Thesis Abstract

Introduction

The rationale behind the emergence of single child families in India is unexplored. In a highly populated country like India, where TFR is around 2.4, it is interesting to investigate why some couples opt for only one child.

Objectives

The objectives of the study are: First, to examine the levels, trends and determinants of single child families in India and West Bengal. Second, to explore the rationale behind the choice of the women to have single child. Third, to examine whether there was a trade-off between career prospects and number of children among urban working women. Fourth, to assess whether the emergence of single child families is an indication of changing attitudes towards son preference among urban couples.

Data and Methodology

Both primary and secondary data were utilized in the study. The three rounds of National Family Health Surveys (NFHS) undertaken in 1992-93, 1998-99 and 2005-06, were utilised. In the present analysis, we have only considered women who have completed their reproductive life. Kolkata was chosen for primary survey, as the city is having higher proportion of single child families. Total 330 women were interviewed from four selected wards of Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC). To fulfil the stated objectives of the study, uni-variate, bi-variate and binary logistic regression techniques have been used. In-depth interviews with single child mothers were conducted which provided valuable insights.

Findings

At national level, the proportion of single child families is slowly but gradually increasing. It is the urban, rich, educated and employed couples who are at the forefront of this demographic phenomenon. Women’s age at marriage and age at child birth are two important determinants of single child families. The most important factors cited by couples to opt for single child are low household income and high cost of education. Twelve percent of the couples prefer to have single child family choice. This shows the emergence of new family behaviours among urban couples. About one-fifth of the women stated that their child is having problems due to lack of siblings. Most common problem among the children was self-centeredness and loneliness. Working women are more likely to associate with the one-child model as compared to those who are not working. The women with high work pressure tend to have one child, even if they wanted more children. Out of households surveyed, 56 percent have single son. Significant proportion of women believe lack of child care support at home as the reason for opting for single child. The study reveals that most couples jointly took the decision to have only one child and have no regrets now. However many are concerned about future living arrangements and the required support in old age.