

General Review of the Sociological Challenges and Prospects of Population in Iran – A Sociological Study of Quality of Life

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ABSTRACT A surge in the population of Iran over the past half-century, accompanied by the emergence of over-populated and over-congested urban areas, has resulted in numerous social, economic, environmental and political challenges. If these challenges are not tackled soon, a decline in the overall quality of life—especially among younger generations will occur. The population increases in Iran in the 1970s and 1980s significantly contributed to the present situation in which younger generations are facing numerous hardships. In large part because of the global diffusion of Western norms and values, young Iranians are expecting and demanding a high quality of life characterized by access to all of the modern convenience and consumer goods that the global economy sets before them. But, in the absence of fundamental demographic change, their expectations and goals will not be met, and social, economic, environmental and political problems will be magnified. The demographic trap that Iran is facing needs progressive and sustainable social, psychological and demographic conditioning. In this regard, fertility behaviour in Iran is examined from a multidimensional perspective. It is hoped that, in order to prevent a further decline in the overall quality of life, population planning and education will find high priority among policymakers within the government.

THE AIM OF STUDY

The present research intends to study the human interactions and inter-relations, their conditions and consequences. In the fast-changing time, we will see as to how sociology cooperates with other social sciences such as demography to study the challenges and prospects of population as a dynamic phenomenon. Social life being so complex, needs probing and investigation in terms of demographic variables, and that will be followed as one of the main objectives of the study, and in that, the author attempts to consider and understand relations between the various institutional complexes of demographics, economics, social norms and values etc.

While the entire conditions brought the world population to 6.2 billion in the year 2002, that of Iran reached 65.6 million in 2002 from 16.5 million in 1950 (WPDS: 2002). The emergence of the dimensions of such huge increase if not studied, analyzed and predicted, social, economic and ecological challenges are inevitable. Among other things, the number of the youth exploding in the next five decades will lead to various problems, namely; the effects of which on development and peace will be miserable. Sociologically speaking, doubling of population in Iran in around fifty years calls for immediate probing and investigation. As a whole, poverty, deprivation, social

injustice, and political exclusion; all leading to challenges and even threats; all depend on quality and quantity of population, and that should be the focus of major sociological researches in the future. Learning and adapting being of the main aims of sociology of population, suggest that the diagnostic process is most effective when it feeds into an adaptive process of balancing interests, setting goals, taking action and learning from results (WDR, 2003: 19).

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the world the field of population studies is becoming broader in scope. Research in population is no longer the exclusive domain of a few professional groups such as demographers and public health specialists; rather, researchers from those fields that have traditionally been involved in population, are now working hand-in-hand with such diverse specialists as psychologists, anthropologists, political scientists, geographers and legal scholars. That is to say, a group of disciplines are currently involved in the issue. However, almost all the scientists in different disciplines believe that many of the socio-demographic consequences may be ameliorated, and even prevented by creating conditions in which women and men are empowered to make their own choices in matters of child-bearing (Sinha, 2001: 3).

This broadening of population studies or sociology of population results from a recognition that demographic behaviour has roots in the society, the culture and the psychological development of the individual, that are only poorly understood. Better knowledge about the complex causes of demographic behaviour will not only facilitate the development of government programmes to bring about changes, but will also shed light on the likely consequences, intended and unintended of such changes. Though the effects of population growth are relatively recent, yet assertions that population growth could affect human welfare are not (Narasaiah, 2001: 102).

Sociology of population the same as sociology of medicine or sociology of law is particularly in demand, providing indirect services to people (Albrow, 1999: 35). In sociology of population, we try to deal with selected aspects of fertility behaviour⁽²⁾, demographic behaviour, and also focus on psychological dimensions, specially the social-psychological dimensions of fertility. The term "social - psychological" should not be construed to apply only to the domain of a particular professional group, i.e. social - psychologists, rather; the term is used here to describe those theoretical or research approaches that consider simultaneously the individual and the social context, and attempts to relate one to the other in a dynamic way. Such an outlook is common among behaviourally - oriented researchers in many of the social sciences, as well as among those identified as social - psychologists.

A particular advantage of the social - psychological approach is that, it lends itself readily to linkage with the long and rich tradition of socio-demographic research. In most societies, the social parameters of fertility behaviour are now well known; one aim of social - psychological research is to extend this knowledge to the individual level through models that incorporate both social and psychological levels of conceptualization. Though demography studies fertility in its wide scope, yet, it must take into consideration the behavioural patterns of fertility in the society, the attitudes of various strata about such phenomena and so forth (Seyed Mirzaie, 2003: 5). Such an inevitable linkage substantiates the relationship between the two disciplines of demography and sociology.

Sociologists are interested in moving beyond

merely the arithmetical analysis of population to achieve theories which can explain patterns of population change, namely; variations in levels of fertility, or "push and pull"⁽³⁾ factors explaining migration (Jary and Jary, 1999: 504). The study of tendencies in world population growth is a particularly important aspect, as is the study of social implications of particular national population profiles (e.g. an ageing population).

In this study, the entire body/ background of the research is based on discussing the cultural, situational and policy influences of fertility behaviour. This provides a broad context for the more specific research topics that follow, namely; dealing with topics that are commonly thought of as psychological value orientations, attitudes, personality dimensions, inter-personal communications, and so on. A discussion of research design and methodological issues will follow too.

With respect to population policies, it is noted that the emphasis on family⁽⁴⁾ planning programmes as a means to resolve population problems, is in part responsible for the lack of an adequate knowledge-base to assist in the development of policies other than family planning that might reduce fertility. There is an urgent need, therefore, to motivate more social science research of high quality on the multiple factors that influence fertility.

METHODOLOGY

Based on research question, the method selected in the present research is mainly of library character, and through that, some relevant facts were established about the socio-demographic conditions in Iran. In that, various published materials, books, periodicals and the like were consulted and used. As a useful method in social problems, the author came to know of new knowledge about the theme of research. However, a synthesis of findings made possible the survey to be followed and carried out. Such a social phenomenon which basically needs content analysis must inevitably be based on the materials available in the libraries. In the present research, a lot of UN as well as national documents, reports, periodicals etc. were referred to. Statistical data being produced by the government agencies including the Statistical Centre of Iran, in the form of periodical surveys, were widely consulted by the author during the

research. In using any published sources, the data was analysed within the limitations of collection methods. However, in the present social research, the data was collected and analyzed more or less within the existing framework of the character of research. It must also be noted that the subject matter of the research being of inter-disciplinary content, a trinity of sociological, demographic, and to some extent economic materials, perspectives and theories was used.

Conceptual Analysis and Theories

In this part of the article, the author tries to reflect some relevant theoretical perspectives and ideas on the issue. The purpose of this review is to develop a socio-demographic perspective by taking advantage of what others have learned and passed on to us. One of the most recent perspectives given in this respect is that of Garret Hardin. In that, he reminds us that most societies are committed to a social welfare ideal. He adds:

“families are not completely on their own. We share numerous things in common as education, public health, police protection, minimum amount of food and what is today known as quality of life. Hardin believed in the likelihood that people voluntarily limit their fertility before it is too late.

Emile Durkheim also discussed that increasing complexity of modern societies is characterized by increasing division of labour. He proposed that “the division of labour varies in direct ratio with the volume and density of societies, and if it progresses in a continuous manner in the course of social development, it is because societies become regularly denser and more voluminous. Durkheim proceeded to explain that population growth leads to greater societal specialization because the struggle for existence is more acute when there are more people” (Durkheim, 1933: 262). Such a trend is followed by an increasing long list of occupations and social classes he asserts. Such a phenomenon has become very controversial.

The theory of “demographic change and response” as put forward by Kingsley Davis (1963), expounds that: in order to do anything about the consequences of population growth, one has to know the causes. In that, when more children survive through adulthood, putting greater pressure on family resources, people have to reorganize their lives in an attempt to relieve

that pressure—that is; people respond to the demographic change. But, it must be noted that their response will be in terms of personal goals, and not national goals. Davis argued, the response that individuals make to the population pressure created by more members joining their ranks, is determined by the means available to them. A first response, nondemographic in nature, is to try to increase resources by working harder, i. e. longer hours perhaps, a second job and so on. If that is not sufficient, then migration of some family members (typically unmarried sons or daughters) is the easiest demographic response. Davis has documented the response of rural people who have too many children, and send them to the cities to take advantage of what ever opportunities (that is, resources) might exist (Davis, 1963). On the other hand, Easterlin (1968) assumes that the standard of living one experiences in late childhood is the base from which the person evaluates his chances as an adult. If one easily improves his income as an adult relative to one’s childhood level, then the person will be more likely to marry early and have several children. However, Easterlin’s thesis presents a model of society in which demographic change and economic change are closely interrelated. In that, economic changes produce demographic changes, which in turn produce economic changes and so forth (Easterlin, 1968).

Sociologically speaking, humans throughout history have generally favoured large families, i.e. for the most part to assure survival of a particular family line or racial group. Also, high death rates from plagues, wars etc. let people produce as many offsprings as possible. However, the situation has changed dramatically in the 20th century as technological advances of one sort or another have caused a global population explosion (Zgourides et al., 2000 : 205). Therefore, almost the entire socio-demographic values are changing. Eugenics or what is known as the general improvement in the quality of life, and conditions of generations was not considered as a priority in the past, and instead, the quantity of population was a priority (Behnam, 1967: 16). But, recently and in the last few decades, the scenario has reversed specially in modern urban areas of Iran, namely; a phenomenon leading to higher quality of life, and higher-quality population.

In general, modernization theory claims to identify those factors crucial for economic

development such as achievement motivation and a decline in the significance of extended family relationships (Webster, 1991: 56). The whole process would eventually affect population trends and the related values.

Literature Review

To follow a meaningful piece of research, review of some relevant literature is quite necessary and helpful. It helps better think and plan about the subject of research. Literature review is an invitation to learn a new way of looking at familiar patterns of the research problem. It helps in learning to use sociological perspectives (Macionis, 1997: 11). It helps us think sociologically, and find relevant ideas to pursue the survey. For that, some research journals, books, documents and other sources of information were used.

Literature review leads us to see for the better or worse, and decide as to how to carry out the research. The more we understand the game, the more effective the outcome will be. Sociological perspective helps us recognize the matter, namely; to think critically about the relative strengths and weaknesses of the issue.

In attempting to develop theories about human society, and in the present article, the Iranian society, i. e. population challenges and prospects, sociological and other relevant theories are important to probe. As a whole, in sociological research, sociologists face a wide range of choices regarding what issues to be studied. However, in social research, and to give a meaning to review literature, researchers / sociologists are guided by one or more theoretical "road maps" or paradigms (Kuhn, 1970), and that is the basic tool of the social research.

Sociologically speaking, predicting or forecasting the future could be possible mainly through socio-demographic studies. Also, in recent decades, population issues have been increasingly recognized as a fundamental element in development planning. That is to say, human welfare and quality of life is widely dependent on inseparable links between population, resources, environment and development. Such relationships have been touched and investigated through the article with the use of the ideas of different social scientists.

Population projection and the study of population trends widely help in social planning

which is an integral part of general development of the country (Zanjani, 1999: 253), and that creates the linkage between demography and sociology. Another argument proves the linkage as such: though demography uses mathematical and statistical methods to interpret its conceptions, yet, to identify the social phenomena and their relationships with each other, demography has to seek assistance from sociology. This means that, the increasing trends in marriage age, unexpected decline in fertility trends in particular in urban areas, and considerable decline in mortality rates in Iran, all will affect the future population trends in the country as well (Ashofteh Tehrani, 1985: 36 & 460). That is, a very clear and objective relationship between the two disciplines.

Population Policies

Cultural and situational atmosphere highly influences population policies, and is influenced by them as well. Situational factors are many and varied, and could be viewed at different levels of conceptualization. In the broadest sense, the culture or society might be taken as a situational influence, and the effects of such variables, as cultural values and social structure could consequently be studied. Likewise, attention may be focused on smaller social units such as ethnic groups or the family in the course of the study of population. In a longitudinal sense, the group may be seen as a learning environment through which socialization of members takes place. Hence, behaviour, or better to say, fertility behaviour, is shaped through long-term learning experiences in the immediate social environment. Social environment itself is highly influenced by a society's population structure—the age, sex, education, income, occupation, marital status, race and religion (Keller et al., 1994: 489). Population policies may be viewed as attempts to structure the group situation, i.e. the social system in a manner that would influence individual choices about fertility behaviour. A population policy, by definition should address the population issues or problems as they are perceived by the people of a country (Sinha, 2001: 157). It is important to recognize that even in the absence of a population policy, the social system conveys messages to individuals about the likely consequences, namely; positive or negative; of having another child, or having a

large or small family. This process allows for variability in individual choices, and the ultimate goal is to steer the statistical aggregate of fertility decisions in the desired direction. The development of such social - psychological models of fertility behaviour would permit each society to devise more appropriate population policies—taking into consideration, the forces that influence childbearing choices in a particular setting. Rapid population increase⁽⁵⁾ poses a serious threat to the development efforts of less developed countries. The problem of population is not merely quantitative, but also qualitative in nature as the implications of population growth on the quality of life and the well-being of the people (Sinha, 2001: 36). It is also felt that such models should focus upon social and psychological factors that are “mutable” or “dynamic”, that is; the factors that are susceptible to change with relative ease through public policies or programmes. As a whole, social change could be conceptualized in terms of three processes:

- (1) Accelerated rate of technological development.
- (2) Increased differentiation in the social and family structure.
- (3) Increased rationality in the belief system. Each of those processes might be related to psychological mediating mechanisms that facilitate fertility reduction. Such knowledge might suggest means for speeding up changes in fertility behaviour without waiting for long-term social change, by designing programmes and policies that affect the psychological mediators directly. For example, educational programmes that strengthen beliefs about the efficacy of science and technology, might have a substantial effect on the tendency of individuals to control their own fertility behaviour.

Another way to look at the social context, is to consider the opportunity structure and the possibilities for social mobility that it provides. From the individual's perspective, what kinds of work opportunities, social relationships, recreation etc. are available? and, in the context of fertility, to what extent do those opportunities provide satisfactions that might be substitutes for some of the satisfactions obtained through having children? In that regard, it is important to recognize that children, provide multiple benefits

to parents; therefore, diverse policy approaches are required to affect fertility. For example, a social security system might be a good substitute for economic help from children in old age, but it is not a substitute for the emotional support and other types of help that children might provide for their parents. Other types of institutional mechanisms might be required to provide alternative means of social and emotional support in old age.

Situational Factors

Such factors as proposed by (Popper, 1961: 48) are analyzed in terms of the motivations and goals of social actors, and the logical implications of those factors. Such factors could be studied in relation to costs of having children. For example, education policies have implicit population effects, in which in most countries, the costs of educating children are borne not by parents alone, but by the wider population through transfer to the school system of payments collected in various ways, such as taxation. If it is presumed that subsidized education has a pro-natalist effect, then it must be asked: What would be the fertility effect of reducing or eliminating the subsidy, at least for families which could bear the costs? Given that the rationale for a population policy is to increase the welfare of the people, it is obvious that such policy measures must be considered with a view to whether they would have harmful non - fertility effects such as aggravating social and economic inequalities?

More widespread awareness of the social costs of excessive childbearing might facilitate the process of fertility reduction. For instance, social pressure for small families might be increased if it were commonly known that basic necessities of life became increasingly scarce when some people chose large families. Also, internal psychological pressures might be enhanced through the development of a “population consciousness” similar to the “ecological consciousness” that has arisen in some countries. Such processes present a translation to the personal level of the societal consequences of population growth. The Ottawa Charter of World Health Organization in 1986 also spoke of the need to achieve healthy public policies and a supportive environment to underpin the health of a population (Cahill, 2002:

82). In view of the fact that in many developing countries the potential use of social and financial disincentives is limited by poverty and inadequate welfare services, more attention should be given to the possibilities of using positive incentives to encourage fertility regulation. In particular, the use of social approval as a reward, and the linking of small family size to achievement aspirations deserve analysis by social - psychological researchers. More attention should be given also to the ways in which development policies in various sectors might have unintended effects on fertility behaviour. For example, an agricultural policy to increase the viability of labour-intensive small farms might have the effect of increasing the economic value of large families. It is recognized of course, that policies in those sectors have their own appropriate rationales, and should not be evaluated solely on the basis of fertility implications. However, policy decisions should be taken in the light of full information about both intended and unintended consequences, with a view to developing integrated national policies to promote social welfare. In many instances, social - psychological mechanisms provide a link between policies of various types, and fertility behaviour.

The sociological approach emphasizes that changes must occur in society to motivate people from high-fertility to low - fertility behaviour (Weeks, 1989: 134). In this context, the effect of urbanization on fertility behaviour is also noticeable. That particular aspect of social change deserves special attention in view of the rapid urbanization occurring in Iran. Studies of the adaptation processes of rural - urban migrants, with changes in fertility behaviour as an aspect of that adaptation, provides a means for understanding the psychological effects of a changed environment. Urban migrants have their own psycho-social characteristics, group norms, interaction patterns and life styles, and the relationships between those psycho-social variables and fertility behaviour, need further exploration and investigation. Knowledge derived from such studies could provide important guidelines for population policy, and for information, education and communication programmes by identifying the particular aspects of the adaptation process that induce motivation towards or against smaller families.

Moreover, in Iran, intermarriages regardless

of language differences, social status, and geographical differences have become common in recent decades (Adib, 1995: 181), namely; a new phenomenon widely influencing fertility patterns, traditional patterns of childbearing etc.

Personal and Family Influences

Economic development and access to new technologies have led to at least some level of fertility decline every where in Asia (East - West Center, 2002: 3-4). Likewise, behaviour is shaped not only by the external situation or environment, but also through the internal-psychological organization of the individual. People learn certain patterned and relatively stable ways of perceiving and responding to the world around them, based in part upon what had been rewarded in their past experience, i.e. shaping their attitudes, values and personality dimensions. However, the development and characteristics of modern family life is based on the forms of knowledge which constitute family identities and construct family behaviour (Bilton et al., 1996: 489). Role relationships provide another organizing principle for human behaviour. The social life of each individual might be viewed as a series of structured interactions with others towards whom the individual has a particular type of relationship; son, husband, friend, employee etc. The social system provides rewards for correct role behaviour, and punishment for deviation, thus ensuring that relationships within the society follow a patterned functional course.

In the context of fertility behaviour, many efforts are made to identify and assess the psychological and social-psychological dimensions that are related to the desire for children, family size preferences, and birth - limitation behaviour. The value orientations of individuals have repeatedly been found to be associated with family planning adoption. Some of the values which are recognized as militating against the acceptance of family planning include traditional, familial and kinship orientations, family solidarity, son preference and fatalistic attitudes towards life. Values such as mastery, achievement, individualism and future orientation, namely; what might be called developmental value orientation, is positively correlated with family planning adoption. While factors such as those shown to be related to family planning acceptance, their origin and relative degree of

importance need to be studied more adequately, furthermore, values and fertility-specific attitudes ought to be studied within the context of individual modernity factors—reflecting the changing socio-cultural context, and the individual's perception of his environment. The value of children to parents is the subject of a recent comparative studies in countries like Iran, India as well as many other countries in the developing world. The study deals with fundamental motivations or reasons for having children. It must also be mentioned that the values of children to parents vary from culture to culture, and according to the sex of the parents and children, and also differentiated by socio-economic variables, and are related to fertility level. In addition, knowledge is needed about how the parents' general psychological needs are transformed into needs for children, how values that are specific to children are formed and developed, and how the needs for children differ according to the number and sex composition of children already born.

Sociologically speaking, one of the most neglected areas of research in fertility behaviour is the voluntarily childfree couples. What are the psychological costs and benefits of childlessness? How does society perceive couples without children, and how do they perceive themselves? What alternative satisfactions exist for voluntarily childfree couples? What are the social pressures working against childfree couples, and how is the pressure dealt with? Also, in present-day transitional societies, family dynamics are changing rapidly, women's employment outside of the family is frequent, and the sources of women's life satisfaction are tending to move away from the family. Husband and wife share economic responsibility in the family more than ever before. It is important to know how women perceive their changing role in the family, and how that perception influences their level of participation in decision-making for family planning etc. To gain a total picture of family dynamics, the concept of ecological psychology is needed to be introduced in the study of fertility behaviour, particularly to examine the effects of crowding or density on fertility. In that regard, questions bearing on the effect of crowding on the type of interaction among family members, and the effect of the extended family on decision-making and sexual behaviour are relevant.

Holistic Approach

So far as sociological enquiries are concerned, there is now a wider understanding of the necessity for a holistic approach where intensive efforts must be made, to conjointly and simultaneously bring about significant reductions in birth rates nationwide, to provide accessible, affordable, and quality services for reproductive and family planning programmes, where measures to ensure gender equity and the empowerment of women are pursued vigorously, and where social evils such as early age at marriage, and gender violence are combated. Hence, if these components are pursued each on its own; through parallel and vertical programmes, adequate results are not reached. Now, the holistic approach demands interlinkages and horizontal coordination.

Therefore, to eliminate poverty, and bring about full and productive employment and economic growth, and to create a democratic society which is socially integrated, population stabilization⁽⁶⁾ is an integral factor in bringing about the fulfillment of such goals (IIPS, 2001: 8). Thus, population policy plays a decisive role in encompassing the linkages between population and development, and to some extent the environment. So far as the general health in the society is concerned, based on holistic approach, causes of illnesses and their remedies could be understood through bringing about Social Health in the society (Webster et al., 2000: 358).

Traditional vs. Modern

So far as policy issues are concerned, in many societies including Iran, traditional⁽⁷⁾ values are currently in conflict with the modern ones. For example, traditional roles within marriage are likely to change more slowly than other aspects of women's lives such as schooling or employment opportunities (East-West Center, 2002: 3). As long as women who are educated and have worked outside the home, are expected to shoulder all the traditional house - wifely duties when they become wives, it should come as no surprise that many are reluctant to marry. Such contradictions of women's changing views and behaviour have profound implications for government policy in areas such as health, family planning, labour, and support systems for the elderly. For instance, postponement of marriage has been an important

factor, to bring birth rates to unprecedented low levels in countries such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and recently in Iran. These low birth rates raise serious concerns about population ageing and the size of the future workforce in many societies. Many of the developed societies are currently facing the ageing problems. Hence, population trends are creating various contradictions. For example, elderly people have formed an increasing large section of population through the 20th century in many parts of the developed world (Tinker, 1997: 14), and the same will reflect in Iran too in the future.

Iran's Demographic Perspective

Iran, with an area of 1648000 km² in south Asia; a demographically fast-growing country in the past fifty years, had a population of 16.5 million in 1950. Since then, through the year 2002, the country's population has reached 65.6 million. But, socio-culturally speaking, with the changes emerged among different social classes, and based on change in the standards and values, doubling time of the country's population towards the year 2050, will approximately take 58 years. Though in recent years every effort has been made to lower the population growth rate, yet, due to young population structure, Iran's population increase will continue for many more decades.

The most important question on a nation's fertility rate is whether people want to have children, and this decision is shaped by cultural, situational and policy influences in a country. Situational factors which are varied and different, play a major role in Iran's fertility behaviour — a key factor which could even dominate the cultural factor. Culturally speaking, the head of the family in Iran, usually a man, is responsible for the fortunes of all the family members, and his success depends not only on the accumulation of capital in the modern sense, but on the accumulation of people as well. In the traditional Iranian society, the children are either the mainstay, or the whole of the work force. Such deep-rooted attitudes could be changed mainly under the situational and policy influences. The attitude based on the fact that a large family provides extra insurance against old-age under the conditions that the state cannot provide full-range and satisfactory old-age assistance

programmes, they continue having more children. That is to say, the more children a couple have, the better off they will be in old-age.

In Iran, where population policies have been waived for many years, the population outlook has changed, i.e. it has become a complicated and problematic phenomenon for "now and then". Sociology of population, then emphasizes the relationship between population and environment. If a population dramatically increases, social demographers trace the increase to changes in the customs of a people. Such changes may be as complicated as modifications in medical and sanitation practices, or may be as simple as a shift in diet (Henslin et al., 1983: 476). Population policies being viewed as attempts to structure the group situation, and the social system, would in a manner influence individual choices about fertility behaviour etc. It is important to recognize that even in the absence of a population policy, the social system could convey messages to individuals about the likely consequences, positive or negative, of having another child, or having a small or large family. One of the aims of the population policy is to adjust the array of messages in a way, so that the individual desires would be congruent with societal well-being.

Due to the deep - rooted cultural values in rural society of Iran, and the great differences in rural - urban standards, population growth rate is still high particularly in the non - urban areas, where more progressive policies must be applied. In Iran, though standards have changed to some extent, and more equality has emerged in the past few years, yet, more children and son preference is culturally a value. As, still men earn more in general, so sons add more to the family coffers before they marry, and are better able to support their parents in old age (ibid, 1983: 502). Furthermore, as the daughters have to be paid on heavily at the time of marriage, hence more sons are preferred, and that is the point where high population growth rate in Iran started from, and where the cultural values of high fertility behaviour have found their roots in. That is why the Iranians say, "the first two sons are for the crows."

Hence, changing such cultural outlook is not so easy, even when medical advances and better nutrition enable more children to live into adulthood in the country. For many decades, prevailing wisdom held that the key to population

control was economic development. According to this view, a country must first reach a certain level of modernization (in such areas as industrialization, urbanization, and education) before people will realize the economic advantage of small families. Supporters of this argument point to the rapid fall in birth rates experienced by such newly-industrialized countries as Singapore and south Korea. However, Iran must not wait to first fully get modernized, and then turn to population planning as Sri Lanka and Costa Rica did for example. But, the country must extensively start cultural and population planning paralleled with her economic planning.

Policy Approaches

A major need for Iran is to develop conceptual frames, models and theories to link together the socio - situational variables and the individual - psychological variables that jointly determine fertility behaviour. The development of such socio-psychological models of fertility behaviour

would permit Iran to devise more appropriate population policies, taking into consideration the forces that influence childbearing choices in the particular setting.

Likewise, the opportunity structure and the possibilities for social mobility count a lot so far as population control is concerned. That is to say, work opportunities, social relationships, recreation, etc. are partly responsible for fertility control. They may play as alternatives/ substitutes for some of the satisfaction obtained through having children. In this regard, it is important to recognize that in Iran, the children provide multiple benefits to parents; therefore, diverse policy approaches are required to affect fertility. For example, an inclusive and comprehensive social security system might be a good substitute for economic help from children in old age, but it is not a substitute for emotional support and other types of help that children might provide for their parents. Other types of institutional mechanisms might be required to provide alternative means of social and emotional

Table 1: Socio –demographic indicators of Iran 2002-2003

Province	Population (000) 2003	Crude Birth Rate (Per 1000)	Crude Death Rate (Per 1000)	Annual Growth Rate (%)	Household size (Persons)	Total Fertility Rate	Life Expect- ancy at Birth (years)
Iran (Total)	66480	18.3	6.3	1.2	4.5	2.5	69
Ardebil	1211	20.9	6.8	1.41	4.9	2.7	67.1
Bushehr	805	20	6.8	1.32	4.7	2.5	67.5
Chahrmahal & Bakhtiyari	802	22.6	6.7	1.59	4.6	3	67.3
East Azarbayejan	3387	17.2	6.8	1.04	4.1	2.2	67.6
Fars	4187	20.2	6.4	1.38	4.6	2.6	68.5
Ghazvin	1086	17.3	6.3	1.1	4.2	2.1	68.9
Gilan	2324	16.2	6.9	0.93	4	2.1	70
Golestan	1576	20.3	6	1.43	4.7	2.5	66.9
Hamadan	1727	22.9	6.8	1.61	4.4	2.9	66.9
Hormozgan	1266	27.9	6.7	2.12	5.1	3.8	67.3
Ilam	562	25.4	7.2	1.82	5.4	3.2	65.6
Isfahan	4393	17.1	6.1	1.1	4	2.1	69.8
Kerman	2256	22.9	6.9	1.6	4.3	3	66.8
Kermanshah	1992	21.6	7.1	1.45	4.6	3	66.4
Khorasan	6028	19.3	7.3	1.2	4.4	2.6	65.9
Khuzestan	4641	25.1	6.6	1.85	5.3	3.3	68
Kohgiluyeh & Boyer-Ahmad	645	29.1	7.6	2.15	5.4	3.8	65.1
Kurdistan	1518	24.6	7.6	1.7	4.6	3.3	63.8
Lurestan	1685	23.7	7.2	1.65	4.7	3.1	66.2
Markazi	1315	18.9	6.7	1.22	4.1	2.4	67.8
Mazandaran	2766	15.8	6.7	0.91	4	2.1	67.9
Qom	991	21.8	6.3	1.55	4.2	2.8	68.6
Semnan	576	16.2	6.5	0.97	3.9	2.2	68.7
Sistan & Baluchistan	2152	30.1	7.7	2.24	5.1	4.7	63.3
Tehran	11912	15.7	6	0.97	3.9	2	70
West Azarbayejan	2824	21.2	7.1	1.41	4.7	2.8	66.4
Yazd	912	18	6.2	1.18	4.1	2.5	69.4
Zanjan	943	21.4	7	1.44	4.7	2.7	66.7

Source: Population Data Sheet for Iran, the I. R., 2002, (UNFPA), the Statistical Centre of Iran.

support in old age. In view of the fact that in Iran, the potential use of social and financial disincentives is limited by poverty and inadequate welfare services. Hence more attention should be given to the possibilities of using positive incentives to encourage fertility regulation. In particular, the use of social approval as a reward and the linking of small family size to achievement aspirations, deserve analysis by social and psychological researchers.

Future Perspective

Since the quality of life as a consequence of modernization is different in various provinces of Iran, the rate of population growth is varying in the 28 provinces of the country. While underdeveloped, or so to say deprived provinces such as Sistan and Baluchestan bearing high population growth rate; averaging 2.24 percent

annually, more prosperous provinces such as Mazandaran has an annual population growth rate of 0.91 percent. Hence, the continuity of baby-boom in many provinces of the country, including the rural areas, accelerates doubling time of population in the country, and the influx of migrants to the urban areas.

Though in some parts of the country and among certain categories of people where women have entered labour market, their fertility patterns have changed, and fertility has lowered, yet, in many parts of the country fertility patterns have not changed. Also, there is largely a moderate approach towards fertility in the country.

CONCLUSION

During the past half-century, social modernization, change in economic production and dramatic breakthroughs in health and family

Table 2: Socio-economic indicators of Iran 2002-2003

Province	Mean Age at First Marriage (Year)2000		Ever Married Rate (15+) (%) (Year) 2000		Early Married (15-19 Years) (%) 2000		Economic Activity Rate (%) (Youth 15-24)		Unemployment Rate (%) 2002 (Youth 15-24) Both
	Male	Famale	Male	Famale	Male	Famale	Male	Famale	
	Iran	26.4	23.7	59.7	68.4	1.5	12.9	53.1	12.0
Ardabil	26.3	24.0	59.7	66.5	1.4	13.4	50.6	10.6	20.9
Bushehr	26.9	24.7	55.7	63.4	0.6	10.7	50.1	4.0	31.4
Chaharmahal & Bakhtiari	26.4	23.5	57.5	67.1	0.9	10.9	46.1	10.5	18.6
East Azarbayejan	26.8	23.9	60.1	70.5	1.4	11.6	55.1	14.4	16.1
Fars	27.0	24.0	57.1	65.7	2.1	12.5	51.1	9.4	22.7
Ghazvin	25.3	23.0	62.4	70.5	1.8	18.9	56.3	6.5	25.5
Gilan	26.3	24.1	63.9	71.2	2.1	13.3	56.1	17.9	24.5
Golestan	26.5	24.3	59.3	65.7	1.5	9.6	57.2	25.8	17.7
Hamadan	26.3	23.6	59.6	68.8	1.2	15.6	62.7	13.0	21.9
Hormozgan	25.7	23.2	58.2	67.8	2.3	13.7	56.7	6.7	38.0
Ilam	28.2	25.7	50.3	58.7	0.4	7.3	42.7	11.7	43.4
Isfahan	26.5	22.4	61.6	73.0	0.5	16.5	56.9	15.1	30.8
Kerman	26.6	24.2	60.0	65.9	0.5	6.9	40.1	10.2	30.7
Kermanshah	27.4	24.6	56.5	66.0	1.1	10.5	51.4	6.7	41.9
Khorasan	24.9	22.5	63.0	71.8	3.6	17.6	61.9	20.7	17.5
Khuzestan	27.0	24.0	55.8	66.8	1.1	11.0	61.9	9.9	40.8
Kohgiluyeh & Boyer-Ahmad	27.2	24.4	52.8	62.3	0.9	8.4	38.0	9.5	40.5
Kurdistan	25.6	23.1	62.6	69.8	1.6	15.4	59.1	9.9	38.5
Lurestan	27.3	25.0	54.2	63.4	0.4	9.6	50.0	11.1	41.7
Markazi	26.1	23.8	61.2	70.2	1.0	13.2	54.6	6.3	23.2
Mazandaran	26.2	24.5	64.1	70.0	1.7	12.1	49.9	11.4	31.4
Qom	25.7	22.5	63.3	72.0	1.6	1.7	49.0	7.8	20.1
Semnan	27.2	24.4	59.2	69.5	1.6	11.3	42.4	5.4	31.1
Sistan & Baluchestan	23.9	21.8	65.3	70.3	4.9	22.0	55.5	10.5	52.9
Tehran	27.5	24.0	61.4	70.6	0.7	9.4	47.0	7.5	27.7
West Azarbayejan	26.1	23.2	61.6	70.9	1.7	15.5	64.1	15.8	19.9
Yazd	26.4	22.7	60.1	71.8	1.4	9.9	54.9	15.4	29.3
Zanjan	25.6	23.8	61.3	69.5	0.5	15.7	59.4	32.2	21.1

Source: Population Data Sheet for Iran, the I. R., 2002, (UNFPA), the Statistical Centre of Iran.

planning technology, have been the fundamental forces contributing to population challenges in the country. Employment challenge, as currently appearing in Iran as a result of population change and explosion, must be met through appropriate planning. Though the interaction among the situation, the person (couple) and fertility behaviour has been touched, it must be further improved so as to be able to reach a balanced development. The study stresses that the integration of the socio-demographic on the one hand, and the socio-psychological approaches on the other hand, should ultimately lead to better understanding of causal mechanisms, and that such causal understanding is the key to population prospects, and the development of long-range appropriate population policies to guarantee the sociological development of the country. It is also concluded that social development, social modernization, and economic development for both men and women in Iran in the form of education, media exposure, and opportunities to work outside home, have provided, and could further provide access to new ideas—a transformation of socio-cultural values leading to improvement in quality of life. So far as Iran is concerned, there is still a lot to be done so as to have an optimum population size and consequently an improved quality of life. Similarly, it must be added that the population improvement in Iran would be reached within a situational context; and that could be achieved through an interaction among the three dimensions of situation, the person (or couple), and fertility behaviour. Among the complex indicators for quality of life, social, demographic and economic measurements are very determining in a transition country like Iran.

NOTES

1. Demographic trap: a demographic situation in which an unexpected population explosion appears due to rapid decline in mortality rates without the same decline in fertility / birth rates, usually accompanied by large migration trends.
2. Fertility behaviour: the behaviour pertaining to the physical capacity of a woman or man to sexually reproduce.
3. Push and pull: the theory which says that some people move because they are pushed out of their former location, whereas others move because they have been pulled or attracted to some place else.
4. Family planning is one of the internationally most popular population policies to limit fertility, and it provides each woman with the technological ability

to have the number of children she wants.

5. The image of the Third World supported by modernization theory is one in which war, poverty, famine, disaster and drought are either natural disasters or self-inflicted wounds which visit these societies on occasion. These disasters or social upheavals are often explained in terms of the general inefficiency, or even corruption common to such societies or because of their lack of rational values, or scientific or professional processes of management.
6. Stabilization is a state in which neither the age-specific birth rates nor the age-specific death rates have changed for a long time. In a sense, it is a state in which percentages of people at each age and sex do not change over time.
7. Traditional society is presumed to be static and contrasted with a modern, changing industrial society in various respects. The concept is widely used in the social sciences, but over the last few decades, it has come to be seen as very problematic, and therefore avoided by many sociologists.

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