

B.A. PART-III(SOCIOLOGY)
PAPER-VIII-A(Social Demography)

Topic – Fertility

College- MMC, P.U(Department of Sociology)

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FERTILITY

➤ **Learning objectives:**

- To understand the concept of Fertility

➤ **Introduction:**

The discipline of demography involves a scientific study of population primarily to study its size, structure or composition and growth. Demography casts a multidisciplinary net, drawing insights from economics, sociology, statistics, medicine, biology, anthropology and history. It is a subject central to understanding of human evolution and variation, because it's most important elements- fertility and mortality- are fundamental aspects of evolution and variation. Thus, demography employs scientific methods of studying cause and effect relationships and has its own techniques of interpreting the past and present variables that can be used for projecting future population dynamics.

The term 'demography' is derived from the two Greek words demos meaning 'people' or 'population' and graphy meaning to 'draw' or 'write' about them. The credit for initiating a new field of empirical research in population study goes to John Graunt. His work, *Natural and Political Observations, Made upon the Bills of Mortality* in 1662 definitely marked the beginning of demography while Achille Guillard(1885) was the first to popularize the word demography when he used the word in his 'Element de Statistique humaine on demographic Comparee'.

Population change has been defined in terms of fertility, mortality and migration. Fertility, mortality and migration constitute the three basic components of population growth.

According to United Nations, "Natural fertility is the fertility which exists in the absence of deliberate birth control." Fertility, "refers to the actual reproduction performance - applied to an individual or a group". Fertility is a term used to refer to the actual number of live births produced by a female. G.T.Trewartha viewed that, "fertility, is the birth performance of a population as reflected by the number of live births. It refers to the number of children a woman has actually born."

FERTILITY, which refers to the occurrence of birth, however, needs to be differentiated from FECUNDITY, which refers to the reproductive capacity of a woman during her entire, reproductive period. It is not very easy to measure 'fecundity' but the measurement of 'fertility' does not pose many problems.

Various measures of fertility have been coined. However, some writers have used the terms fecundity and fertility as synonymous. These comprise; Crude birth rate, general fertility rate, Child Woman ratio, fertility ratio, age specific birth rate, standardized birth rate, total fertility rate, reproduction/replacement rate etc.

“Fertility is socially controlled to some extent in all population. It is a common believe that fertility is a function of two factors viz. (1) Physiological and (2) Socio-cultural. The most important of the physiological factors are heredity, health, age, the ovulation cycle, lactation and sex. Davis and Blake 1956 : 211-235) have classified the socio-cultural aspects into three groups (a) factors affecting exposure to intercourse which includes - age of marriage or of entry into sexual action, frequency of celibacy of females, length of time spent or between sexual unions during the women’s reproduction period, aspect of voluntary and involuntary sexual abstinence and frequency of intercourse, (b) factors affecting exposure of conception, which comprises involuntary fecundity and infecundity, contraceptive usage or non-usage and fecundity or infecundity as affected voluntary practices e.g. sterilisation and medical treatment, and (c) factors affecting exposure to gestation and perturbation, which includes voluntary and involuntary abortion, and infanticide. The fertility of population depends largely on the balance between those parts of its culture and social system that favour reproduction and those which hinder it.

Fertility is the natural capability to give [life](#). In [humans](#) and [animals](#), fertility means that the [parent](#) can produce babies. As a measure, **fertility rate** is the number of children born per couple, or person or population.

➤ **Definitions of Fertility:**

- ✓ **According to G.W.Barclay-** “Fertility is an actual level of performance in a population based on the number of live births.”
- ✓ **According to Benard Benjamin-**“Fertility measures the rate at which a population adds to itself by births and is normally assessed by relating the number of births to the size of some section of the population, such as the number of married couples or the number of women of child bearing age, i.e. an appropriate yardstick of potential fertility.”
- ✓ **According to Thompson and Lewis-** “Fertility is generally used to indicate the actual reproductive performance of a woman or groups of women.”

Fertility may be defined as actual reproductive performance of a women or a group of women (Thompson and Lewis, 1965). On the other hand, a woman of her physiological capacity to conceive and bear children is termed as the fecund period, which has two extremes, viz., menarche and menopause. In demographic studies, the reproductive span i.e., the child bearing period of

women is usually taken to as between 15-49 years of age. Thus, a fecund woman may or may not be fertile but a fertile woman must be fecund.

In the present day world, it is fertility which is drawing a lot of attention because the mortality rates have fallen considerably while fertility rates have not. When replacement is quicker and more in number than depletion, obviously there is rapid growth. Therefore only bringing down fertility can bring down the population growth. While the measures to bring down mortality have met with success, it has not been so in the case of fertility. This is because the latter is much of a socially controlled process influenced by a number of interrelated biological as well as socio-cultural factors such as age at menarche, age at marriage, age at menopause, education, desired family size, socio-economic status, contraception and so on.

➤ **Conclusion:**

Fertility is generally used to indicate the actual reproductive performance of a woman or groups of women. In **demography**, **fertility** indicates the product or output of reproduction, rather than the ability to have children. The physiological ability to have children—that is manifest roughly in the period between menarche and menopause in women—is termed **fecundity**.