Subrata Lahiri

Demand for Sons Among Indian Couples by Urban-Rural Settlement Size

I. Introduction

RECENTLY, demographers have focussed their attention on the identification of socio-economic and psychological factors accounting for undesirably high rates of population growth in many of the developing countries. Traditionally, apart from social prestige and the felt need to carry on the family name, the existence of a son in an Indian family is considered very important, to take care of parents in their old ages and to provide eternal comfort in heaven to the parents (a religious inhibitions).[1] Moreover, because of the unlawful yet de facto prevalence of the dowry system in India, the marriageable daughters are held at a discount and sons at a premium.

In developing countries like India, the infant and child mortality have declined considerably during the last few decades, mainly due to immunisation programme together with discoveries of life-saving drugs and other antibiotics and to some extent due to various public health measures. However, it must be noted that there is no significant decline in the level of infant mortality during the period 1970-78 in India, specially in rural areas.[2] Probably, at a certain stage

1. K. M. Kapadia, *Marriage and Family in India,* Third edition, Oxford University Press, **Apollo** Bunder, Bombay (1966) Chapter 11, pp. 250-272; Sec also, Ramkrishna Mukerjee, *Family and Planning in India,* Orient Longman Limited, New Delhi (1976) Chapter 3, pp. 32-54; and Pandharinath H. Prabhu, *Hindu Social Organization: A Study* in *Socio-Psychological and Ideological Foundation,* Fourth edition, Popular Prakashan, Bombay (1963J.

2. Office of the Registrar General, *Survey on Infant and Child Mortality.* 1977: *A Preliminary Report,* Ministry of Home Affairs, Government **of** India, New **Delhi** (1980) p. 33.

of demographic transition, mere intensification of the immunisation programme and use of modern broad spectrum antibiotics may not have a significant depressing effect on infant and child mortality without sufficient improvement in public health programmes (other than immunisation) and socio-economic development of the people. *It* has been reported in a recent publication of the Office of the Registrar General of India that "mortality among female infants is more than that among male infants, especially in the rural areas. A question may be asked whether the preference for a male child results in female infants not receiving as much care and nourishment as bestowed on the male infants. In the case of urban areas, the sex differential is not significant".* A good deal of qualitative and quantitative discussion on infant and childhood mortality, health programmes together with maternal and child health services may be found elsewhere.[4] Now the question is to what extent the Indian couples arc aware of the fact of a sizable decline in infant and child mortality mentioned earlier, who, among the couples, are aware of this and how many of them are confident enough about the survival of a sufficient number of children, particularly, sons when they become old? In the context of poor literacy levels[5] and poor standards of living[6]"*[6] specially among those residing in rural India,

3. Ibid.

4. Office of the Registrar General of India, *Op. cit,* in footnote 2, Chapter 5 and *6,* pp. 32-46; see also Subrata Lahiri, "Infant and Child Mortality and Desire for Additional Children", in K. Srinivasan, P, C. Saxena and Tara Kanitkar (eds) Demographic and Socio-economic Aspects *of the Child in India,* Himalaya Publishing House, Bombay, (1979), pp. 131-148; see also U. P. Sinha, "Health Programmes and Childhood Mortality", in K. Srinivasan et al., (eds.) *Op, cit.* pp. 275-300 and Tara Kanitkar, "Development of Maternal and Child Health Services", in K. Srinivasan et al, (eds.) *Op. cit.,* pp. 301-328.

5. The literacy rates (excluding 0-4 age group) in rural India in 1971 were 39.55 and 15.52 per 100 males and females respectively; the similar figures for urban India in 197! were 69.83 and 48.84 for males and females respectively. See Government of India, Family Welfare Programme i. *Year Book 1978-79* Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Department of Family Welfare, New Delhi (1979), Table C. 4, p. 64.

6a. Defining the consumption basket represented by Rs. 15 'per capita per month at the 1960-61 *all-India rural* prices as the minimum level of living, Bardhan found that "the percentage of rural people below the minimum level of living has significantly gone up from 38 per cent in 1960-61 10 54 per cent in 1968-69. In absolute number, this means a rise from 135 million to about 230 million rural people below the minimum level between 1960-61 and 1968-69." For details see, Pranab K. Bardhan, "On the Incidence of Poverty in Rural India in the Sixties", in T. N. Srinivasan and P. K. Bardhan (eds.). *Poverty and Income Distribution in India,* Statistical Publishing Society, Calcutta (1974), p. 265.

66, Defining five poverty levels in terms of per capita annual income of all-India rural in 1968-69 rupees as Rs. 180, Rs. 240, **Rs.** 300, Rs. 360 and Rs. 420 so as to avoid the controversy of specifying one single poverty line, Bhatty showed that the percentage of population below certain specified poverty levellies between 24.01 to 75,02 corresponding to the lowest and highest levels respectively defined earlier. For details see, I. Z. Bhatty, "Inequality and **Poverty in Rural** India" in T. N. Srinivasan and P. K. Bardhan (eds.) loc. *cit.,* Table 11, p. 318.

it is quite probable that a large proportion of the couples are either ignorant about the sharp decline in infant and child mortality during the last few decades or are not confident enough about the survival of sufficient number of children, particularly sons. Thus, their assessment regarding the extent of infant and child mortality will be guided by the experience as observed by elderly persons in the society. Thus, it appears that in India, the major problem of reduction in fertility is to overcome the desire for large families which is partly sustained by a strong preference for sons in addition to a fear of heavy infant and child mortality as observed by elderly persons in the society. Moreover, the desire for children is largely influenced by factors like number of surviving children, sex-composition of the surviving children and certain other psychological and socio-economic ones including religious beliefs and customs.[7] A good deal of qualitative and quantitative research on preference for children of particular sex and its impact on fertility in India and abroad have already been published.[8]

7. John Knodel and Pichit Pitakepsombati, "Thailand: Fertility and Family Planning Among Rural and Urban Women", *Studies in Family Planning, 4* (9) (1978), pp. 238-243; see also, Subrata Lahiri, "Sex Preference in Relation to Desire for Additional Children in Urban India", *Demography-India,* 4 (1) (1975), pp. 86-106 and United Nations, *Mysore Population Study,* Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, New York (1961), Chapter 11, pp. 130-158; and see also, LoisPratt and Pascal K. Whelpton, "Extra-familial Participation of Wives in Relation to Interest in Liking for Children, Fertility Planning and Actual and Desired Family Size", *The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly, 34 (I)* (1956), pp. *44-78.*

8. Subrata Lahiri (a), "Preference for Sons and Ideal Family in Urban India", *Indian Journal of Social Work,* 34 (4) (1974), pp. 323-336; see also (6), "Sex Consciousness Among Child Desiring Husbands in Relation to Family Gender", *Journal of Population Research, 4* (1) (1977), pp. 29-42; see also D. V. N. Sarma and Anrudh K. Jain, "Preference about Sex of Children and Use of Contraception Among Women Wanting no more'Children in India", *Demography India,* 3 (1) (1974) pp. 81-104; Prem P. Talwar, "Effect of Desired Sea Composition in Families on the Birth *Rate", Jaurnal ofBiosocial Science, 1* (2) (1975), Pp, 133-139; Nancy E. Williamson, "Boys or Girls? Parents' Preferences and Sex Control", *Population Bulletin,* 33 (1) (1978), Population Reference Bureau, Washington; Nancy ,E.' Williarnson, T, H. Lean and D. Vengadasalam, "Evaluation of an Unsuccessful Sex Preselection Clinic in Singapore", Journal of Biosocial Science, 10 (4) (1978), pp. 375-388; Lolagene C. Coombs and Ronald Freedman, "Some Roots of Preference; Roles, Activities and)Familial Values", Demography,S 16(3) (1979), pp. 359-376; see also, Gary H. McClelland, "Determining the Impact of Sex Preference on Fertility; A Consideration of Parity Progression Ratio, Dominance, and Stopping Rules Measures", Demography, 16(3) (1979), pp. 377-388; and Bilquis Kabir, Family Size Preference Among a Selected Group of Couples in Dacca City, "Bangladesh, International Institute for Population Studies (UPS), Bombay (mimeographed) (1950) (a research paper submitted to UPS Bombay for the award of Certificate in Population Studies under the guidance of Mr. S. Lahiri).

II. Previous Studies and Objective of the Present Study

In an earlier paper of the author it was found that the proportion of mothers desiring children decreases with an increase in settlement size for different family sizes. But the decline in desire over a period of 12 years during 1960-1972 is rather discouraging in the context of the decline in infant and child mortality during the same period. The decline in the desire for additional children with an increasing number of surviving children, is greater in large towns and cities than in small urban settlement.[9] However, in the context of strong preference for sons among Indian couples as shown by the earlier studies,[10] it is worthwhile to examine the variations in relative preference for sons over daughters among Indian couples by settlement size.

The present study is based on the data collected from a large probability sample 25,330 currently married individuals (12,716 husbands and 12,614 wives) through an All-India enquiry on family planning practices carried out by Operations Research Group (ORG), Baroda, during July 1970 to 1971.[11]

III. Need for Sons and Reasons for Desiring a Son by Settlement Size

To ascertain the intensity of demand for a son among Indian couples, ORG, Baroda introduced a question—"Do you believe that one must have a son?" Responses to this question are shown in Table 1 by settlement size.

TABLE 1—PERCENTAGE OF COUPLES (WIVES AGED 15-44 YEARS) ACCORDING TO THEIR OPINION ABOUT THE NEED OF A SON BY SETTLEMENT SIZE AND TYPE, INDIA, 1970

Opinion about the Need of a Son	*Settlement Size**					*All India*		
	Urban: 5 lacs and above	*Urban; 1-5 lacs*	*Urban: below 1 lac*	*Rural- 5,000 and above*	*Rural: below 5,000*	*Urban*	*Rural*	*Combined*
Need not have a son	18.1	14.7	15.0	13.9	10.2	15.6	10.5	11.5
One must have a son	81.9	85.3	85.0	86.1	89.8	84.4	89.5	88.5
All	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	**100.0**

1 lac - 100,000

SOURCE: Operations Research Group, Baroda, *Family Planning Practices in India,* (1973) Table 3.4, p. 7 and Appendix III, Table 1-13, p. 15.

9. Subrata Lahiri, *loc. cit.,* in footnote 4.
10. Subrata **Lahiri,** *loc. cit.,* in footnotes 4, 7 and 8.
11 Operations Resell Group, **Baroda,** ***Family Planning Practtices in India,*** (1973).

It is clear that the demand for a son is more pronounced among rural couples than among the urban couples, which is not unexpected in the context of social norms and customs prevailing in India. Further, the demand for a son decreases with increase in settlement size in urban as well as rural areas. The slight aberration between small and medium sized urban settlements may be ignored—the degree of demand for sons remains almost at the same level for the small and medium sized urban settlements. It is, however, encouraging to note that some of the couples (around 10%) residing in rural areas (even in small sized rural settlements) have courage enough to say that "one need not have a son*. Proportion of such couples is highest among those residing in large urban settlements. Probably the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of such couples are considerably different from those who said 'one must have a son*. It is not unrealistic to hypothesize that the proportions of economically well off and highly affluent groups of persons are significantly more in *large urban* settlements as compared to the small and medium sized urban settlements; and the proportion of such persons is obviously quite low in rural India than that in the urban India. One may expect that the economically well-off and affluent classes of people are more progressive regarding demand for a son than those of the poor and middle class people. Unfortunately, the requisite data on demand for sons by economic status are not available; however, the analysis of the data on demand for a son according to reasons for desiring a son by settlement size may give some explanation for the possible variation in demand for sons. The relevant data are given m Table 2.

It would appear that 'to carry the family name' and 'to support the family' with greater weightage on family support, are grave issues faced by couples who said one must have a son. Increase in settlement size increases the weightage on family support for the rural areas but for urban areas it decreases for the largest size. In other words, the couples residing in rural areas and in small and medium sized urban settlements are definitely more worried than those residing in large urban settlements about the 'support of their families' and less about the desire 'to carry the family name'. This is not unexpected in the context of the fact that the poor and middle class people who constitute the major portion of rural areas as well as the small and medium sized urban settlements, need more economic support from their children, particularly sons," for the welfare of their families than the economically well-off and affluent groups who constitute greater proportions in large urban settlements as compared to those belonging to smaller urban settlements and rural areas. Thus, one may find that among the couples residing in smaller urban settlements, the demand for SODS 'to support the family' becomes quite prominent than the reason 'to carry the

12. In the context of Indian social system, economic support to parents usually comes **through** sons **only.**

TABLE 2—PERCENTAGE[a] OF COUPLES MENTIONING *ONE MUST HAVE A SON* ACCORDING TO THE REASONS FOR DESIRING A SON BY SETTLEMENT SIZE AND TYPE, 1970

Seasons	Settlement Size[b]					All India		
	Urban: 5 lacs and above	Urban: 1-5 lacs	Urban: below 1 lac	Rural: 5,000 and above	Rural: below 5,000	Urban	Rural	Combined
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
To carry on the line	47.2	42.1	42.9	29.7	42.6	43.7	41.9	41.9
To support the family	48.8	55.4	53.9	63.8	55.7	53.7	56.4	55.8
For social satisfaction in life	4.8	3.5	4.0	3.8	1.9	4.1	2.1	2.4
For social consideration	5.1	5.2	5.2	4.2	3.3	5.2	3.4	3.7
Cannot tell the reasons	3.7	3.8	3.3	4.8	5.4	3.5	5.3	5.1
Total[c]	109.6	110.0	109.3	106.3	108.9	110.2	109.1	108.9

Note. [a]The percentages shown here in each column are obtained by multiplying the corresponding published data of ORG with suitable factors (e.g. the percentages **in** col. (2) are obtained by multiplying the published figures by 100.0/81.9).

[b]1 lac = 100,000.

[c]The total will exceed 100 per cent as more than one reasons were reported by some couples.

SOURCE : Operations Research Group (ORG), Baroda, *Family Planning Practice in India* (1973), Table 3.5, p. 7 and Appendix III, Table 1-13, p. 15.

family name'; whereas the couples belonging to large urban settlement give almost equal weightage with respect to the two major reasons, for their opinion that 'one must have a son'. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that among the couples belonging to smaller urban settlements (having population below 500,000), the demand for sons to support their families is significantly higher than that of the couples residing in large urban settlements (having population 500,000 and more). Incidentally, one may observe that the percentage distribution according to various reasons for demanding a son as put forward by the rural couples varies considerably with the size of the settlements. But the variation in the distribution of the same among the urban couples by settlement size appears to the insignificant between the small and medium sized urban settlements; however, further increases in urban settlement size cause some variation in the distribution according to various reasons for demanding a son

(c.f. Table 2). In general, the Indian couples, irrespective of their place of residence, who said one must have a son, attach highest emphasis on the reason—'to support the family'. On an average, demand for sons 'to support the family' among the rural couples is relatively greater than that among the urban couples.

So far, we have discussed demand for sons on the basis of a direct question on it, mentioned at the beginning of this section. Demand for sons can also be assessed through the sex-composition of the total number of children considered ideal by the respondents under study. This has been done in the following sections.

IV. Ideal Number of Children

In the family planning survey conducted by the ORG during 1970-71, the ideal number of children was determined through the question—"In your opinion how many children a couple should have"? This differs from the concept of ideal family used in National Sample Survey (NSS).[13] The responses to this question are shown in Table 3. It is found that the average number of children considered ideal by the urban couples is very close but less than that for the rural couples—the averages being 3.4 and 3-7 for urban and rural areas respectively. About 65 per cent of the urban couples consider 3 or 4 children and about 9-per cent consider 5 or more as ideal, whereas these percentages among the rural couples are 52 and 13 respectively. It is found that the ideal family size decreases slowly but consistently with increase in settlement size. In fact, the entire urban distribution by ideal family sizes leans more and more in favour of the small family as the settlement size increases—a highly consistent phenomenon. However, the urban-rural variation with respect to ideal family is more prominent than the size class variation. The lowest ideal family, observed for the largest urban settlements, is 3.3. The difference between the smallest and largest urban settlement with regard to the ideal family size is rather small. Similar observation may also be made for the couples residing in small and large rural settlements. The figures given in the brackets of Table 3 are the percentages of couples considering 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 and above as ideal number of children out of couples excluding those who were either indifferent or unable to state anything about the idea! number. In rural India though the percentage of couples considering three or less as the ideal number increases with increase in settlement size, but the percentage of rural couples considering four or more as ideal number remains almost unaltered with increase in settlement size. This is so because the proportion of rural couples belonging to 'indifferent' and 'can't say' groups is as much

13. Definition of ideal family adopted by the NSS, was the number of children that a husband considered to be ideal in his circumstances. See Indian Statistical Institute, Instructions ef Field Workers, National Sample Survey, Sixteenth Round (July 1960—June 1961), Section 8, p. 4 (Mimeographed).

TABLE 3—PERCENTAGE OF COUPLES (WIVES AGED 15-44 YEARS) ACCORDING TO THEIR OPINION REGARDING IDEAL FAMILY SIZE BY SETTLEMENT SIZE AND TYPE, INDIA, 1970

Ideal Number of Children	*Settlement Size*[a]					*All-India*		
	Urban; 5 lacs and above	*Urban: 1-5 lacs*	*Urban; below 1 lac*	*Rural; 5,000 and above*	*Rural: below 5.000*	*Urban*	*Rural*	*Combined*
(I)	*(2)*	*(3)*	(4)	(5)	*(6}*	(7)	*(8)*	(9)
One	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
	(0.5)	(0.3)	(0.2)	(0.1)	(0.4)	(0.3)	(0.4)	(0.4)
Two	15.6	12.2	10.2	8.9	7.7	11.9	7.8	8.5
	(18.0)	(13.9)	(11.9)	(10.7)	(10.6)	(12.8)	(10.6)	(11.2)
Three	43.1	42.6	38.8	39.1	28.5	40.7	29.4	31.4
	(49.8)	(48.4)	(45,4)	(46.8)	(39.0)	(47.2)	(39.8)	*(41.2)*
Four	21.9	24.3	26.3	23.1	23.6	24.8	23.5	23.8
	(25.3)	(27.6)	(30.8)	(27.6)	(32.3)	(28.7)	(31.8)	(31.3)
Five or more	5.6	8.6	9.9	12.4	12.9	8.6	12.8	12.1
	(64.4)	((9.8)	(11.7)	(14.8)	(17.7)	(10.0)	(17.4)	(15.9)
Indifferent	3.6	4.3	4.8	4.2	6.9	4.4	6.8	6.3
Cannot say	9.8	7.7	9.8	12.2	20.1	9.3	19.4	17.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)
Mean ideal number of children[b]	3.3	3.4	3,5	3.6	3.7	3.4	3.7	3.6
Sample couples	3999	4839	*8478*	2319	6425	17316	8744	26060

Note, The figures shown in the brackets denote the percentage of couples considering the specified number as ideal out of those who have explicitly expressed the number considered ideal by them in response to the question—'In your opinion how many children a couple should have?'.

1 lac = 100,000.

Computed from the published data.

SOURCE : Operations Research Group, Baroda, *Family Planning Practices in India* (1973), Appendix III, Table 1.1, p. 3.

as twice the corresponding urban proportions. Possibly, the rural couples arc less conscious about the concept of ideal family than the urban couples.

V. Ideal Number of Sons and Intensity of Preference for Sons

The sex-composition of the ideal family was not recorded in the ORG survey conducted during 1970-71. However, Sarma and Jain[14] stated that the ideal number of sons may be obtained by adding the number of additional sons desired to the number of surviving sons. They further commented that, "Measured this way, the ideal number of sons is slightly over-estimated as for those who desired no more sons when they had .X" number of living sons the ideal number of sons is taken to be *X* even though the *ideal* number, if probed, was likely to be less than X"[15] Care is needed in the interpretation of this indirect measure of ideal number of sons, mentioned above. The comments made by Pullum while discussing the preferences for additional children in Sri Lanka arc relevant in this contexts—"When child mortality is low, as in Sri Lanka, there should be close agreement between the stated personal ideal and the sum of *(a)* the family size and *(b)* the additional number wanted. Discrepancies will partially reflect the subtler aspects of the questions and partially reflect problem of reliability and validity."[16] It may be noted effective use of birth control method is also a contributing factor for possible discrepancy between the stated personal ideal number of children and the indirect way of measuring it."

An index to measure the intensity of preference for sons over daughters was developed, in an earlier paper of the author,[18] by taking the excess of the average number of sons considered ideal by the respondents over that of daughters expressed as percentage of the average number of children considered ideal. This index was originally applied to the published NSS data of 16th round (1960-61) which gives the average number of children as well as average number of sons considered ideal by the respondents. It may be noted that in the case of ORG data, 1970, the ideal number of sons has been estimated indirectly as mentioned earlier.

The ideal number of children as well as that of sons and the index of measuring the intensity of preference for sons over daughters, are shown in Table 4

14. D. V. N. Sarma and Anrudh K. Jain, loc. cit., in footnote 8, pp. 82-83.
15. Ibid.
16. Thomas W. Pullum, "Illustrative Analysis : Fertility Preferences in Sri Lanka", *WFS* Scientific Reports, No. 9, March (1980), World Fertility Survey, International Statistical Institute, p. 19, para 2.2.
17. G. B. Rodgers, "Fertility and Desired Fertility : Longitudinal Evidence from Thailand", Population Studies, 30 (1976), pp. 511-526.
18. Subrata Lahiri *(a), loc. cit,* in footnote 8, p. 326.

TABLE 4-IDEAL NUMBER OF CHILDREN, IDEAL NUMBER OF SONS AND INTENSITY OF PREFERENCE FOR SONS AMONG CURRENTLY MARRIED WOMEN AGED 20-39 YEARS ACCORDING TO SETTLEMENT SIZE AND TYPE, INDIA, 1970

*Settlement Type and Size**	*Wife's Present Age (Years)*			*Ratio (3)1(2)*
	20.29	*30-39*	*20-39*	
(1)	*(2)*	*(3)*	*(4)*	*(5)*
	Ideal number of children[b] (C)			
Urban: 5 lacs and above	3.1	3.3	3.2	1.06
Urban: 1-5 lacs	3.3	3.5	3.4	1.06
Urban; below 1 lac	3.4	3.6	3.5	1.06
Rural India	3.7	3.8	3.8	1.03
All India	3.6	3.7	3.7	1.03
	Ideal number of sons[b] (S)			
Urban: 5 lacs and above	1.8	2.1	2.0	1.17
Urban: 1-5 lacs	1.9	2.2	2.0	1.16
Urban: below 1 lac	2.0	2.3	2.1	1.15
Rural India	2.2	2.4	2.3	1.09
All India	2.1	2.4	2.2	**1.14**
	Index (I) for intensity of preference for sons[c]			
Urban: 5 lacs and above	16.13	27.27	25.00	1.69
Urban: 1-5 lacs	15.15	25.71	17.65	1.70
Urban: below 1 lac	17.65	27.78	20.00	1.57
Rural India	18.92	26.32	21.05	1.39
All India	16.67	29.73	18.92	1.78

[a] 1 lac = 100,000.

[b] Borrowed from D. V. N. Sarma and Anrudh K. Jain, "Preference about Sex of Children and Use of Contraception among Women Wanting No More Children in India", *Demography-India*, 3, (1), (October, 1974), Table 2, p. 84 and Table 4, p. 86.

[c] Intensity of preference for sons is measured by an index (I) defined by : I = (25 — C)/ *C* x 100 = *(E}C)* x 100, where 'E' is the excess of the aggregate number of sons considered ideal over the aggragate number of daughters considered ideal (for further discussion, **see** Subrata Lahiri, "Preference for Sons and Ideal Family in Urban India", *Indian Journal of Social Work, 34* (4), (January, 1974);

according to the settlement size and age of the currently married women. Caution is needed in interpreting the results of the index measuring the intensity of preference for sons, since the index used here is the outcome of the joint use of the two different concepts of "Ideal"—one for the children based on more or less direct question regarding the ideal number and the other for sons based on an artificial way of measuring the ideal number of sons.

The number of children as well as sons considered ideal decreases gradually with increase in urban settlement size. Urban-rural differentials with respect to ideal number of children as well as that of sons are more significant compared to the variations observed between urban settlements of different sizes. Though slow but consistent declining trend is found in average number of children and sons considered ideal with increase in settlement size, but the behaviour of the index is rather peculiar. The intensity of preference for sons first decreases with increase in settlement size between small and medium sized urban settlements but it again increases with further increase in settlement size. It is not known to what extent the "forced" definition of ideal number of sons has to do with this phenomenon.

VI. Discussion

In an earlier study of the author[19] based on the data collected by the National Sample Survey Organization (NSS) during 1960-61 through a large probability sample of husbands' in urban India, this index was found to vary widely from State to State. For example for the States of Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Kerala and Jammu and Kashmir, the values of the index were very high having the range of variation 51 to 66 and for the Stale of Maharashtra, Madras, Union Territories and West Bengal, the values were considerably low having the range of variation 22 to 25. It is interesting to note that the States with lower intensity of preference for sons are those containing the great metropolitan and more modernised cities like Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and Madras. Perhaps the socio-cultural background and economic conditions of the couples residing in various States of India have a more telling effect in this regard. It appears that so long as the prevailing social norms and the accepted values systems continue, mere introduction of Western ideas so as to modernize the way of living would not lead to any progressive attitude towards small sized family and establish an equal preference for sons and daughters. In this context the study made by Srinivasan and others[20] may be referred as an example of such a situation. The major findings of their study are briefly described below.

19. Subrata Lahiri (a), *loc. cit.* in footnote 8, p. 332.

20. K. Srinivasan, P. H. Reddy, and K. N. M. Raju, "From One Generation to the Next; **Changes** in Fertility, Family Size Preferences and Family Planning in an Indian State **Between 1951 and** 1975", *Studies in Family Planning*, 9 (10 and 11) (Oct.-Nov. 1978). pp. 258-271.

This study is based on the two demographic and socio-economic surveys conducted in the State of Karnataka viz,, 'Mysore Population Study' (MPS)[21] conducted jointly by the Government of India and United Nations in 1951 and the 'Bangalore Population Study' (BPS)[22] conducted by the Bangalore Population Centre in 1975. Comparing the results of the two surveys MPS and BPS, with respect to various demographic and socio-economic characteristics, the authors found that there were little change in the birth rate over the period of 24 years (almost a generation gap), even though there were several developments in favour of fertility decline, such as substantial decline in infant and child mortality, considerable increase in literacy level specially among females, remarkable increase in the knowledge of modern contraceptions, etc. which were brought about through various modernisation programmes. Furthermore, comparing the relevant data on family size preferences of the two surveys the authors found that there was some decline in the number of children desired by the couples over the period but the decline was not encouraging enough in. the context of the moderately good socio-economic development and extensive family planning activities,

To explain the inconsistencies noted above, the authors have made a good deal of discussion on various social and cultural changes and improvement in health conditions during the period. They feel that in a developing and traditional society like India there might be some side effects of such modernization programmes, as relaxation of some traditional checks on fertility[23] and remarkable reduction in the incidence of malaria epidemics,[24] which may even increase the potential fertility of married women. On the other hand these modernization programmes were unaccompanied by appreciable change io the social and religious norms and inhibitions attached to the desire for additional children and practice of contraception so as to counteract the fertility increasing effects of modernization,

VII. Summary and Conclusions

In this paper an attempt has been made to study the relation of settlement size with the demand for sons based on a direct question and relative preference for sons over daughters assessed through an index.

21. United Nations, *loc. cit.* in footnote 7.

22. K.. Srinivasan, *et al., loc. cit.* in footnote 20.

23. For example, prolonged breast feeding, prohibition of sexual, intercourse **on** certain days for social and religious reasons and prohibition of remarriage by widows. For further discussion see K. Srimvasan, e*t al., loc. cit.* in footnote 20, p. 261.

24. 'It is well known that malaria epidemics can reduce the fecundity of the population and contribute to increase in secondary sterility' see K. Srinivasan, *et. al, loc. cit.* in footnote 20, p, 265.

Demand for a son is still quite strong in the mind of the Indian couples; about 88 per cent of couples feel that one must have a son. Some decline in demand for a son has been observed with increase in settlement size. Rural-Urban differences with regard to demand for a son seen to be more prominent. It is found that 'to support the family* and 'to carry the family name' are the issues for couples who said 'one must have a son'. Increase in settlement size intensifies the relative emphasis on the former ('to support the family') dramatically in rural areas; but lowers the emphasis for the largest size in urban areas.

Average number of children considered ideal increases with reduction in settlement size. This is also true for ideal number of sons- Older mothers (age group 30-39) set almost the same ideal size for the total number of children as compared to those of the younger mother (age group 20-29); but for sons the older mothers opt for a *relatively* higher figure. The older mothers have a more intense preference for sons for all settlement sizes. Though the view regarding number of children as well as sons considered ideal becomes more and more progressive with increase in settlement size, but the settlement size does not seem to be a crucial factor in controlling the intensity of preference for sons as it is either unaccompanied by any significant change in the intensity of preference for sons or the direction of change of the son preference is inconsistent with those of the number of children and sons considered ideal.

For purpose of surveillance it is important to arrange for collection, compilation and dissemination of relevant information by settlement sizes, (not necessarily those used in this paper and the earlier study).[25] It is of course necessary to pay greater attention to settlements of smaller size than what has been possible hitherto, in matters like motivation, education and training, family welfare, health and medical facilities; but it is not an easy task for a vast country like India. In this connection it may be noted that according to the 1971 census the size-classes-urban 500,000 and over, 100,000-500,000 and below 100,000, rural: 5,000 and above and below 5000, accounted for 6.22, 4.89, 8.79 and 10.04 and 70.06 per cent of the total population[26] respectively.

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25. Subrata Lahiri, *Joe, cit.* in footnote 9.

26. These percentages were computed from the published 1971 census figures. Sec; Census **of** India, 1971, *General Population Tables,* Series 1-India, Part-II-A(i), Registrar General and Census Commissioner, (Government of India, 1975). Table X-III, p. 156 and Table A-IV, pp. 239-496.