



## A Study on Status of Women Education and Fertility Rate in West Bengal

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### ABSTRACT

*The study focuses on the present scenario of Total Fertility Rate (TFR) vis-à-vis women education in West Bengal. Education has developed a consciousness among women that was found implicated in taking the modern birth control measures and thus decreasing the TFR gradually. It appears that the level of literacy of women gets its pace in West Bengal within this decade and the TFR is gradually decreasing both in urban and rural sector. Though the TFR of rural sector is lagging behind than that of their urban counterpart, but the trend of growth is quite appreciating. The study finds a significant correlation between the women literacy level and TFR.*

**KEYWORDS :** Women Literacy, Total Fertility Rate (TFR), Teen-age Pregnancy.

### Introduction

The population boom has created a serious threat to the world at every sphere of life. It has threatened the world economy as well as availability of basic amenities required for a healthy living. India is no exception. Among other factors, heavy increase in the birth rate through uncontrolled sex due to lack of education and consciousness, is considered to be the most significant one. Educated women develop their own identity and attain their position to express their own desire. They have become a power of sustainable development of the society by their own growing cognitive development which has affected their male counterparts also. The present study attempts to correlate the problem of population growth in terms of fertility rate with the education status of women in terms of literacy rate in West Bengal. The study is based mainly on different secondary data collected from different Government departments and interview of a sample of 50 women each in rural and urban areas of the Darjeeling district. It has been observed that there is a significant relation between education and fertility rate.

### 1. A Brief Account of Educational Status of Women Education in West Bengal:

**Table 1: Comparative Profile of Women Literacy in West Bengal (2001-2011)**

State	Literates	Literacy Rate (%) Excluding 0-6 age group	Literates	Literacy Rate (%) Excluding 0-6 age group
	2001	2001	2011	2011
West Bengal	47196401	68.64	62614556	77.08

[Computed by the researcher from Provisional Population Total: Census 2011]

From the Table 1, it was revealed that a significant growth has been achieved so far as women's literacy is concerned within this decade.

### 2. A Brief Account of Fertility Rate in West Bengal:

**Table 2. Fertility indicators [TFR] of West Bengal (2001-2012)**

Indicator	Year	Rural	Urban	Combined
Total Fertility Rate	2001	2.7	1.6	2.4
	2003	2.5	1.6	2.3
	2005	2.4	1.4	2.1
	2006	2.2	1.3	2.0
	2007	2.1	1.4	1.9
	2008	2.1	1.3	1.9
	2009	2.1	1.3	1.9
	2011	1.9	1.3	1.7
	2012	1.8	1.2	1.7

[Source: Fertility Indicators of West Bengal: Sample Reg-

### istration System; computed by the researcher]

The researcher has taken the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) out of the other indicators as the study material and focused on the TFR trend. The Table 2 shows clearly that TFR in West Bengal gradually decreased year wise both in rural and urban sectors. It appears that West Bengal had at least achieved a worthy score in controlling population by reducing fertility rate.

**Table 3: Percent change in average TFR (Total fertility rate) between 2000-02 and 2010-12 by residence, West Bengal**

State	Total			Rural			Urban		
	2000-02	2010-12	% Change	2000-02	2010-12	% Change	2000-02	2010-12	% Change
West Bengal	2.4	1.7	-29.2	2.6	1.9	-26.9	1.6	1.3	-18.8

The Table 3 shows that TFR in West Bengal decreased significantly within the decade (2000-02 to 2010-12). Interestingly, the rural sector showed better result compared to its urban counterpart in terms of percentage change. (26.9% and 18.8%).

### 3. The Status of Teen-age Fertility of West Bengal :

Teen-age motherhood (age 15-19 years) is a serious problem in our country with respect to the mother's health. It appears that the condition in the rural sector is worse to the urban sector. Available data for the year 2009 suggest a much higher rate of teen age fertility in the rural sector (77.1%) than the urban areas (33.7%). Even the combined rate is much higher (66.8%). [Source: Sample Registration System]. Undoubtedly, the condition was just set its feet on the precipices with no concern of its danger.

**Table 4: Teenage Pregnancy and Motherhood -West Bengal: 2005-2006**

Background Characteristics	Have Had A Live Birth (%)	Are Pregnant With First Child (%)
Urban	7.2	4.0
Rural	23.4	6.6

[Computed by researcher from National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) India 2005-06: West Bengal, October 2008]

The rural sector shows higher percentage of pregnancy level as well as live birth percentage. The lower live birth percentage in urban sector obviously refers to higher rate of birth control.

#### 4. Data Utilized to Find Out the Relation between Education and Fertility

**Table 5: TFR by the Level of Education of Mother-West Bengal - 2005-06**

Level of Education	TFR %
No Education	3.07
< 5 years complete	2.43
5 – 9 years complete	1.92
10 or more years complete	1.36

[Computed by researcher from National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) India 2005-06: West Bengal, October 2008]

From Table 5, it has been observed that the more the education was, the lower was the level of fertility rate.

**Table 6: Teenage Pregnancy and Motherhood on the Basis of Educational Level – West Bengal: 2005-2006**

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	Have had a live birth (%)	Pregnant with first child (%)
No education	37.9	6.2
<5 years complete	21.1	8.2
5-9 years complete	17.4	6.0
10 or more years complete	3.4	2.7

[Computed by researcher from National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) India 2005-06: West Bengal, October 2008]

Even the teen-age fertility was found higher in rural West Bengal than the urban areas. The clear trend is that with the increasing level of education the level of fertility (in the name of a live birth) gradually decreased.

#### 5. Data Utilized to Find Out the Relation of Using Contraceptive Method With Education

It seems that the fertility rate could have been restricted by the use of contraceptive measures by the individual. Different measures may be used by men and women for birth control. But, for the present study, the researcher has limited the focus to the status of female contraceptive measures.

There can be no denying the fact that education has a positive direct influence on fertility and birth. More the level of literacy achieved, more utilization of contraceptive (any mode) was found. But the level of awareness of the use of modern methods of birth control, viz. using of pills, IUD, condom (including woman condom methods) etc among rural women was found less, although they are well aware of some traditional or folk methods.

**Table 7: Knowledge of Contraceptive Methods: Comparative Statement of Urban and Rural Sector of West Bengal: 2005-2006**

Method	All women	All women
	URBAN (%)	RURAL (%)
Any method	99.0	97.9
Any modern method	98.9	97.5
Woman sterilization	96.8	95.6
Male sterilization	78.8	69.7
Pill	95.1	90.7
IUD	71.1	55.6

Injectables	58.5	53.9
Condom/Nirodh	88.6	69.9
Woman condom	17.7	13.6
Emergency contraception	15.7	13.6
Other modern method	1.1	0.1
Pill, IUD, and condom1	68.5	48.6
Any traditional method	75.9	72.0
Rhythm	64.5	57.7
Withdrawal	62.9	54.0
Folk method	0.5	1.5
Mean number of methods known by respondents age 15-49		
Number of respondents age 15-49	2,087	4,707

[Computed by researcher from National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) India 2005-06: West Bengal, October 2008]

The data clearly establish that urban women are more conscious about the contraception methods, especially modern. More important in this data is that the utilization of emergency contraception method found higher in urban women (15.7%) than its rural counterpart (13.6%) who significantly reduced birth rate. Importantly, withdrawal method was significantly higher in urban women (62.9%) than rural women (54%) which suggest that they were in a position to deny unwanted pregnancy. These were the outcome of high literacy level attained with the age as also her rights.

The following data revealed and established the previous inference.

**Table 8: Use of Contraceptive Methods: Comparative Statement of Urban and Rural Sector of West Bengal: 2005-2006**

AREA	Any method	Any Modern Method	Woman Sterilization
Urban	28.8	75.5	49.9
Rural	33.5	69.5	49.9

[Computed by researcher from National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) India 2005-06: West Bengal, October 2008]

It is a significant finding that urban woman (with high literacy rate) were the users modern methods (75.5%) in comparison to rural woman (69.5%). But, rural women were found higher users of any method. It has been shown previously that rural women are habituated to traditional / folk methods. The mode whatsoever was changed due to the increasing of literacy and sustainable development of health policy throughout the state.

**Table 9: Use of Contraceptive Methods on the Basis of Education—Comparative Statement –West Bengal: 2005-2006**

Educational Level	Any method	Any Modern Method	Woman Sterilization
No education	42.4	70.2	54.4
5 years complete	36.1	70.7	52.1
5-9 years complete	25.6	72.4	47.9
10 or more years complete	12.0	72.0	38.7

[Computed by researcher from National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) India 2005-06: West Bengal, October 2008]

It is to be noted from the study that the utilization of modern contraceptive measures is more or less the same in rural and urban women. Lower rate of Sterilization method has been observed which is due

to increased consciousness of using temporary as well as permanent non-surgical methods of birth control. That can be assigned to the increasing rate of education, introduction of health centers in the remote areas and the regular advertisement.

The data has further been tallied and analyzed in the light of the primary data received by interview of target group.

**Table 10: Birth Control by Educational Level of Target Group Interviewed**

BIRTH CONTROL BY EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	RURAL			URBAN		
	TOTAL WOMEN	MEASURE TAKEN BY	% out of 50 women	TOTAL WOMEN	MEASURE TAKEN BY	% out of 50 women
NON-EDUCATED	19	4	8.0	0	0	0.00
TOTAL EDUCATED	31	14	28.0	50	24	48
PRIMARY	15	7		0	0	
UPPER PRIMARY	8	4		2	0	
SECONDERY	7	3		3	1	
H.S	1	0		12	4	
GRADUATE	0	0		23	10	
PG	0	0		3	2	
DOCTORATE	0	0		1	1	
OTHERS	0	0		6	6	
TOTAL NUMBER INTERVIEWED	50			50		

**\*[Collected and Computed by Researcher]**

It appears that rural women still practice less birth control measures. In rural area, primary education level of the women showed higher as those interviewed were brought under primary education. So far as the adoption of birth control measure is concerned, their number is found less. But in urban sector, graduate category was large and they well showed high rate in taking birth control measure. The same trend may be seen in higher educational level. It may safely be concluded that women with higher education have even the power of self determination.

**Conclusion:**

On the basis of the present study worked out on the status of women education in the state of West Bengal limiting it to the district of Darjeeling and its impact on the Total Fertility Rate it may be safely concluded that with the progress women literacy in West Bengal in general and Darjeeling district in particular significant progress has been achieved in the reduction of fertility rate. With the progress of education and the consequent awareness among the women at both rural and urban sectors different contraceptive measures have been adopted for birth control. Although difference in the quality as well as quantity is clearly discernible at rural and urban sectors, but the trend is towards progress. Even the change in the method adopted for birth control in the rural sector may be assigned to the increase in the level of education. Interestingly, the teen-age pregnancy and motherhood was found decreasing with the enhancement of the educational level. So far as the question of self-determination of the women with regard to the denial of unwanted pregnancy is concerned, it seems that the urban women are in a more privileged position which again may be assigned to the higher educational level.

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