

**CHAPTER VIII**

**DECISION-MAKING AND FERTILITY BEHAVIOR**

Conceptually 'status' being a multifacet construct, it is decided initially to employ multiple criteria rather than to attempt a composite measure of status. The criteria selected are (a) educational level, (b) employment status, (c) economic status, (d) perception of one's status within the home, (e) decision-making role with regard to domestic affairs and family planning matters, and (f) number of restriction imposed on one's activities and freedom. Each of these aspects of status is measured by a series of thoroughly pretested questionnaire items suitable inclusion in the precoded interview schedule which is used for data collection.

#### INTRA-SPOUSE COMMUNICATION AND FERTILITY

The communication between husband and wife on various aspects related to family living is considered here as intraspouse communication. The items included under intra-spouse communication are : (a) husbands/wives work, (b) future plans, (c) family affairs, (d) sex matters, (e) family size, (f) financial matters, (g) current events, (h) recreation and entertainment. An index on all these items is also prepared to know about the intra-spouse communication on various aspects of family life. The responses are given a score of one, two and three for the three items namely do not talk, talk occasionally and talk frequently.

The score for each respondent is the sum of the points assigned to each of her responses. These scores have been grouped into three equal classes and then assigned as low status, intermediate status and high status groups respectively.

**TABLE 4.1**  
**PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF WOMEN BY AGE AND INTRA-SPOUSE COMMUNICATION**

Intra-spouse communication	Present age of women				Total	
	30 years & below		31 years & above		Working Women	Non-Working Women
	Working Women	Non-Working Women	Working Women	Non-Working Women		
Least communication	05.33 (4)	09.29 (13)	04.80 (6)	26.67 (16)	05.00 (10)	14.50 (29)
Occasional	37.33 (28)	70.00 (98)	40.80 (51)	50.00 (30)	39.50 (79)	64.00 (128)
Frequent communication	57.34 (43)	20.71 (29)	54.40 (68)	23.33 (14)	55.50 (111)	21.50 (43)
Total	100.00 (75)	100.00 (140)	100.00 (125)	100.00 (60)	100.00 (200)	100.00 (200)

Note: Figures in the parenthesis indicate the number of wives.

Significantly (Significant at 1 per cent level) a greater proportion of (55.5 per cent) the working women maintain frequent intra-spouse discussion as compared to non-working women (21.5 per cent). On the

otherhand while 39.5 per cent of working women had only occasionally communicated with their spouses a very high proportion (64.0 per cent) among non-working women, ofcourse, similarly communicated. The non-working group out number the working group among the least communication categories. Thus we may confirm the hypothesis that husband and wife communication increases with the social status of women.

**TABLE 4.2**  
**MEAN NUMBER OF LIVE BIRTH BY AGE OF THE MOTHER AND**  
**INTRA-SPOUSE COMMUNICATION**

Intra-spouse communication	Present age of women				Total	
	30 years & below		31 years & above		Working Women	Non-Working Women
	Working Women	Non-Working Women	Working Women	Non-Working Women		
Least communication	02.25 (4)	02.54 (13)	02.83 (6)	04.94 (16)	02.60 (10)	03.86 (29)
Occasional communication	01.82 (28)	02.38 (98)	02.78 (51)	04.23 (30)	02.44 (79)	02.81 (128)
Frequent communication	01.58 (43)	02.00 (29)	02.71 (68)	04.00 (14)	02.27 (111)	02.65 (43)

Note: Figures in the paranthesis indicate the number of wives.

The Table 4.2 represents the relationship of intra-spouse communication with fertility behaviour. The hypothesis fully confirmed here uniformly among working

and non-working young and old women is that there is an inverse relationship between the extent of intra-spouse communication and fertility behaviour. The working women as a whole who have high intra-spouse discussion had 0.33 and 0.17 live births less as compared to those who have very less and occasional intra-spouse communication respectively. On the other hand, the over-all fertility of the non-working women who have high intra-spouse communication had 1.21 and 0.16 live births less as compared to those who have least and occasional intra-spouse communication respectively.

Further the over-all fertility of the working women in each level of intra-spouse communication is significantly less than the fertility of the corresponding non-working women. The working women who maintained very frequent intra-spouse communication had 0.38 live births less than the corresponding non-working women, whereas those who have least and occasional intra-spouse communication had 1.26 and 0.37 live births less than the respective non-working women.

FREQUENCY OF DISCUSSION

Generally there may be couple variation in the frequency of participation in the discussion besides the variation in the subject matter of discussion. To know the frequency of discussion with their spouses on some aspects of family life, the respondents in the present study were asked as how often they discussed about the following matters: (a) income and expenditure of the family, (b) education of the children, (c) family planning, (d) health necessities, (e) job situation and satisfaction, (f) financial security for old age (savings, investment, children, etc), (g) political and national topics, (h) topics concerning your own neighbourhood. The response dimension and the corresponding score values are as follows: (1) never, (2) very often, (3) often.

The score for each respondent is the sum of the points assigned to each of her response. The sum of total score ranged from 8 to 24 which yielded an index with three status levels. While level 1 represented low status, level 2 and level 3 indicated middle and high statuses respectively.

TABLE 4.3

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF WOMEN BY AGE AND FREQUENCY  
OF DISCUSSION WITH SPOUSE ON DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF FA-  
MILY LIFE

Frequency of discus- sion	Present age of women				Total	
	30 years & below		31 years & above		Working Women	Non- Working Women
	Working Women	Non- working Women	Working Women	Non- Working Women		
Level 1	04.00 (3)	07.86 (11)	03.20 (4)	21.67 (13)	03.50 (7)	12.00 (24)
Level 2	50.67 (38)	69.29 (97)	54.40 (68)	51.67 (31)	53.00 (106)	64.00 (128)
Level 3	45.33 (34)	22.86 (32)	42.40 (53)	26.66 (16)	43.50 (87)	24.00 (48)
Total	100.00 (75)	100.00 (140)	100.00 (125)	100.00 (60)	100.00 (200)	100.00 (200)

Note: Figures in the paranthesis indicate the number of wives.

The working wives are significantly (at 0.05 level) different from non-working wives with respect to frequency of participation in intra-spouse communication. The proportion participating in highest level of communication constituted 44.0 per cent among working women as against only 24.0 per cent among non-working women. At lower frequencies of discussion (level 1 and 2) the proportion of non-working women exceeded the proportions of working women. These differences between working and non-working

women in the pattern of frequency of discussion, however, did not seem to vary such among the younger as well as older women. Therefore, the data confirmed the hypothesis that an increase in the working status of women would lead to an increase in the frequency of intra-spouse communication.

**TABLE 4.4**  
**MEAN NUMBER OF LIVE BIRTHS BY AGE OF THE MOTHER AND**  
**FREQUENCY OF DISCUSSION WITH THEIR SPOUSES**

Frequency of discussion	Present age of women				Total	
	30 years & below		31 years & above		Working Women	Non-Working Women
	Working Women	Non-Working Women	Working Women	Non-Working Women		
Level 1	02.33 (3)	02.45 (11)	03.50 (4)	04.69 (13)	03.00 (7)	03.67 (24)
Level 2	01.76 (38)	02.38 (97)	02.84 (68)	04.29 (31)	02.45 (106)	02.84 (128)
Level 3	01.59 (34)	02.06 (32)	02.57 (53)	04.25 (16)	02.18 (87)	02.79 (48)

Note: Figures in the paranthesis indicate the number of wives.

As regards the status of women and fertility, it may be hypothesized that the status of women as measured by frequency of intra-spouse discussion on matters of family life will be inversely related to fertility. In the present study also, this hypothesis is confirmed for both working and non-working women. The working women



as a whole who have high frequency of discussion had 0.72 and 0.27 live births less as compared to those women who have low and medium frequency of discussion, respectively. Similarly the over-all fertility of non-working women who have high frequency of discussion with their spouses had 0.88 and 0.05 live births less as compared to those women who have low and medium frequency of discussion respectively.

The over-all fertility of the working women in each level is significantly less than the fertility of the corresponding non-working women. The working women who have high frequency of discussion had 0.61 live births less as against the corresponding non-working women, whereas those women who have low and medium frequency of discussion had 0.67 and 0.39 live births less as compared to the corresponding non-working women respectively.

#### FREEDOM OF ACTION

Within the family the pattern of subordination of sampled women expressed itself in a variety of restrictions imposed by husbands on their wives' action. Total number of restrictions imposed by the husband constituted one of the objective measures of his wife's status. As a measure of this variable in this study, the respondents were asked as to how they are prohibiting from doing the following things: (a) going for shopping

alone, (b) going to women's club, (c) going to film, (d) taking up job outside the home, (e) spending money on luxurious things, (f) doing social service, (g) spending their own earnings as they like. The response dimension and the assignment of score values are as follows: (a) not at all allow - 1; (b) occasionally allow - 2; (c) always allow - 3.

The score for each respondent is the sum of the points assigned to each of her responses. The total score ranged from 7 to 21 points which yielded an index with three status levels. Table 4.5 shows the distribution of respondents according to their status levels and age.

**TABLE 4.5**  
**PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF WOMEN BY AGE AND FREEDOM OF ACTION**

Freedom of action	Present age of women				Total	
	30 years & below		31 years & above		Working Women	Non-Working Women
	Working Women	Non-Working Women	Working Women	Non-Working Women		
Level 1	09.33 (7)	24.29 (34)	06.40 (8)	35.00 (21)	07.50 (15)	27.50 (55)
Level 2	36.00 (27)	55.00 (77)	56.80 (71)	41.67 (25)	49.00 (98)	51.00 (102)
Level 3	54.67 (41)	20.71 (29)	36.80 (46)	23.33 (14)	43.50 (67)	21.50 (43)
Total	100.00 (75)	100.00 (140)	100.00 (125)	100.00 (60)	100.00 (200)	100.00 (200)

Note: Figures in the parenthesis indicate the number of wives.

The data confirm the hypothesis that working women enjoy more freedom compared to non-working women. Further, younger women enjoy more freedom than older women. There is a significance difference between working and non-working women (significant at 1 per cent level). While 44.0 per cent of the working women as a whole enjoy highest level of freedom, only 22.0 per cent of the non-working women enjoy similar freedom. At lower levels of freedom non-working women are more numerous than working women.

At lower and middle levels, although the differentials are not consistent, the proportion of younger women particularly working women (55.0 per cent) exceeded the proportion of older women (39.0 per cent) at the highest level of female freedom.

**TABLE 4.6**  
**MEAN NUMBER OF LIVE BIRTHS BY AGE OF THE MOTHER AND**  
**FREEDOM OF ACTION**

Freedom of action	Present age of women				Total	
	30 years & below		31 years & above		Working Women	Non- Working Women
	Working Women	Non- Working Women	Working Women	Non- Working Women		
Level 1	02.43 (7)	02.56 (34)	03.60 (8)	04.43 (21)	03.07 (15)	03.27 (55)
Level 2	01.89 (27)	02.36 (77)	02.79 (71)	04.40 (25)	02.54 (98)	02.86 (102)
Level 3	01.46 (41)	01.90 (29)	02.52 (46)	04.21 (14)	02.02 (87)	02.65 (43)

Note: Figures in the paranthesis indicate the number of wives.

With respect to the relationship between status of women as measured by freedom of action and fertility, it may be hypothesized that higher status women enjoy higher freedom action which, in turn, depresses fertility. This hypothesis is confirmed in this study for both working and non-working women. Among the working women who have high freedom of action as a whole had 1.05 and 0.52 live births less as against those women who have low and medium levels of freedom of action. Among the non-working women who have high freedom of action had 0.62 and 0.21 live births less as against those who have low and medium levels of freedom of action.

On the other hand, the over all fertility of working women at each level is significantly less than the corresponding non-working women. The working women who have high freedom of action had 0.63 live births less as against to the corresponding non-working women, whereas the working women who have medium and low levels of freedom of action had 0.32 and 0.30 live births less as compared to the corresponding non-working women.

#### DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY

Although most of the women's time is spent on household maintenance, they do not have the necessary power and authority in all spheres of home making. To measure the level of women's participation in decision-making regarding different aspects of household responsibilities, the respondents in the present study were asked whether the decisions were made by husband alone or wife alone or both on the following items: (a) money spent on necessities (food, clothing, housing, etc.); (b) money spent on things other than basic necessities (Radio, T.V. Vacation spending, etc.); (c) education of children; (d) number of children want; (e) whether or not plan fertility; (f) method of contraception used; and (g) discipline of the children.

While the probable answer of 'husband alone' is coded as level 1, 'both husband and wife' as level 2 and 'wife alone' as level 3. The score for each respondent is the sum of the points assigned to each of her responses. These scores which ranged from 7 to 21 are grouped into three equal levels : low, intermediate and high. Table 4.7 presents the data on the distribution of respondents by age and level of decision-making authority.

**TABLE 4.7**  
**PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF WOMEN BY AGE AND DECISION-  
MAKING**

Decision-making authority	Present age of women				Total	
	30 years & below		31 years & above		Working Women	Non-Working Women
	Working Women	Non-Working Women	Working Women	Non-Working Women		
Level 1	17.33 (13)	35.00 (49)	19.20 (24)	31.66 (19)	18.50 (37)	34.00 (68)
Level 2	68.00 (51)	58.51 (82)	69.60 (87)	56.67 (34)	69.00 (138)	58.00 (116)
Level 3	14.67 (11)	06.43 (9)	11.20 (14)	11.67 (7)	12.50 (25)	08.00 (16)
Total	100.00 (75)	100.00 (140)	100.00 (125)	100.00 (60)	100.00 (200)	100.00 (200)

Notes: Figures in the paranthesis indicate the number of wives.

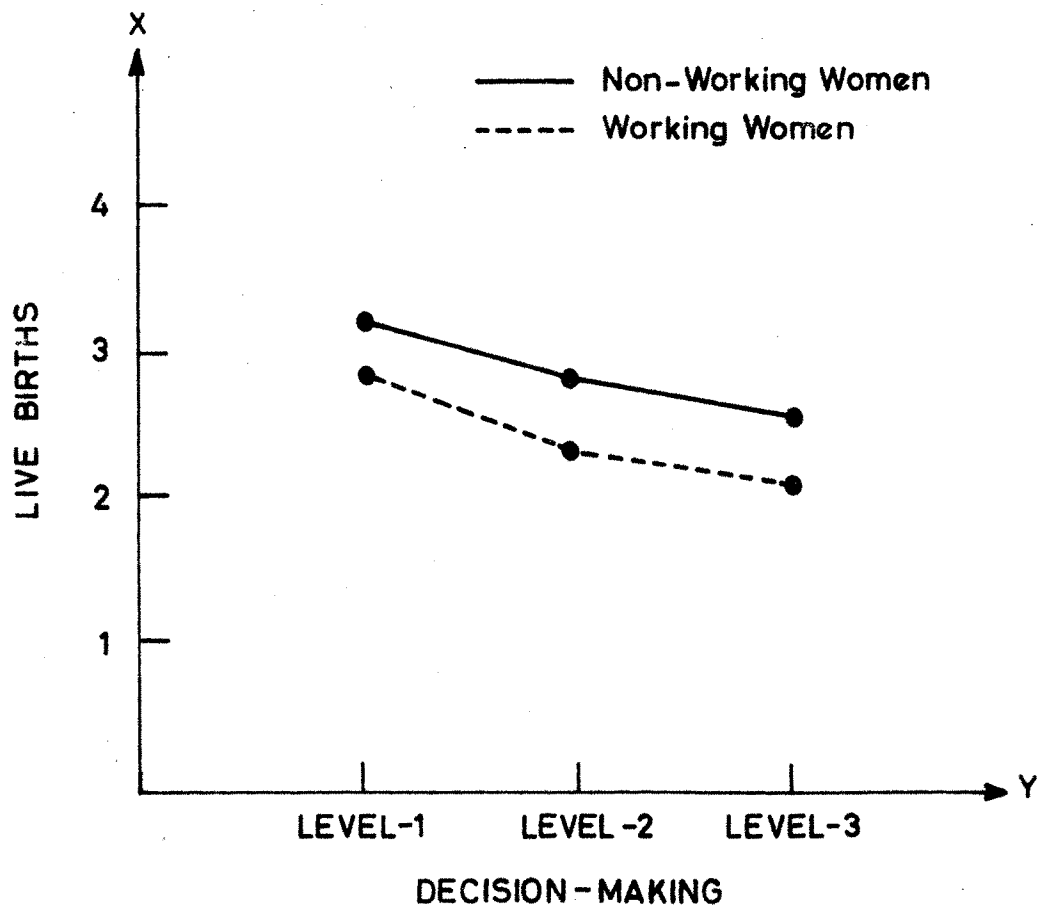
Table 4.7 shows the distribution of respondents according to age and decision-making authority. In majority of the families (working women 69.0 per cent and non-working women 58.0 per cent), the decisions on family life matters are made bilaterally. The difference between these two is statistically significant (Significant at 5 per cent level). The proportion where unilateral (husband alone) decisions are made constituted 34.0 per cent in the case of non-working women as compared to 19.0 per cent in the case of working women. However, only in a small fraction of the families (13.0 per cent working and 8.0 per cent non-working) the decisions are made exclusively by wives.

**TABLE 4.8**  
**MEAN NUMBER OF LIVE BIRTHS BY AGE OF THE MOTHER AND**  
**DECISION-MAKING**

Decision making	Present age of women				Total	
	30 years & below		31 years & above		Working Women	Non-Working Women
	Working Women	Non-Working Women	Working Women	Non-Working Women		
Level 1	02.31 (13)	02.53 (49)	03.21 (24)	04.84 (19)	02.89 (37)	03.18 (68)
Level 2	01.63 (51)	02.21 (82)	02.64 (87)	04.32 (34)	02.27 (138)	02.83 (116)
Level 3	01.36 (11)	02.11 (9)	02.57 (14)	03.29 (7)	02.04 (25)	02.63 (16)

Note: Figures in the paranthesis indicate the number of wives.

MEAN LIVE BIRTHS IN RELATION  
TO DECISION MAKING.





It may be hypothesized that an increase in the working status of women increases their decision-making authority in the family which acts as a powerful antinatalist factor. Data provided in Table 4.8 confirmed the hypothesis that an increase in the decision-making authority decreases fertility. At all levels, the fertility of the working women is consistently lower than their non-working counterparts. These differentials in fertility are also consistent among the younger as well as older women. To sum up, an enhancement in the status of women depresses fertility through an enhancement of female decision-making authority.