CHAPTER VIII
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The desire to have children is found in almost all societies of the world. However, the desired number and composition of family vary from one group to another and within the same cultural group from time to time.

Fertility is on the decline in almost all the countries of the world. In fact, most of the industrialized countries have reached below replacement level fertility. In less developed countries, there is variable success in fertility decline. In India too, the family size has shrunk from over six children in the 1950s to an average of 3.39 in the 1990s. It is still on the high side as compared to the replacement target fixed for the close of the century.

Declining fertility is affecting the size and composition of the family. Consequently, new forms of families are emerging—families without children, single child families, two-child families, families with same sex children and families with different sex children. As the childbearing pattern of Indian society is undergoing a change, it is worthwhile to study families with different size and composition in a comparative manner.

A systematic survey of available literature on population studies shows that research initiatives on this theme have not been pursued so far, even scantily. Therefore, the major focus of the present study is to compare families with same sex and different sex children from the socio-demographic perspective. While comparing the groups with different size and composition of families, the major focus has been on understanding the socio-economic and demographic background of the reproductive couples, their fertility experiences and the strategies used to achieve a given size and composition of children. A
comparison of inter-birth interval is also made between families with children of same sex and of different sex based on sex, parity and order of birth. Further, this study attempts to delineate the gender based value of children for a comparative analysis of size and composition of family. Some exploration into the status of women issues related with the size and composition of family has been done here. Further, the problems of adjustment faced by SSC and DSC as perceived by the parents have been discussed in this study.

All the currently married women residing in urban area of Chandigarh, in the age group 15-44 years, having two or more surviving children and married for ten or more years constitute the universe of this study. A multi-stage sampling procedure has been adopted to select 600 couples. Out of the total sample, 300 couples have two or more children with different sex; out of the remaining 300 couples, 179 have SO and 121 have DO.

Both secondary and primary data have been used to complete this study. The secondary data constitute the various reports, journals, unpublished dissertations and published materials.

The primary data have been collected with the help of interview schedule. The main schedule elicited information on socio-economic and demographic background of the couples, their current status and reproductive history. Information on value of children, self and societal perception on status of women in the context of fertility related issues were sought in the sub-parts of the schedule. Besides the respondents, also interviewed separately were their husbands and elderly members residing in the family particularly the mother-in-law. The data was collected over a period of nearly one year.
Coding plans were prepared to transcribe all the information contained in different schedules. Several items of information were compressed for the development of indexes and generation of new variables. The data was screened with the help of a computer programme for its authenticity and errors. The SPSS package has been used for data analysis in the present study. Various two-way and three-way tables have been prepared for this study and appropriate statistical tests carried out. Quantitative analysis has also been supplemented by qualitative data wherever necessary.

The present study has been planned into seven chapters, each relating to the major objectives of this study.

In analyzing the socio-economic and demographic background, it has been hypothesized that there are likely to be differences across the three groups. It is expected that couples with SSC would be significantly different on socio-economic and demographic indicators compared to DSC. On demographic variables, couples having DO are likely to have more children on an average compared with other groups. Further, it has been hypothesized that respondents with DO are more modern, more educated, gainfully employed holding high prestige occupations, having a high income and also a high level of living as compared to other groups.

While studying the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the couple, the findings indicate that couples across the three groups have more or less a homogeneous background. The respondents are of middle age, i.e., 36.38 years, and their spouses are four years older. The mean age of the respondents and their husbands is more or less similar in all the three groups. The mean age at marriage of the respondents is 20.16 years and of their spouses 24.67
years. A comparative analysis shows that women having SSC got married at higher age than those who have DSC. As the age at marriage is lower among respondents having DSC, therefore the duration of married life is also higher for this group as compared to the other two groups. The average duration of married life is 16.23 years for the total sample.

Preference for a particular sex of children plays a dominant role in determining the family size. As expected the average family size is lower among respondents having SO than the other two groups. A greater proportion of respondents with DSC have three or more living children as compared to couples having SSC. The average family size is 2.79 children.

Inter-generational analysis shows that respondents come from a larger family than their husbands, though statistically the differences in family size is not significant. In the respondents’ generation the sex ratio (Females/1000 males) in the husband’s family is relatively lower across the three groups. In parents’ generation, there is no consistent pattern of sex ratio. Thus, the analysis indicates that there is a changing trend not only in size and sex composition of family over a generation, but also the family composition of the husband has greater reflection on his own family formation.

In the total sample, a large majority of respondents have attained some level of education. The mean level of schooling is more or less the same for all the three groups. However, a greater proportion of mother having SSC have college or higher level education as compared to DSC. Within SSCF, the percentage of mothers attaining college and higher education is higher among couples having SO. Thus, the findings reject the proposition that a greater
proportion of mothers having DO will be relatively more educated than the mothers of the other two groups.

When the husbands’ educational background is analyzed no differences are found across three groups. This indicates that wife’s education has relatively more bearing on the size and composition of family than the husband’s. Level of education and type of schooling is an important indicator of modernity (Thakur, 1991). It has been observed in the study that respondents across the three groups on average have improved their educational qualifications from the time of marriage till the current study. The study reveals significant differences between respondents having SSCF and DSCF when the type of school is taken into account. A higher proportion of respondents having SSC had their schooling at public or private institutions as against government institutions. It may be indicated that within the SSCF a relatively higher proportion of respondents in the DO group had their formal schooling in public and private schools as compared to the respondents in SO group. The finding of this suggests that, in relative terms respondents in the DO group are more modern than those in the SO group or in DSCF.

As far as gainful employment and occupational prestige is concerned, the study shows that a higher proportion of respondents in SSCF were working at the time of marriage compared to DSCF. Within the SSCF, statistically significant differences in occupational prestige of the respondents have been observed. More respondents with DO were engaged in high prestige occupations than those with SO. Thus, the hypothesis that a higher proportion of respondents with DO would be engaged in high prestige occupations at the time of marriage is supported by data.
Between the time of marriage and the present survey, an increase in the proportion of respondents engaged in gainful employment is found. This increase is accompanied by a decline in high prestige occupations. No inter-group differences are observed in this trend.

The change in occupational prestige from the time of marriage to the present is both—in the number of women seeking entry into gainful employment and in the quality of occupation into which they were entering. A relatively larger expansion in employment of females occurred in medium prestige occupations than the high prestige ones and, as such, the trend observed in this study is no surprise. Moreover, when husbands’ occupational prestige across the three groups is compared over a period of time since marriage, no significant differences are observed. In other words, this study shows that the structure of female employment has undergone a change as compared to male employment. Therefore, it is the occupational status and prestige of the females which plays an important role in accepting the SSC.

The income level of the family and the family composition are found to be statistically significant. The income level of the SSCF is higher than the DSCF. However, within the SSCF, it is higher among SO group. This is contrary to the proposed hypothesis. The analysis of the level of living shows that SSCF have higher level of living as compared to the DSCF. Among the SSCF, SO have higher level of living. The analysis on religious background and caste prestige do not show any inter-group differences. This indicates that there is no cultural bias influencing the size and composition of family in the study area.

The analysis of the background of the couple reveals that there is socio-economic compatibility between husband and wife across the three groups. Inter-
generational analysis with respect to family size and composition, level of education and female employment reveals significant changes over a period of time across the three groups. It has been found that the SSCF are quite different from the DSCF in many of the socio-economic and demographic indicators discussed above. Further, within the SSCF, there are differences between families with SO and DO. The DOF are more modern as measured by type of school and more gainfully employed status. Families with SO, on an average have higher income level, higher level of living, more education, and have smaller family size. These socio-economic and demographic differences by family size and composition have not been revealed by earlier works, and this study documents these differences between the three groups. It also provides foundation for further exploration in this direction.

The fertility history of the respondents reveal that on an average the number of pregnancies and live-births and surviving children are the lowest among couples having SO, followed by families having DO, but are highest among families having DSC. The last group appears to have ended up in having larger number of children in the process of achieving a balanced family.

Generally, it is presumed that the incidence of induced abortion compared to the other groups is relatively higher among couples with DO as they often wish to have a son. Subsequently, several studies show that such couples often undergo sex-determination test and abort female foetuses. Our study also partly agree with this trend as incidence of sex-determination followed by abortion of female foetus is reported largely from DO group. However, the findings of the study also show that the rate of induced abortion per thousand pregnancies is highest among families with SO as compared to the other groups.
After having two sons which is the most preferred size of the family the couples increasingly showed the tendency to terminate further pregnancy. Not a single instance has been observed where couples with SO deliberately resorted to choose female births after two or three sons. These reproductive experiences observed in the study belie the impressionistic observation of higher abortion rate among DO group.

In the total sample IMR is 32 per thousand live births which is on the higher side compared to the one prevailing in the study area. In this study the IMR is observed to be 50 per cent higher in DO group. In case of the SO group it is 30 per cent lower. Thus, this study reinforces the view that parental discrimination leading to infants deaths become particularly marked when baby girl already have sisters.

The forgoing analysis reveals that reproductive experiences related to foetal wastage vary across the three groups with different composition of family. These experiences have not been fully documented in the literature but often odd impressionistic statements relating to foetal wastage are made occasionally. This study not only documents the pattern of foetal wastage among three groups but also corrects the distorted view relating to the reproductive experiences of couples having DO.

In the urban middle class the quest is to achieve a desired composition of family within its most preferred size. So often one goes in for two children without making a deliberate attempt to achieve a balanced family consisting children of both sexes. Though, in several cases couples may consciously resort to strategies for having a balanced family within a small family norm of two
children. By and large not much difference in the timings of first two births may be observed across groups with different size and composition of family.

However, when the desired composition of the children is not achieved within first two or three births, couples may resort to strategies leading to difference in the timings of subsequent birth. Therefore, the analysis of inter-birth interval is likely to reflect on the similarities and differences in the reproductive strategies of the couple across three groups.

The mean birth interval is 30.75 months in the total sample for all births. No significant differences are observed between the three groups. The mean interval between marriage and first birth for the total sample is 21.40 months. More or less all the groups in the study have similar waiting period for becoming parents from the status of a conjugal couple. Significant differences are observed in the second birth interval between SSC and DSC. The former group have their second child six months later on an average than the latter group. This enhanced time gap between the first and second child among couples with SSC is indicative of the conscious effort to achieve a balanced composition of children with a small family size norm.

The study finds that parents of two sons considerably delay having a third child compared to the other groups, but those having three daughters considerably delay the subsequent births of children. It seems that couples having two sons feel satisfied with the size and composition of family and often postpone or avoid having additional births, while those having two or more daughters, equally are afraid of taking the risk of having an additional birth lest it may be a daughter again, though their desire to have a son is not weakened. It is
for this reason that strategies adopted by couples with different family composition vary across groups particularly after the second or third child.

The last birth interval indicates the recent reproductive experiences of the couple in the sample. This study shows that mean length of last birth interval is significantly higher in DO group as compared to other groups. It is of interest to observe here, that though the postpartum amenorrhea related to last birth interval is significantly higher in DO group, but the mean duration of breastfeeding is lowest among them. As a matter of fact, the trend in the relationship between postpartum amenorrhea and mean duration of breastfeeding appear to be of inverse type in DOF, contrary to the trend observed in the literature. However, as the frequency and intensity of breastfeeding is also a critical factor in postpartum amenorrhea it seems that daughters are breastfed for a shorter period, but intensely resulting in longer duration of postpartum amenorrhea, as against sons who are breastfed for a longer time and also supplemented by bottle feeding/other liquid foods. This trend probably explains the nature of relationship between postpartum amenorrhea and mean duration of breastfeeding observed in this study and also points at the higher incidence of infant mortality among the DO group.

Present age and age at marriage of the respondents are two demographic variables which have been examined for differences and similarities of mean birth interval by family composition. The trend observed in this study shows that both these variables have a positive influence on the mean birth interval at the second and higher order births. Those who are young tend to space their births narrowly compared to those who are married later. However, no consistent pattern of difference in age at marriage and birth interval emerges
across the three groups in this study. But when all the births are taken into consideration, there is an indicative trend of inverse relationship in age at marriage and birth interval among SSCF and positive relationship in DSCF.

This study shows that younger women space their children relatively more closely than those who are at the end of their reproductive period. When all the births are taken into consideration, the latter group has on an average more space of about four to six months between births than the younger group, though they have relatively smaller family size. This may be a new trend—complete the desired family size in less time and be free to participate effectively in non-reproductive activities. The present age of the women is positively related with mean birth interval at third and higher order births in DO group but no consistency is found in birth interval relationship between these variables in other two groups.

Educational level of the respondents is positively related with the mean birth interval at third and higher order births in the total sample. The consistency in this trend is found among SSC group, but not in DSC group. In SSCF, highly educated respondents have not only large number of children among DO group, but there is a positive relationship in the level of education and birth interval at higher parity level.

Gainful employment status of the respondents do not show any significant differences in the birth interval when all the births are taken into consideration. Even the differences are insignificant in the mean interval of first two births between working and non-working respondents in all the three groups, though the working women on an average have their second child six months later than the non-working women. However, it is in the third and higher order
births the differences between SSCF and DSCF begin to appear. Interestingly, this study shows that working mother with SO delay their third child for a considerably longer time as compared to those having DO. As a matter of fact, working mothers in the DO group have in fact delayed the third and higher order births for a longer time as compared to those having SO who do so after the second birth.

When the husband's occupational prestige is considered to analyse the mean birth interval, a positive relationship is found between the two variables for all the births as well as the second and higher order births. The study shows that there are not much differences in the mean birth interval by family composition when husband's occupational prestige is taken into account.

It is quite clear from this study, that wife's employment status is more sensitive than husband's occupational prestige in influencing the mean birth interval by family composition. Similarly, the analysis of data on mean birth interval by family income and level of living reveal a positive relationship when all the births are taken into consideration. It is quite pertinent to observe here that the trend of positive relationship in family income and mean birth interval is observed across all family compositions from second order births onwards. But the same trend is smoked when level of living as an influencing factor on mean birth interval is considered. In that case the positive relationship between birth interval and level of living is clearly visible in DO group from third and higher order births, but inconsistencies in the pattern are observed in other two groups.

Current use of contraception is highest in the SO group as compared to the other two groups. However, the proportion of couples adopting terminal method is highest in DSCF. As a matter of fact, users of spacing methods have
longer birth interval in all the three groups. Within the SSCF the difference between users and non-users disappear after the third birth in case of SO, but are consistently found in the DO group even at higher order births. This shows that there is a persistent effort by the parents in the DO group to restore a balance in the sex composition of the family even at the risk of having a large family.

Further, the study also reveals that foetal wastage/pregnancy wastage is an influencing factor not only in accounting the birth interval among users and non-users but also in subsequent efforts to achieve desired size and composition of family. Interestingly, the study shows higher birth interval among non-users with pregnancy wastage upto the third birth in all the three groups. The mean birth interval at third and higher order births is significantly higher among non-users and users of contraception with history of pregnancy wastage in the SSCF as compared DSCF.

This study clearly shows that variation in socio-economic and demographic characteristics exist with respect to their using strategies for achieving a balanced composition of family. The analysis of inter-birth interval clearly points out that whereas couples with SO delay considerably from the second birth onwards, but the DO group have one more child before they significantly delay in having another child. This pattern is consistently found among couples with DO even having gainful employment, higher education status and higher family income. Thus, the study clearly shows that between SSCF the second birth is a critical point to correct the composition of family for SO, whereas it is third birth for the DO group. However, in case of DSCF, different pattern is observed as compared to SSCF. It may be pointed out that pattern of mean birth interval with respect to socio-economic background more
closely fits with the other studies in case of DSCF, but there are interesting variations among SSCF. This study has attempted to highlight the differences in a modest way. Further, investigation and replication of studies in other geographical and cultural areas shall be rewarding information for construction of strategies for fertility regulation in the light of size and composition of families.

The notion of ideal and complete family may overlap or differ a great deal among different populations. While the notion of complete family implies expectation of number of children to constitute minimum sets of relationship within the family units, the ideal family refers to the preferred size and composition of children. However, the ideal family may or may not end up in the actual family the people have. The study has tried to analyse the perception of ideal family size and complete family size among respondents.

The findings reveal that the ideal family size of the total sample is 2.1 - demographically this number depicts replacement of parents by children and zero growth of population.

Inter-group analysis supports the proposition that ideal family is higher among families having DSC compared to SSC. The preference for a male child is universally reported in all the three groups. The ideal family size and its composition has undergone a change over a period of time.

A moderate correlation is observed between actual family size and ideal family size for the total sample as well as in DSC group, whereas it is low for groups consisting of SSC. This study shows that couples may review their family choices from one birth to another depending on the sex of the child as well their
own socio-economic status. This is particularly borne out by the data in this study, for in SSCF, as their actual family size has less bearing on the ideal family size they desire.

This study shows there is complete agreement on the ideal family size between husband and wife and the finding is supported by other studies done in India. Analysis also indicates that the perception of elderly members with regard to the ideal family size is similar to that of the respondents. This shows that over a period of time the perception of elderly members who themselves had large families has changed with regard to ideal family size. There is compatibility in thought formation of husband and wife as also between younger and older generation. There is also compatibility on actual and ideal family size.

The study reveals that the notion of a complete family size varies across respondents having DSC and SSC. The actual family size is greater than the complete family size in the total sample. However, the actual family size of SSCF is very close to the notion of complete family. No inter-generation differences in perception of a complete family by elderly members and that by the couples are found. The data from the study also shows that along with the changes in the perception of reproductive couples, the elderly member residing with them also tend to accept the ongoing changes more readily. They do not seem to be bothered by the fact that some pairs of kinship may be missing in the subsequent generations due to shrinking family size. Such patterns of change in family size and composition may induce structural changes in family and kinship areas of a society in future.

It is generally presumed that women with no sons expect to have an additional child in an attempt to balance the family. The data from this study also
reveal that among the DO group, 15 percent respondents expressed a desire to have a son against only one percent among the DSC group. However, it is noted that a larger number of husbands desired to have a male child as compared to the wives. This indicates that although women are more keen to restrict their fertility, they have to yield to the pressure either of their husbands or other family members to bear more children than they wish to.

It was felt that the notion of complete family size could not be truly reflected by the respondents as often most of them do not distinguish between an ideal, actual and a complete family. Therefore, in an attempt to know whether the respondents feel that their family size is complete or incomplete, information was collected on this issue. The study shows that a large majority of respondents with DSC and SO felt that their families are complete in terms of size and composition. However, 40 percent of the respondents in the DO group did not think that their families are complete. This shows that the presence of sons is inevitable for the completeness of the family in Indian context.

There is an indicative trend on changing attitude of people towards the family size as majority of the respondents in the total sample stated that the family size is decreasing as compared to what it was ten years ago. Inter-group differences are observed.

Questions on how may children make a family ‘too large’ and ‘too small’ provide important clues about family size norms. Respondents perception of large and small family has undergone a change. Nearly half of respondents consider that three children constitute a large family whereas 36.50 percent thought that four children are too many. Greater proportion of respondents having DO and DSC consider four or more children as too many, while in the SO
group this number was three or more. On an average 3.6 children constitute a large family.

Regarding the measure of a small family there is hardly any difference between the three groups as over 90 percent of them think that one child constitute ‘too small a family.’

Desired family size provide information about normative limits of family size. The desired family size is about two children, though it is higher in the DSC group than the SSC group. Majority of the respondents desire to have first a male child and the second, a daughter thereby indicating a desire for a balanced family. One thing is clear from this study that majority of respondents desire the first to be a male child. This ensures a balanced family even an ideal one with any subsequent birth.

In order to know whether respondents are satisfied with the existing size composition of family an index of satisfaction was developed on the basis of six statements. This study shows that, but for one-third respondents in the DO group, a large majority of others are satisfied with their existing composition of their families. One of the most critical components in determining the size and composition of family is the way in which society holds value with respect of children. In our society like other patriarchal ones sons are preferred than daughters due to various reasons.

Studies on values of children have been carried out in various cultures but there is no consistent pattern as to why one sex is preferred over the other. As this study is focused on respondents with different size and composition of families, it was therefore of interest to have comparative view on the VOC across
three groups. Therefore, several statements both pro sons and pro daughters were incorporated to formulate a comprehensive index on VOC in this study.

This study indicates that there are no basis to hold that desirability of son is linked with their economic value to the family like old age security and contribution to the well being of family.

Equally revealing is the fact that daughters are not considered a burden for giving them dowry in marriage. Daughters are desired to provide help and support in household work whereas dependence on sons is gradually diminishing. For half of the respondents sons are not needed to inherit the property.

As a matter of fact, that positive role of daughters to look after the parents selflessly in their old age is highlighted in all the three groups by majority of the respondents. However, the role of sons to provide physical security to the family and to continue family name is still favoured by respondents in all the three groups.

Presence of a daughter to give emotional support to the family and provide companionship to mother is still considered of greater importance, whereas bearing a son is a psychological fulfilment of the reproductive role of the women.

Taking several values together, an index of VOC was developed. The analysis of data on VOC and family composition reveals that quite often respondents reflect favourable attitude to male and female children according to their own family composition. Respondents having DO more often favour girls on VOC index and those SO the boys. Similarly, those having DSC favour both
sons and daughters. Thus, this study shows a greater consistency in one's family composition and reflection on VOC.

The analysis of VOC with socio-economic and demographic characteristics show some interesting patterns. A higher proportion of respondents in the age group 40-44 years favour girls, while those in younger age group favour boys in all the three groups. Age at marriage also influences the VOC. Among those married between 20-24 years, a majority in the DO group favour boys. Present age and age at marriage are significantly related to VOC. Educational level of the respondents highlight that those who have college and higher level education are often favourable to girls. Gainfully employed respondents engaged in high prestige occupations favour boys in DO and DSC groups while in SO group most of them favour girls.

The study shows that non-terminal method of fertility control are being practised by those who favour boys, while terminal method is most popular among those favouring girls or both sexes. Inter-group comparison shows that within the SSCF the use of non-terminal method is highest among those favouring girls in SO group, while in DO group it is highest among those favouring both sexes. Lastly, in DSC group it is the highest among those favouring SO. Thus, a greater degree of variation in the current use of contraception by VOC is observed across three groups.

In this study the status of women is determined on the basis of their gender related VOC. The finding shows that most women feel that bearing a son enhances the status of women in family and society. In this study, relatively higher proportion of respondents having DO indicated that their status in undermined in the absence of bearing a son for the family. However, no one
among the three groups stated that the birth of a female child enhances the social status of women.

In this study it was of interest to know to what extent the self-perception of women with a given size and composition of family differ with that of societal perception. A comparison of gender related status of women shows that the respondents do not significantly vary with respect to evaluation of their status across three groups. However, the societal views represented by their husbands and their elderly members towards gender related status of women are significantly different across three groups when compared with self-perception of respondents.

The study concludes that the male dominated value structure in the society is still dominant and even in the transitional phases of family size, there is no indication of its dilution.

Further, it is observed that in relative sense, women are prepared to accept the given composition of family, but it is the husband or other members in the family who exercise pressure on the women to bear male children particularly among those groups who have successive births of DO.

Regarding the socio-economic and demographic characteristic some interesting patterns are observed. The findings show that women in younger age group are found to be relatively more conservative than older people with respect of the value of having son. Inter-group comparison show that in DO group, younger women are more modern, while in the SO group the middle aged women have a broader outlook. Age at marriage tends to be inversely related with conservative dimension of woman's status.
Educational level of respondents by status of women reveals a different picture. Respondents whose level of education is upto high school and above are relatively more modern as compared to respondents who have a lower level of education. However, in the SO group, the level of education is neutral in influencing the status of women. In DO and DSC groups there is a different pattern in level of education and status of women. In context of gainful employment, a majority of the respondents are traditional irrespective of their gainfully employed status. In SSCF occupational prestige is positively related with modern view status of women.

An attempt has also been to know whether the problems of adjustment of children vary across their sex composition. In this respect, it is found that in the total sample no variation among respondents is observed in pointing out the adjustment problems of children. However, inter-group comparisons show that the problems relating to bringing up of SSC vary with those of DSC. Within the SSCF, among couple having DO, more than half of respondents feel that the problems somewhat vary, while in SO group very small proportion of respondents support this contention. Among the various listed problems quarrelsomeness is the most salient in all the three groups.

Implications of the Study

The study has been conducted in a limited area in an urban setting. The population living in the peripheral localities like slums and squatters as well as in the rural areas have not been included. Therefore, generalizations drawn from the study have limitations. Similarly, studies in other areas covering both rural, urban and floating population would provide better understanding of the similarities
and differences among the groups having different size and composition of family.

Inspite of limitations, there are some indications of the study, both for research and policy areas. During the discussion, whereas reference for undertaking studies on several sub-themes relating to family size and composition have been pointed out in the main text, it is the latter which needs to be pointed out here.

Several misconceptions relating to the couples having SSC particularly DO have been examined and the findings clearly contest the popular notions held by people relating to couples with SSC.

The study does not show significant variability in socio-economic characteristics of the respondents among the groups having different composition of children. However, some differences in the reproductive experiences have been observed between SSC and DSC, as well as within the groups and between SSCF. These differences need further data support from studies in other areas and have important bearing on policies relating to reproductive health and family demography.

Couples with DO, have relatively higher fertility than those having SO, but higher abortion rate is observed within the latter group. The practice of sex-determination test and female foeticide is mainly among those who have two or more children without a son. Although, sex-determination test is legally banned in this part of the country to check female foeticide, but it has no guarantee that people would not resort to the practices clandestinely. Moreover, one really does not know that the fall out of legal ban on sex-determination test particularly for
those who wish to have a balanced family composition may result in increasing the incidence of female infanticide. Policies and action program related to the reproductive health should incorporate these facts in their formulation and implementation. Variations in reproductive experiences and fertility control strategies have also been observed across the three groups. The variation is particularly marked in the use of terminal and non-terminal method of contraception. This study suggest prevalence of non-terminal method is higher in SSCF and that of terminal method in DSCF. Moreover, the non-users are found to be higher in DO group. These findings provide the base line information for identifying target groups for family regulation policies and intensifying method specific motivation to achieve a balanced family.

Analysis of VOC provides a wide range of information on several dimensions. Although, the birth of male child is considered to be the most desired event in the reproductive history of the family, there has also been a positive attitude emerging for female children. Over a period of time it has been found that economic basis for preferring a male child have bit weakened, but the socio-cultural base is still dominant. On the other hand, daughters are appreciated for their positive contribution to the family both economically and emotionally. These trends are indicative of a shift in gender based VOC. Consistent efforts both by the state and other agencies to encourage this trend needs careful planning and implementation. Gender neutral values need to be projected and discovered through studies for influencing the attitude of people towards couples having different family compositions.

This study has also marginally reflected on the son related status of women and also on the problems of rearing children in different family
compositions. Although, further studies are required on these issues to know about the full extent of knowledge and implications, but the preliminary findings of this study suggests that these issues are perceived differently by people in different family compositions. Undermining one’s own status in the absence of a son, particularly among those who have DO is a matter of concern. In order to improve their status, such persons require positive orientation through family counselling and self-assurance of being successful in their reproductive performance. Family counselling also needs to be made available to every reproductive couple not only for reorienting their attitude towards a balanced, desired and complete family size but also towards resolving the problems of rearing children, particularly within SSCF.