Independents+ Covariate (<math>\beta</math>)</i>
<b><i>Consultation of Women for Finalising their Marriage</i></b>		(0.32)	(0.03)
Not Consulted	113	2.38	2.09
Consulted	187	1.85	2.03
<b><i>Women's Control over Jewels Brought from Natal Family</i></b>		(0.41)	(0.30)
Not Brought Jewels	36	2.20	2.33
No Control	136	2.36	2.24
Have Control	128	1.68	1.77
<b><i>Extent of Sex-segregated Interaction (Index)</i></b>		(0.43)	(0.17)
Higher ( 2)	106	2.50	2.23
Moderate (13-16)	97	1.87	1.96
Lower (17+)	97	1.74	1.94
<b><i>Extent of Restrictions Imposed on Women by Husbands to do Certain Activities (Index)</i></b>		(0.39)	(0.12)
Higher ( 9)	82	2.50	2.19
Moderate (10-13)	107	2.05	2.03
Lower (14+)	111	1.72	1.96
<b><i>Extent of Women's Participation in Decision-making on Household Affairs (Index)</i></b>		(0.31)	(0.12)
Lower ( 27)	96	2.40	2.19
Moderate (28-33)	114	1.93	2.00
Higher (34+)	90	1.83	1.96

Notes: Multiple  $R^2 \times 100 = 68.70$ ; Multiple  $R^2 \times 100 = 47.2$ ;  
Grand Mean = 2.50; Number of Cases = 300.

The MCA results reveal that 'women's control over the jewels brought from natal family' has a substantial positive influence on the number of CEB. The unadjusted values show that those women who have control over the jewels brought from their natal family (through marriage) had borne conspicuously less number of children (1.68) than those women who did not have such control (2.36) and had not brought jewels (2.20). Further, the values of the common correlation ratio ( $\eta$ ) and the partial correlation ratio ( $\beta$ ), associated with this variable in determining fertility, are observed to be 0.41 and 0.30 respectively. This indicates that even after making an adjustment for all the variables and covariate used in the model, the explanatory power of 'women's control over jewels', in determining the CEB is, more or less, constant and very high. The table further shows that the variation in CEB is clear across the categories of their predictor variable. Thus the results indicate that women's independent control over the jewels brought from their natal family would enhance their status because of their economic accessibility and thereby motivate them to curtail the number of children.

The unadjusted category of means reveal that the 'extent of women's sex-segregated interaction' has a significant positive influence on their fertility that is, lesser the sex-segregated interaction higher the women's status and in turn lesser the number of children. The average number of CEB to those women who have been categorised as higher, moderate and lower sex-segregated interaction are found to be 2.50, 1.87 and 1.74, respectively and the value of 'n' for this variable is as high as 0.43. However, after making adjustments for the other dimensions of the status of women and covariate, the prediction power of women's sex-segregated interaction reduced considerably. Similarly, the influence of the 'extent of restrictions imposed on women by husbands to do certain tasks' and the 'extent of women's say in decision-making in household matters', exhibited a higher influence on CEB (unadjusted). After being adjusted to other variables and covariate, their predictive power has been reduced substantially. In general, these results highlight the fact that lesser the restrictions on women by the husband and more the women's involvement in decision-making in household matters (which would enhance their status in their respective families and thereby take a decision to have lower number of children and act accordingly) lesser the number of children.

As far as the influence of the 'consultation of women for finalising their marriage' on CEB is concerned, the unadjusted means showed a clear negative relationship between these two variables that is, those women who were consulted at the time of their marriage would exert a higher status which, in turn, lead to lower number of children. The common correlation ratio ( $r$ ) is noted to be 0.32. However, after making allowances for all the other predictor variables plus the covariate, the relationship between these two variables turned out to be very weak ( $\beta = 0.03$ ).

### **Conclusions and Implications**

From the foregoing analysis and discussion it is explicit that the various dimensions of the status of women at the familial level, in general, have played a crucial role in influencing the cumulative fertility. In the light of these findings it may be suggested that programmes and policies have to be formulated and implemented to raise the status of women at the familial level. This has to be done mainly through the eradication of social customs, beliefs and traditions which undermine the value or importance of women in the family and at the societal level at large. The establishment of voluntary organisations, social education to young girls and mass media communication should be directed against arranged/forced marriage by parents, discrimination shown towards females (women's subordinate status) both inside and outside household, and against confining women within the four walls of home.

Women, in general, may be encouraged to attain higher education and to participate in economic activities, especially in the modern sector. Such programmes motivate women to have greater exposure and interaction outside the familial world, and be economically independent. This would enhance their status at home, thereby granting their greater autonomy in decision-making on their marriage as well as about their domestic affairs. All these measures, in the long run, will facilitate fertility decline.

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## NOTES

*Extent of Sex-segregated Interaction (Index):* 1. Taking meals with husband or other male family members (Take lastly = 1; Depends = 2; Eat together = 3); 2. Present in the same room when husband is discussing with male members of the family; 3. Participation in discussions with male members; 4. Husband helps wife in household chores; 5. Accompany husband in social functions (Never = 1; Sometimes = 2; Always = 3) and 6. Going to shopping alone or with husband (With female elders = 1; With husband = 2; Go alone = 3). (Pooled minimum score per respondent is 6 and the maximum is 18).

*Extent of Restrictions Imposed on Women by Husbands to do Certain Activities (Index):* 1. Going to shopping alone; 2. Going to film; 3. Spending money on cosmetics, clothes, and so on; 4. Entertaining friends and guests; and 5. Financial assistance to relatives (Does not allow = 1; Allows sometimes = 2; Always allows = 3). (Pooled minimum score is 5 and the maximum is 15).

*Extent of Women's Participation in Decision-making on Household Matters:* 1. Spending money on food; 2. Spending money on clothes; 3. Health and medicine; 4. Inviting guests; 5. Decorating house; 6. Leisure time activities; 7. Spending money on radio; television, and such capital goods; 8. Family size; and 9. Family planning (Husband alone = 1; Husband more than wife = 2; Both husband and wife = 3; Wife more than husband = 4; and Wife alone = 5). (Pooled minimum score is 9 and the maximum is 45).

## 2. Details of Techniques Used for Analysis:

(i) *Hierarchical Analysis of Covariance:* The hierarchical analysis of covariance is a special form of covariance analysis where the covariate and factors are introduced in a fixed order. The analysis shows for each variable, the contribution to the degree of freedom and the sum of squares after controlling for variables listed earlier (but not for variables listed afterwards). The ratio of the mean square for a variable to the residual mean square, after introducing all the variables, gives an F-test for the net effect of the variable after controlling for previous variable(s). The ratio of the sum of squares for a variable to the total sum of squares provides a partial  $R^2$  measuring the degree of association between the variable and the dependent variable, or the proportion of variance explained by the variable, after taking into account the previous variables. Accumulation of partial  $R^2$ 's provide a multiple  $R^2$ , measuring the proportion of variance explained by all the variables considered up to that stage (Sohail, 1981; Bhargava and Saxena, 1987).

(ii) *Multiple Classification Analysis:* The multiple classification analysis (MCA) is a special case of analysis of variance with no interaction terms, and multiple regression with dummy variables. Here the predictor variables can be nominal, and a non-linear relationship between any predictor and the dependent variable is permissible. The main advantage of the MCA technique is that it provides the grand mean of the dependent variable as its constant term and a table of category of means for each factor or predictor variable expressed as deviations from the grand mean. Thus, they reflect the magnitude of the effect of each category of a predictors. These category effects may be obtained in three different forms namely unadjusted, adjusted for variations accounted for by the succeeding predictors, and adjusted for variations in the predictors and for differences in the covariate as and when they are appropriate (Bhargava and Saxena, 1987; Sathe and Murthy, 1987).

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