



## AN INQUIRY INTO THE ATTITUDE TOWARDS ADDITIONAL CHILD AMONG THE SINGPHOS OF ASSAM AND ARUNACHAL PRADESH

### KEYWORDS

Fertility, Attitude, Additional Child, Singpho

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### ABSTRACT

*The fertility performance of a couple depends on their attitude to have a child or not. If a couple has favourable attitude towards an additional child, it will increase the fertility performance of that couple and unfavourable attitude reduces fertility performance. Fertility performance of a population depends upon the socio-cultural-economic and demographic characteristics of a population. Thus, the prevailing socio-cultural practices, economic and demographic characteristics of the population influence the couples' attitude towards an additional child and thereby the fertility performance of the population. The study is based on primary data. Data were collected through personal interview with the help of structured interview schedule from 825 ever married Singpho women of the reproductive age – group (15 - 45 years). Binomial logit regression model is used to explain the attitude towards addition child of the Singpho wife who had at least one living child. Findings indicate that the wife's labour force participation, nature of husband occupation, religiosity, opium consumption (either husband or wife), family types were the influential predictors of desire for additional children.*

### Introduction

The fertility performance of a couple depends on their attitude to have a child or not. If a couple has favourable attitude towards an additional child, it will increase the fertility performance of that couple and unfavourable attitude reduces fertility performance. Thus favourable attitude towards an additional child reduces the acceptance and adoption of family planning devices (Borah, 2006). This study provides some useful insights into attitude towards an additional child. Several studies have revealed that tribal women have more favourable attitude towards an additional child as compared to the non-tribals. The scheduled caste and scheduled tribe women in the rural areas of Uttar Pradesh have desired more children than that of other caste women (Roy and Paswan, 1995).

Fertility performance of a population depends upon the socio-cultural-economic and demographic characteristics of a population. Thus, the prevailing socio-cultural practices, economic and demographic characteristics of the population influence the couples' attitude towards an additional child and thereby the fertility performance of the population (Borah, 2006).

### Significance of the Study

The Singpho tribe is one of the frontier tribes of North East India. The tribe is known in China as Jingpo and in Burma as Kachin. In India, the Singphos are found in the states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh adjoining the Patkai Mountain range. The Singpho tribe is a Mongoloid stock and presently they are found in Tinsukia district of Assam and Changlang and Lohit (undivided) districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Apart from Tinsukia district a small size of the Singpho speaking population are also found in Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam. According to Breton (1997) the total number of Singpho population living in the country is about 3000. Linter (1997) places the Singpho population at 30 to 40 thousand in India and Singpho (2008) records a total of 25000 Singpho people in India. However, Census 2011 witnesses a total of 7958 Singpho people with 3999 males and 3959 females both in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

The population of the Singphos is very meager as is evident from the census count (Dutta, 1990). It is largely believed that one of the primary reasons of the small size of Singpho population is the practice of opium consumption which is very much prevalent in Singpho society. According to Sahu (2002), "adult Singphos are fond of opium consumption. In many families the mothers provide a moaning child with small dose of opium that acts as a sedative". This has an impact on their health and fertility. Various studies show that reproductive health of

tribal women is poor and the growth of tribal of population is uneven across the country. However, many scholars have argued that the tribal population has higher fertility as compared to the non-tribal population; the Singphos population has been reported to be declining at the rate of 2 per cent every year. The average number of live birth ever born among the Singphos was observed to be 3.59 per female which was lower than the mean number of live birth of the Ao Nagas of Nagaland 4.83 per married female (Sengupta & Purungla, 2005).

The tribes of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in general and the Singpho tribe particularly have undergone drastic change in population size during the post independence period. Though the decline of fertility rate remained moderate in India during the last 15 years, the Singpho tribe has been experiencing a fall of fertility and has even become extinct from some of the villages. This fall in fertility of the Singphos has captured the attention of the learned Singphos and researchers. It is believed that the fertility level of the Singphos is less than the average fertility rate of Assam (2.39), Arunachal Pradesh (3.0) and that of India (2.39). The size of a family or fertility performance of a community is influenced by women attitude towards addition child. Hence in the present study the researcher makes an effort to inquire into the attitude towards additional child among the Singphos living in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

### Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is to inquire about attitude towards additional child among the Singphos of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

### Methodology of the Study

The study is predominantly based on primary data. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected through a survey conducted among the Singphos of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, while secondary data are collected from the print materials and websites. Primary qualitative data have been collected through personal interview with the help of structured interview schedule from 825 ever married Singpho women of the reproductive age – group (15 - 45 years) and quantitative data were collected through focus group discussion. Binomial Logit Regression analysis has been applied to analyse the influence of various variables to the attitude towards additional child among the Singphos.

### Factors influencing the attitude towards additional child

An attempt has been made to understand how the attitude of the Singpho wives towards an additional child who have one living child is affected by different socio-economic and demographic factors.

**LIVE BIRTH:** Live births ever born as well as existing number of children of a couple significantly influence the attitude towards the additional children. The attitude towards an additional child will be negative provided that the couple's desire for a definite family size has already been fulfilled. On the contrary, those couples without any experience of live births has not reached the desired family size, the attitude towards additional children will be positive. Thus attitude towards an additional child is negatively associated with the increase in the number live births ever born and existing number of children. It is found that 54.9 per cent Singpho women possess negative attitude towards additional children while the remaining 45.1 percent of the surveyed women possess positive attitude towards the same. The attitude of the wife towards additional children is found to be most favourable for 51.9 per cent families with 1 live birth.

#### INFANT AND CHILD MORTALITY EXPERIENCE

Infant and child mortality experience plays a significant influence the attitudes towards an additional child. If in a population the prevailing infant and child mortality experience is found to be high, the general expectations is that the wife's attitude towards additional children is to be positive in order to compensate the possible loss of child during infancy and childhood. It is found that 10 families having infant and child mortality experience and 50 per cent women desired additional child.

#### TYPE OF FAMILY

It is generally believe that fertility is higher in joint family as compared to nuclear family. In joint family structure the decision of a woman towards additional children is not only influence by her willingness but also by the desire of other family members. In the study it is found that the attitude towards the additional children is higher among the joint families (45.6 per cent) than the nuclear families.

#### EDUCATION

Educational development of a society can significantly influence the fertility level. The couples with higher educational attainment are likely to have less desire for additional children. Education in general makes people more aware about the consequences of having a large family. Education helps to rationalize people's attitude towards additional children and accordingly want to limit to the size of family to maintain quality of life. In the study it is evident that husbands are more literate than wives which lead to variability of their attitude towards additional children. The highest percentage of wives having desire for additional children is found among those illiterate. Moreover it is observed that as level of educational attainment level goes up attitude towards additional children reduces.

#### WIFE'S LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

The employment status of the wife significantly influences the fertility level. The fertility theories proved that fertility is high among the unemployed females as compared to the employment female. Moreover the attitude towards the additional child is determined by wife's labour force participation. Working woman want to avoid frequent child birth as the opportunity cost of child bearing is high. It is found that working women (60.3 per cent) not encourage for additional children. While 49.7 per cent unemployed women favour attitude towards the additional children.

#### HUSBAND'S OCCUPATION

The attitude towards additional children can also be influence by the occupation of the husband. It is believed that employed husband provides better economic security to the family which tends to wife's attitude towards additional children. Moreover it is generally observed that agricultural workers desire more children as compared to the husband employed in the services. It is found that highest percentage of wife's attitude towards additional children belongs to agricultural workers (Husband) (65 per cent) followed by small tea growers (25.3 per cent).

#### FAMILY INCOME

Family income is one of the important factors which influence the wife's attitude towards additional children. Generally there exists a strong correlation between high income level and the level of education as well as general awareness about family planning. The study revealed that the higher income level per family lower is the attitude towards additional children. Income group of Rs. 30001-45000 has more favourable attitude of the wife's towards additional children. While as increase income level attitude of the wife's towards additional children are decreasing trends.

#### RESPONDENT'S AGE AT EFFECTIVE MARRIAGE

Wife's age at marriage plays a vital role in influencing her attitude towards additional children. Early age at marriage increase span of married life live and hence fertility. With increase wife's age at marriage, aspiration for additional children become decreasing. Majority (83.3 per cent) of wife' desire for additional children between the age group 15 – 19 years.

#### EFFECTIVE MARRIED LIFE LIVED

Longer the effective married life lived, the aspiration for additional children among the Singpho wives have declined drastically. Highest per cent of wives desire more children within the effective married life live up to 11-15 years.

#### OPIUM CONSUMPTION

It is reported that opium consumption adversely affects the fertility of couple. Here tries to find out the influence of opium consumption to attitude towards additional children among the sample population. It found that 55.2 per cent opium consumption couple have desired for additional child.

#### RELIGIOSITY

Religiosity plays a vital role in determining fertility and attitude towards additional children. There is a strong positive relationship between religiosity and attitude towards additional children and negative relationship with use of contraception and a positive relationship between religiosity and fertility (Choudhury, 1982). The Roman Catholics in U.S.A. were influenced by their religious belief in their fertility behaviour (Westoff, 1959). According to McQuillan (2004) religious norms and rules regulate behaviour directly connected to proximate determinants of fertility, i.e. contraception, sterilization and abortion. In India approximately 84 lakhs Buddhist reside who makes up 0.7 per cent of total population of the country. As per latest figures of 2011 census growth rate of Buddhism has fell down from 22.83 per cent to just 6.1 per cent. Among the Buddhist countries' average fertility rate is 2.22 compared with the global fertility rate of 2.81. In the present study sample population i.e. the Singphos are Buddhist by religion.

It is found that higher religiosity has less desire for additional child. 65.3 per cent highly religiosity couple do not wants additional child. While 32.7 per cent low religiosity couple wants an additional child.

#### HUSBAND-WIFE HARMONY IN RESPECT TO ATTITUDE TOWARDS ADDITIONAL CHILDREN

The result of the study is that 36.1 per cent desire additional children among the samples under study.

#### FACTORS AFFECTING TO ADDITIONAL CHILDREN

Binomial Logit Model is used to examine the attitudes of Singpho respondents towards additional children in relation to different demographic and socio-economic factors. Here Wife's attitude towards additional children (WATAC) is taken as a dummy variable, using 1 for favorable attitude towards additional children and 0 for unfavorable. The independent variables are:

i. Life Birth (LB)

- ii. Yearly Family Income (FI)
- iii. Wife's age at Marriage (AM)
- iv. Effective married life lived (EMIL)
- v. Education (E) using dummy variables scored 1 if either of the couples is having education of M.E. level or beyond and 0 if otherwise.
- vi. Number of Family Members (FM)
- vii. Type of Family (TF)
- viii. Wife's Labour Force Participation (WLFP) using dummy variable 1 for working women and 0 for non-working women.
- ix. Nature of Wife's Occupation (NWO) using dummy variables scored 1 for cultivators and 0 for otherwise.
- x. Nature of Husband Occupation (NHO) using dummy variables scored 1 for cultivators and 0 for otherwise.
- xi. Infant and child mortality experience (ICM)
- xii. Knowledge of family planning (KFP)
- xiii. Opium Consumption (OC) using dummy variables scored 1 if both of the couple is having opium and 0 if otherwise.
- xiv. Religiosity (R) using dummy variables scored 1 if highly religiosity and 0 if otherwise.

The logit model used is given in the following:

$$WATAC = \ln(D_i/1-D_i) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 LB_i + \beta_2 FI_i + \beta_3 AM_i + \dots + \beta_{14} R_i + U_i$$

Where,  $D_i$  is the dummy variable. If the expected value of  $D_i$  continues than  $P_i$  the probability is that the  $i^{th}$  person will make the choice described by  $D_i=1$  (i.e. having favourable attitude towards additional children). The results of the estimated equation are shown in the following table:

**Table: 1.2 Determinants of Attitude towards Additional Children Binomial Logit Regression Result Dependents Variable: Attitude Towards Additional Children (WATAC)**

Regressor	Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	Wald Statistics	Antilog (β)
LB	.239	.304	.621	1.270
FI	-.102	.033	9.705*	.903
AM	-.061	.044	1.897	.941
EMLL	-.004	.012	.124	.996
EC	.400	.211	3.581***	1.492
FM	-.157	.285	.305	.854
TF	.466	.562	.686	1.593
WLFP	-2.752	1.207	5.198**	.064
NWO	2.355	1.206	3.812***	10.541
NHO	.684	.410	2.782***	1.982
ICM	.589	.694	.719	1.801
KFP	.396	.164	5.807**	1.486
OC	-.120	.445	9.073*	1.128
Religiosity	-1.365	.159	74.070*	3.915
Constant	-.234	1.198	.038	.791

$n = 825$ , Cox & Snell  $R^2_p = 0.598$ , Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 0.797$ , Hosmer and Lemeshow goodness of fit test statistic = 9.743

Convergence achieved after 4 iterations.

- \*Significant at 1 percent level
- \*\*Significant at 5 percent level
- \*\*Significant at 5 percent level

It is found that wife's attitude towards additional children (WATAC) is significantly influenced by live family income (FI), education of the couple (EC), wife's labour force participation (WLFP), nature of the wife's occupation (NWO), nature of husband's occupation (NHO), knowledge of the family planning (KFP), opium consumption and religiosity (R).

It has been found that there is highly significant negative relationship between family income (FI) and wife's attitude towards additional children. If family income increases by one unit holding other explanatory variables remaining constant, the log of odds of wife's favourable attitude to additional

children is decreases by .102 units. The antilog (.903) of FI coefficient also suggested that, other things remaining the same one unit increase in FI reduces the chances of wife's attitude towards additional children by 10 per cent. Education of the couple has positive relationship between attitude towards additional children and access to education beyond ME level raises the attitude of wife attitude towards additional children by 50 percent. Wife labour force participation reduces the chance of the wife attitude towards additional children by 4 per cent. Controlling other factor, the odds of the wife's favourable attitude towards additional children is 9.5 times more if the wife is cultivator than when wife is having different nature of occupation. Other thing remaining constant, the odds of the husband's favourable attitude towards additional children is 98 times more if the wife is cultivator than when wife is having different nature of occupation. Knowledge of family planning of the couple has positive relationship between attitude towards additional children and knowledge of family planning raises the attitude of wife attitude towards additional children by 49 percent. Opium consumption reduces the chance of the wife attitude towards additional children by 13 per cent. For those who highly practices religious principles, the odds of wife's favourable attitude towards additional children is 2.94 times more than those who do not follow religion principles.

The other regressors included in the model have no statistically significant effect on the attitude towards additional children. However, together all the regressors have a significant impact on the wives attitude to additional children as the  $R^2_p$  is found to be 0.598 indicating that the model correctly predicts that in respect of about the attitude towards additional children is dependents on the 14<sup>th</sup> independent variables included in the model.

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