

A Study of the Knowledge and Attitudes of Students in a Girls School Regarding Population and Family Planning.

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Introduction

This is a preliminary study to get information on the knowledge and attitudes of students, in a girls school regarding population and family planning. The data collected will be of some benefit in planning population education programmes in schools. The findings of the study shows the importance of collecting this information before a programme of education on family planning and allied subjects.

Materials and methods

The General Certificate of Education, ordinary-level and advanced-level students in a semiurban girls schools were selected for the study. A seminar on population education and family planning lasting 2 hours, was arranged with the collaboration of the head of the school and the department of education. Sixty five O-level students and sixty A-level students attended the seminar. Sixteen teachers who taught in the school also attended the seminar.

The mean age of the students in the O-level class was 16.4 years (Range 15-18 years) and of those in the A-level class was 17.7 years (Range 16-21years).

The age of the teachers ranged from 31 years to 50years with a median of 39 years. There were 2 male teachers and 14 female teachers.

A questionnaire containing 13 questions of which 12 were multiple choice questions was issued. The first four questions were designed to test the knowledge regarding the population of Sri Lanka, the population of the Jaffna District and the knowledge regarding birth and death rates. The next eight questions were aimed at identifying their attitudes towards the age of marriage, the interval between marriage and the first child, family size and preference for male and female children. The last question was to test the knowledge regarding family planning methods.

Results

Demography

88 % of the students and 94% of the teachers were able to indicate correctly the population of Sri Lanka. (Table I)

However, only 12.3% of the O-level students, and 26.6% of the A-level students were able to give the percentage of the population living in the Jaffna District. The difference between them is statistically significant. ($P < 0.05$)

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Table I

Knowledge Regarding Population and Birth and Death Rates

— Percentage giving correct answers

	O-level	A-level	Teachers
Knowledge regarding population of Sri Lanka	87.6 %	88.3 %	94 %
Knowledge regarding population of Jaffna	12.3 %	26.6 %	38 %
Birth rate	16 %	31.6 %	25 %
Death rate	23 %	38.3 %	31 %

Only 16% of the O-level students and 31.6% of the A-level students were able to indicate correctly the number of births they would expect in a population of 1000. The difference between the O-level and A-level students is statistically significant. ($P = < 0.05$).

23% of the O-level students and 38.3% of the A-level students were able to give the number of deaths they would expect in a population of 1000. The difference between the O-level and A-level students was not statistically significant.

Age of Marriage

A majority of the students in the O-level (66.2%) preferred a lower age of marriage for girls (Table 2). In the A-level the shift was towards a higher age of marriage. 60% preferred to get married between 25 and 29 years. The attitude of the teachers was similar to that of the O-level students.

The attitudes regarding the age of marriage for boys also showed a similar

shift with A-level students preferring a higher age (Table 3). A majority of students in both classes preferred to maintain a 5 year gap between the partners. Here too the teachers' attitudes were similar to that of the O-level students.

Late marriage is one of the methods adopted to control an increase in population. In China¹ the late marriage rate ranges from 87.6% to 96.6% in the different provinces. (Late marriage rate is the percentage of couples marrying in a calendar year, at or after the ages set by the late marriage norm.)

Interval between marriage and first child

87.7% of the O-level and 90% of the A-level students wished to have their first baby during or after the 2nd year of marriage. A majority (41.5% of the O-level, and 41.7% of the A-level students) wished to have their first baby during the 2nd year of marriage. (Table 4)

Table II

Attitudes regarding ideal age of marriage for girls			
Age of marriage	O-level	A-level	Teachers
Under 20	1.5 %	3.3 %	—
20 — 24	66.2 %	36.7 %	62.5 %
25 — 29	30.8 %	60.0 %	37.5 %
30 and over	1.5 %	—	—

Table IV

Interval between marriage and first baby			
Year after marriage	O-level	A-level	Teachers
1st	12.3 %	10.0 %	6.2 %
2nd	41.5 %	41.7 %	37.5 %
3rd	26.2 %	33.3 %	43.8 %
4th	12.3 %	13.3 %	12.5 %
Other	7.7 %	1.7 %	0

Table III

Attitudes regarding ideal age of marriage for boys			
Age of marriage	O-level	A-level	Teachers
Under 20	1.5 %	0	0
20 — 24	16.9 %	3.3 %	0
25 — 29	63.1 %	40.0 %	56.3 %
30 and over	18.5 %	56.7 %	43.7 %

Table V

Family size (No. of children they would like to have)			
No. of children	O-level	A-level	Teachers
1	0	0	0
2	83.1 %	76.7 %	43.8 %
3	6.2 %	20.0 %	12.4 %
4	10.7 %	3.3 %	43.8 %
Over 4	0	0	0

Family size

A majority of the students (83.1% of the O-level and 76.7% of the A-level) wished to have a 'two child' family. Not even a single student wished to have more than four children. 43.8% of the teachers preferred 4 children. In countries like China¹, 95% of married couples in

the cities and 90% of married couples in the 'country side' are expected to have a one child family. The idea of the 'one child family' is being gradually introduced into this country too. But not even a single student wished to have a one child family.

Preference for male and female children

A majority of the students (93.8 % of the O-level and 83.3% of the A-level students) indicated that there must definitely be a male child in the family. (Table 6) Similarly, a majority of the students (92.3% of the O-level students and 86.7% of the A-level students) indicated that there must definitely be a female child in the family. (Table 7)

This creates a situation where a family with two children of the same sex will try to have a child of the opposite sex. Since no one in the study group wished to have more than 4 children it is likely that they will try until they have 4 children and then stop.

60% of the O-level and 63% of the A-level students indicated that their first child should be a boy. (Table 8)

Family Planning methods

The knowledge regarding family planning methods was poor 74% of the O-level students and 38% of the A-level students could not mention a single

temporary method of contraception (Table 9), though a good majority of the students wanted to postpone the birth of their baby to the second or subsequent years of marriage. Out of the temporary methods-mentioned, a majority of students mentioned oral contraceptives. (Table 10) The knowledge regarding the permanent methods was also poor. (Table 11) In this study, whenever 'sterilisation' was mentioned it was taken as female sterilization and counted as one method only. Only one student in the A-level classes mentioned vasectomy as a permanent method of contraception.

Knowledge and attitudes of teachers

The study was originally planned only for the students. But the 16 teachers who attended the seminar were also requested to answer the questionnaire. The total number of teachers in the school were 38 and only 16 attended the seminar.

Regarding demographic data and vital statistics the knowledge of the teachers was not much different from that of the students. (Table 1, 2, 3, 4)

Table VI

Preference for male child (Do you definitely need a male child?)

	O-level	A-level	Teachers
Yes	93.8 %	83.3 %	93.7 %
No	6.2 %	15.0 %	6.3 %
No Answer	—	1.7 %	—
	<u>100 %</u>	<u>100 %</u>	<u>100 %</u>

Table VII

Preference for female Child (Do you definitely need a female child?)

	O-level	A-level	Teachers
Yes	92.3 %	86.7 %	93.7 %
No	6.7 %	11.6 %	6.3 %
No answer	—	1.7 %	—
	<u>100 %</u>	<u>100 %</u>	<u>100 %</u>

Table VIII

Preference for the first child to be a boy			
	O-level	A-level	Teachers
Yes	60 %	63 %	31 %
No	40 %	35 %	69 %
No answer	—	—	—
	<u>100 %</u>	<u>100 %</u>	<u>100 %</u>

Table XI

Knowledge regarding permanent family planning methods				
	No. of method	O-level	A-level	Teachers
	1	38 %	58 %	31 %
	2	0 %	2 %	0 %
	None	62 %	40 %	69 %
		<u>100 %</u>	<u>100 %</u>	<u>100 %</u>

Table IX

Knowledge regarding temporary family planning methods by
number of methods

No. of methods mentioned	O-level	A-level	Teachers
1	15 %	35 %	6 %
2	6 %	17 %	25 %
3	5 %	10 %	6 %
Over	74 %	38 %	63 %
	<u>100 %</u>	<u>100 %</u>	<u>100 %</u>

Table X

Knowledge of temporary methods of contraception by methods

Method	O-level	A-level	Teachers
Oral contraceptives	48 %	60 %	27 %
IUCD	14 %	18 %	46 %
Depoprovera	38 %	15 %	9 %
Condom	0	7 %	9 %
Coitus interruptus	0	0	0
	<u>100 %</u>	<u>100 %</u>	<u>100 %</u>
Total number of methods mentioned	21	57	11

The teachers preferred a lower age of marriage (20-24 years for girls and 25-29 years for boys) and were comparable to the O-level students. However unlike the O-level student, 93.8% of them preferred to have their first baby during the second or subsequent year of marriage. One striking feature was that 63% of the teachers could not mention a single temporary method of contraception and 69% could not mention a permanent method. A majority of teachers mentioned IUCD as a temporary method of contraception. Some of the 'contraceptive methods' given by the teachers were, late marriage, natural method, abstinence and involvement in social activities.

Discussion

The idea of introducing population education in schools has been discussed for over a decade. In March 1972, the curriculum development centre, at a seminar organised in collaboration with the Ministry of Planning and Employment recommended the introduction of population education in schools.²

Eleven years after this recommendation, population education is only being carried out in a limited way, in the O-level, by including demographic data and effects of population explosion in Mathematics, General Science and Social Science.

Several views have been expressed regarding the implementation of population education in schools.³ Population education would have to involve more than a knowledge of family size and proportion if the introduction is to bring about behavioural changes in the young school leavers.

According to this study the attitudes towards the family size appears to be in keeping with the present programmes. However knowledge about family planning methods is severely lacking - especially among the O-level students.

In the Jaffna District, over 95% of the '5 year olds' enter school.⁴ Of them 39.3% reach the O-level class. Of the students in the O-level, 30% will continue their studies in the A-level. The balance 70% are to leave school and probably start raising a family. Since the mean age of marriage of a female in Sri Lanka is 24 years and since the mean age of an O-level student (as in this study) is 16.4 years, a girl has about 8 years between leaving school and getting married to gather information regarding family planning. But unfortunately such information is not freely available to an unmarried girl. Therefore it is essential that population education (including sex education and family planning methods) should be introduced in schools-especially for girls. The content area should include, the physiology of menstruation, and contraception by oral pills, injection and IUCD. With this basic idea, they could widen their knowledge later.

The next question is as to who should impart this knowledge. The best person is no doubt the class teacher. But before this is started, the knowledge and attitudes of the teachers should be evaluated.

The present study involving the teachers is not satisfactory. The teachers who attended the seminar may have been those who did not know about family planning and therefore come for the seminar and hence a biased sample

This study raises a question of fundamental importance. Are teachers with the present knowledge and attitude suitable to impart population education to

students? This is a subject for further study.

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