

## CHAPTER 7

### FERTILITY PREFERENCES

Fertility behaviour is a complex phenomenon resulting from an interplay of various social and cultural patterns related to marriage, childbirth, child rearing and familial or kinship affiliation. In the case of India, the cultural importance of the kinship network, coupled with high mortality among children, is considered to be one of the main obstacles to rapid fertility decline. The traditional desire for a large family is embedded in the perceived values and roles that children perform in their families. Children are valued for their role in perpetuating tradition and the ancestral line, providing economic and social support for parents in their old age, and strengthening the marital bond. Although Indian couples traditionally desire many children, with a particular preference for sons, fertility preferences are not immutable. In fact, the two to three child norm is becoming firmly established in many parts of India, as indicated by the NFHS findings on the fertility preferences of women.

Interpretation of data on fertility preferences as a measure of women's future childbearing intentions is a subject of considerable controversy. Survey questions have been criticized on the grounds that answers may be misleading for a number of reasons. Attitudes toward childbearing may not be fully formed, they may be held with little conviction, and they may change over time. Moreover, the responses may not take into account the effect of social or community pressures or the attitudes of the husband and other family members, who may have a strong influence on a woman's reproductive decisions. Finally, a woman's preference for limiting her family size can only be implemented if she has the means to fulfil her desires. Nevertheless, in the aggregate, data on fertility preferences can be useful as an indicator of general fertility attitudes and the possible future course of fertility. Fertility preferences data also facilitate the assessment of the need for family planning and the extent of unwanted fertility.

The National Family Health Survey included several questions on women's desire for children in the future. Specifically, these questions dealt with: a) whether a woman wanted another child, and if so, how soon she wanted her next child; and b) how many children she would want in her lifetime if she could start all over again. The extent of sex preference was ascertained from questions on the preferred sex of the next child and the ideal number of children by sex. These questions are analyzed in this chapter.

#### 7.1 Desire for More Children

In the NFHS, information on future childbearing intentions was sought from currently married women, who were asked, "Would you like to have another child or would you prefer not to have any more children?" Women who did not have any children were asked whether or not they wanted to have any children. If a woman was pregnant, she was asked whether or not she wanted another child after the one she was expecting. Women who wanted another child were then asked about the preferred timing and sex of their next child.

The fertility preferences of currently married women are presented in Table 7.1 and illustrated in Figure 7.1. Overall, only 34 percent of women say they want another child at some time in the future and more than half of these women say they would like to wait at least

two years before having their next birth. Less than two-fifths of women who desire an additional child say they would like another child soon (that is, within two years). Four percent of women believe decisions pertaining to the number of children are "up to God". More than one-quarter of women (26 percent) say they do not want any more children and 31 percent of women (or their husbands) are sterilized. These two groups together constitute 57 percent of all currently married women in India.

<b>Table 7.1 Fertility preferences</b>								
Percent distribution of currently married women by desire for children and preferred sex of additional child, according to number of living children and residence, India, 1992-93								
Desire for children	Number of living children <sup>1</sup>							Total
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+	
<b>URBAN</b>								
<b>Desire for additional child</b>								
Have another soon <sup>2</sup>	59.6	18.4	5.2	2.8	2.0	1.0	0.3	11.1
Have another later <sup>3</sup>	20.3	49.0	13.6	5.7	3.1	1.6	2.0	16.0
Have another, undecided when	4.2	1.7	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.9
Undecided	1.3	2.6	1.7	1.1	0.8	0.8	0.4	1.4
Up to God	4.0	2.4	1.9	1.7	2.2	2.7	2.3	2.3
Want no more	1.7	18.4	44.9	31.6	30.9	33.1	45.6	30.8
Sterilized	1.0	3.9	29.7	54.2	57.3	55.6	39.6	33.6
Declared infecund	7.3	3.4	2.4	2.4	3.2	4.9	9.5	3.7
Missing	0.6	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number	2014	4000	5586	4601	2954	1506	1416	22077
<b>Preferred sex of additional child</b>								
Boy	25.0	34.6	54.4	68.1	78.2	59.6	(63.3)	39.1
Girl	4.5	18.8	17.1	12.6	7.1	16.0	(9.1)	13.8
Doesn't matter	49.4	32.3	17.1	11.1	6.7	15.7	(14.5)	32.1
Up to God	21.2	14.3	11.4	8.1	8.0	8.7	(13.0)	15.1
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number wanting more	1695	2767	1075	407	157	42	35	6177
<b>RURAL</b>								
<b>Desire for additional child</b>								
Have another soon <sup>2</sup>	57.4	22.8	10.2	4.9	2.3	1.3	0.9	13.7
Have another later <sup>3</sup>	21.7	55.4	26.7	11.8	6.7	4.1	2.6	20.9
Have another, undecided when	4.7	3.0	1.3	0.7	0.5	0.3	0.3	1.5
Undecided	2.5	1.3	2.0	1.7	1.2	1.5	1.8	1.7
Up to God	5.7	3.8	4.1	3.9	3.8	3.9	5.0	4.2
Want no more	1.8	6.9	23.6	26.4	33.4	40.2	51.1	24.2
Sterilized	0.9	4.3	29.7	47.5	47.6	43.0	29.9	29.8
Declared infecund	5.2	2.3	2.4	3.1	4.4	5.4	8.0	3.9
Missing	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.2
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number	6902	10292	12705	13094	8933	5401	5273	62601
<b>Preferred sex of additional child</b>								
Boy	39.7	45.7	60.9	69.4	71.1	70.1	54.0	51.1
Girl	1.6	13.7	14.7	11.8	10.1	5.6	4.9	10.3
Doesn't matter	36.6	23.7	12.6	8.3	7.6	9.6	18.7	22.2
Up to God	22.2	16.9	11.8	10.5	11.2	14.7	22.4	16.3
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number wanting more	5786	8360	4840	2266	855	310	201	22617

**Table 7.1 Fertility preferences (Contd.)**

Percent distribution of currently married women by desire for children and preferred sex of additional child, according to number of living children and residence, India, 1992-93

Desire for children	Number of living children <sup>1</sup>							Total
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+	
<b>TOTAL</b>								
<b>Desire for additional child</b>								
Have another soon <sup>2</sup>	57.9	21.6	8.7	4.3	2.3	1.2	0.8	13.0
Have another later <sup>3</sup>	21.4	53.6	22.7	10.2	5.8	3.6	2.4	19.6
Have another, undecided when	4.6	2.6	1.0	0.6	0.5	0.3	0.3	1.4
Undecided	2.2	1.7	1.9	1.5	1.1	1.3	1.5	1.6
Up to God	5.3	3.4	3.5	3.4	3.4	3.6	4.4	3.7
Want no more	1.8	10.1	30.1	27.7	32.8	38.6	49.9	25.9
Sterilized	0.9	4.2	29.7	49.2	50.0	45.7	31.9	30.8
Declared infecund	5.7	2.6	2.4	2.9	4.1	5.3	8.3	3.8
Missing	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.2
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number	8916	14292	18292	17695	11887	6907	6690	84678
<b>Preferred sex of additional child</b>								
Boy	36.3	42.9	59.7	69.2	72.2	68.9	55.4	48.6
Girl	2.2	15.0	15.1	11.9	9.6	6.9	5.5	11.0
Doesn't matter	39.5	25.8	13.4	8.7	7.5	10.3	18.1	24.3
Up to God	21.9	16.2	11.8	10.2	10.7	14.0	21.0	16.1
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number wanting more	7481	11126	5915	2673	1011	352	236	28795

( ) Based on 25-49 unweighted cases

<sup>1</sup>Includes current pregnancy, if any

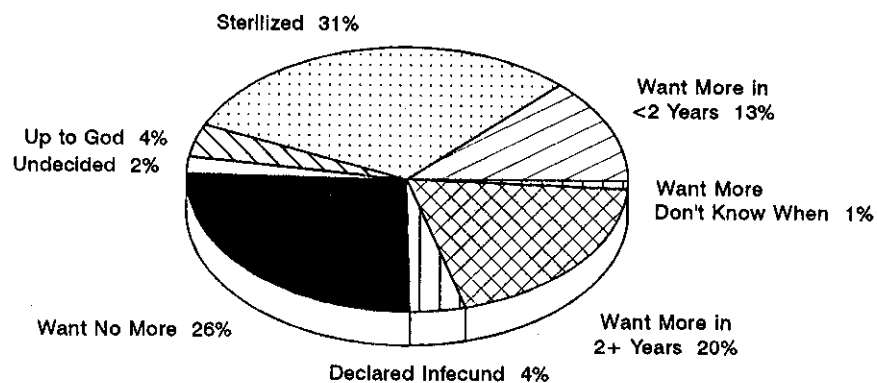
<sup>2</sup>Wants next birth within 2 years

<sup>3</sup>Wants to delay next birth for 2 or more years

In the NFHS, it is assumed that women do not want any more children if they or their husbands are sterilized. However, some dissatisfaction is expected with sterilization and has been observed among the sterilized populations in other countries, although the extent of sterilization regret is usually less than 10 percent (Loaiza, 1995). The NFHS included questions on sterilization regret and the reasons for the regret. Overall, 6 percent of sterilized women (or women whose husbands are sterilized) regret that the sterilization was performed (Table 7.2). However, less than half of these women regret the sterilization because they or their husbands want more children or because they want to replace a dead child. A major cause of sterilization regret is side effects of the operation. Therefore, the assumption that women (or their husbands) who are sterilized do not want any more children will only slightly underestimate preferences to have another child and overestimate the desire to stop childbearing.

From the point of view of understanding the total desire to limit or space births, it is of interest to add together women who do not want any more children (including those who have already been sterilized) and women who want to delay their next birth for two years or longer (as well as women who are unsure of the preferred timing of their next child). Overall, as shown in Table 7.1, 78 percent of women fall in this category (81 percent in urban areas and 76 percent in rural areas).

**Figure 7.1**  
**Fertility Preferences Among**  
**Currently Married Women Age 13-49**



NFHS, India, 1992-93

**Table 7.2 Sterilization regret**

Percentage of sterilized couples who regret sterilization (according to the wife's report) and percent distribution of reasons for regretting sterilization, India, 1992-93

Sterilization regret/reasons	Urban	Rural	Total
Percentage of sterilized couples who regret sterilization	4.0	6.1	5.5
Number of sterilized couples	7417	18635	26051
<b>Reasons for regret</b>			
Respondent wants another child	35.2	27.1	28.8
Wants to replace child who died	13.8	13.3	13.4
Husband wants another child	5.7	4.5	4.8
Side effects	40.7	49.2	47.4
Other	4.5	5.8	5.6
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of couples who regret sterilization	300	1140	1439

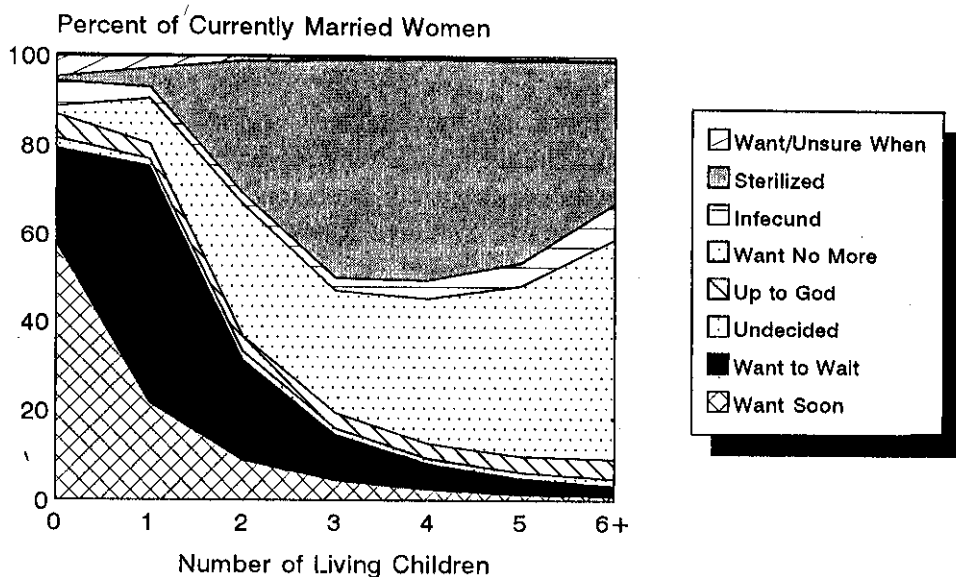
Among women who want another child, there is a strong preference for having a son as the next child. Forty-nine percent say they want a son, only 11 percent express a desire for a daughter, and the rest say that the sex of the child does not matter (24 percent) or that it is "up to God" (16 percent). The desire for a son is particularly strong in rural areas and among high parity women. Women who do not have any children are extremely unlikely to want a daughter for their first child, with 2 percent expressing a desire for a daughter compared to 36 percent who want a son.

As expected, the desire for more children declines rapidly as the number of children increases (Table 7.1 and Figure 7.2). Eighty-four percent of women with no children say they want a child and less than 3 percent say they do not want any children or are sterilized. The proportion who want another child drops to 32 percent for women who have two living children and 15 percent for those with three living children. The desire to have a child within two years drops even more rapidly, from 58 percent for women without any living children to 9 percent or less for women with two or more living children. Interestingly, the desire to space is very strong for women who have fewer than three children. Twenty-one percent of women with no children say that they would like to wait at least two years before having their first child. The proportion more than doubles to 54 percent among women with one child. Similarly, 23 percent of women with two children would like to wait at least two years before having their next child. Since nearly 50 percent of all women have fewer than three living children, the strong expressed desire for spacing among these women cannot be ignored. The family planning programme in India needs to increase access to temporary methods if it is to satisfy the needs of a large segment of the population who wish to space their births. Increasing access to spacing methods for women who want more children is likely to lower overall fertility and population growth, as well as provide health benefits to both mothers and their children.

Table 7.3 shows variations in fertility preferences by state. The percentage of currently married women who want to have another child varies considerably from a high of 53 in Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya to a low of 25 in Himachal Pradesh and Punjab. In every state except Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, the majority of women who want another child would like to wait two years or more to have their next child. Interestingly, among those states where the desire for an additional child is low, there is little difference in the percentage of currently married women who would like to have a child within two years and those who express a desire to wait for two years or more to have another child. For example, in Goa, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu the difference between these two groups is only 1-3 percentage points. With the exception of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Nagaland, more than one out of two currently married women in all states say they do not want any more children or they or their husbands are sterilized. At least two out of three currently married women in Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Tripura, Kerala and Tamil Nadu do not want any more children (including sterilized women and women whose husbands are sterilized). Nineteen percent of women in Nagaland believe that decisions pertaining to childbearing are "up to God", but this response is rare in most other states.

Table 7.4 provides information about subgroup variations in the potential demand for family planning. As before, women who are sterilized (or whose husbands are sterilized) are added to those who say they want no more children to derive this measure. Overall, there is little subgroup variation among women who have no children, except that older women are more

Figure 7.2  
Fertility Preferences by Number of  
Living Children



NFHS, India, 1992-93

likely to express a desire not to have any children. Differences by subgroups emerge as the number of living children increases and are especially marked for women who have 2-3 children. As expected, the desire to have no more children increases with age, from 2 percent among women age 13-14 to 84 percent among women age 35-44 and then falls slightly to 77 percent among women age 45-49. Urban women are more likely to want to stop childbearing than rural women, and this difference is especially marked among women with fewer than three children. Educational attainment is strongly related to fertility desires for women who have at least 2 children, but this difference narrows as the number of living children increases. The desire to have no more children is lowest among Muslim women (49 percent) and highest among Sikhs and Jains (70 percent). Scheduled tribe women are least likely to want no more children, but even in this group nearly one out of two women do not want any more children. It is also evident from Table 7.4 that the sex composition of living children is strongly related to the fertility preferences of women. For example, the desire to have no more children among women with three children is twice as high for those who have all sons as for those who have all daughters. The table shows a strong desire for at least one son, but the inverted U-shaped pattern for women with three or more living children also shows a weak desire to have at least one daughter. The desire to have a daughter may be related to the importance of the Hindu religious obligation of *kanyadan*, which provides an opportunity to make merit by giving one's daughter away at the time of her marriage.

Table 7.3 Fertility preferences by state

Percent distribution of currently married women by desire for children, according to state, India, 1992-93

State	Want within 2 years	Want after 2 years	Want, undecided when	Undecided	Up to God	Want no more	Sterilized	Declared infertile	Missing	Total percent
<b>India</b>	13.0	19.6	1.4	1.6	3.7	25.9	30.8	3.8	0.2	100.0
<b>North</b>										
Delhi	9.8	16.6	0.5	1.4	1.6	45.4	23.3	1.3	0.1	100.0
Haryana	14.8	17.3	0.5	1.9	0.5	29.3	34.8	0.9	--	100.0
Himachal Pradesh	9.3	15.9	0.2	1.4	0.3	25.7	45.8	1.4	--	100.0
Jammu Region of J & K	14.8	17.5	0.1	1.3	0.1	35.6	29.7	0.9	--	100.0
Punjab	11.4	13.3	0.2	1.3	0.4	37.8	34.0	1.6	--	100.0
Rajasthan	12.7	20.3	1.2	3.1	7.1	24.2	27.7	3.5	0.2	100.0
<b>Central</b>										
Madhya Pradesh	12.3	25.3	2.8	2.2	4.2	19.6	31.5	1.8	0.2	100.0
Uttar Pradesh	12.4	25.6	1.0	1.6	9.7	31.5	13.1	4.9	0.3	100.0
<b>East</b>										
Bihar	16.7	24.0	1.1	1.8	6.3	24.1	18.6	7.2	0.2	100.0
Orissa	13.7	18.1	1.9	3.1	2.2	25.9	31.6	3.5	--	100.0
West Bengal	10.0	20.5	0.8	0.7	0.8	34.5	30.6	2.1	--	100.0
<b>Northeast</b>										
Assam	20.5	30.3	2.4	3.5	5.4	24.0	10.7	3.4	--	100.0
Manipur	11.2	22.7	0.9	1.0	1.1	47.8	14.4	0.8	--	100.0
Meghalaya	8.5	29.1	0.6	1.5	2.4	41.4	13.8	2.8	--	100.0
Mizoram	14.7	35.0	3.5	4.6	8.7	17.0	10.0	6.6	--	100.0
Nagaland	12.9	24.3	0.7	2.2	2.4	10.2	44.6	2.8	--	100.0
Tripura	5.6	18.7	1.8	6.4	19.0	35.1	6.4	7.0	--	100.0
	12.6	15.2	0.7	1.1	0.3	50.2	19.1	0.8	--	100.0
<b>West</b>										
Goa	12.9	13.8	0.8	2.7	0.6	33.3	30.5	5.3	0.1	100.0
Gujarat	13.7	17.2	0.7	1.4	1.8	20.6	41.0	3.5	0.1	100.0
Maharashtra	11.7	13.5	2.3	1.2	0.7	20.4	46.1	4.0	--	100.0
<b>South</b>										
Andhra Pradesh	17.7	12.8	2.6	1.6	1.4	13.6	44.8	5.3	0.4	100.0
Karnataka	12.4	16.7	0.9	1.5	1.7	20.6	42.5	3.4	0.3	100.0
Kerala	10.8	16.1	1.1	1.3	1.1	19.3	48.3	1.8	0.2	100.0
Tamil Nadu	12.0	14.6	1.0	0.7	0.6	27.1	39.5	4.2	0.2	100.0

-- Less than 0.05 percent

**Table 7.4 Desire to have no more children by background characteristics**

Percentage of currently married women who want no more children by number of living children and selected background characteristics, India, 1992-93

Background characteristic	Number of living children <sup>1</sup>							Total
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+	
<b>Age</b>								
13-14	1.1	4.4	*	NC	NC	NC	NC	1.8
15-19	1.1	3.0	31.9	60.5	*	*	NC	6.9
20-24	1.4	5.9	39.0	59.0	67.3	79.9	89.2	27.3
25-29	2.0	17.0	60.1	70.0	75.5	78.4	79.2	57.4
30-34	5.7	39.4	79.0	82.7	83.0	82.9	81.7	76.5
35-39	11.2	54.7	84.1	90.4	90.4	87.3	84.7	83.5
40-44	15.7	58.3	85.7	89.0	88.9	89.1	83.8	83.9
45-49	13.8	58.8	78.1	80.4	81.6	81.7	77.4	76.6
<b>Residence</b>								
Urban	2.7	22.3	74.6	85.8	88.2	88.6	85.1	64.3
Rural	2.7	11.2	53.2	73.9	81.0	83.2	80.9	53.9
<b>Education</b>								
Illiterate	2.6	11.4	45.8	70.0	79.6	82.2	80.7	54.0
Literate, < middle complete	2.9	13.1	67.2	86.3	90.9	92.3	86.3	63.0
Middle school complete	2.5	14.0	75.3	90.3	89.0	89.3	87.9	58.5
High school and above	2.6	24.0	83.0	91.4	91.1	92.9	90.2	59.7
<b>Religion</b>								
Hindu	2.8	14.7	60.9	78.3	84.2	85.6	83.2	57.2
Muslim	2.3	9.5	38.6	60.1	70.5	76.6	77.8	49.2
Christian	2.3	15.7	74.2	79.8	78.9	79.6	76.4	60.2
Sikh	1.2	10.2	74.4	89.0	94.7	96.4	95.0	69.6
Jain	(0.8)	39.5	82.7	90.8	(94.6)	*	*	70.4
Buddhist	(2.6)	17.1	67.1	86.1	94.4	(95.9)	(99.2)	64.5
Other	0.4	23.2	60.1	72.6	74.0	66.8	65.1	50.0
<b>Caste/tribe</b>								
Scheduled caste	2.2	9.6	46.1	72.5	81.0	85.4	86.0	53.1
Scheduled tribe	2.9	10.8	47.1	65.3	77.0	79.3	77.4	49.4
Other	2.7	15.4	62.8	78.9	83.8	84.8	81.6	58.0
<b>Number of living sons<sup>2</sup></b>								
None	2.7	13.7	36.9	41.3	56.5	55.3	56.0	15.6
1	NA	18.6	66.0	73.4	76.1	81.9	79.4	57.6
2	NA	NA	71.5	88.0	88.4	87.9	84.6	83.8
3	NA	NA	NA	82.6	89.5	86.7	84.1	86.0
4	NA	NA	NA	NA	82.5	87.4	81.8	83.6
5	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	83.2	82.7	82.8
6+	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	82.4	82.4
<b>Number of living daughters<sup>2</sup></b>								
None	2.7	18.6	71.5	82.6	82.5	83.2	75.3	32.5
1	NA	13.7	66.0	88.0	89.5	87.4	85.7	64.6
2	NA	NA	36.9	73.4	88.4	86.7	81.7	73.0
3	NA	NA	NA	41.3	76.1	87.9	83.6	75.3
4	NA	NA	NA	NA	56.5	81.9	83.3	78.9
5	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	55.3	81.6	77.8
6+	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	79.0	79.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>14.3</b>	<b>59.7</b>	<b>77.0</b>	<b>82.8</b>	<b>84.4</b>	<b>81.8</b>	<b>56.7</b>

Note: Women who have been sterilized, or whose husbands have been sterilized, are considered to want no more children.

NA: Not applicable

NC: Not calculated because there are no cases on which to base a percentage

( ) Based on 25-49 unweighted cases

\* Percentage not shown; based on fewer than 25 unweighted cases

<sup>1</sup>Includes current pregnancy, if any

<sup>2</sup>Excludes pregnant women



## 7.2 Need for Family Planning Services

Assessing the demand for family planning is crucial to the success of a country's population and family planning programmes. It enables policymakers and programme planners to estimate the market for family planning services and assess programme effectiveness. In this report the demand for family planning is estimated as the sum of the unmet need for family planning and the current prevalence of contraceptive use. Unmet need has been measured in various ways in past studies (Westoff and Ochoa, 1991). Here, currently married women who say that they either do not want any more children or that they want to wait two or more years before having another child, but are not using contraception, are defined as having an *unmet need* for family planning. Current users of family planning methods are said to have a *met need* for family planning. The total demand for family planning is the sum of the met need and the unmet need for family planning. Table 7.5 shows the unmet need, met need and total demand for family planning, according to whether there is a need for spacing or limiting births<sup>1</sup>. The table also contains detailed definitions of these concepts.

According to these definitions, 20 percent of women in India have an unmet need for family planning. The unmet need for spacing births (11 percent) is slightly greater than the unmet need for limiting births (9 percent). Together with the 41 percent of currently married women who are using contraception, a total of 60 percent of currently married women have a demand for family planning. If all of the women who say they want to space or limit their births were to use family planning, the contraceptive prevalence rate would increase from 41 percent to 60 percent of married women. This means that 68 percent of the demand for family planning is being met by current programmes, as seen in the last column of Table 7.5. If the level of unmet need indicated in the table is assumed to reflect the needs of all currently married women age 13-49 in India, then about 30 million women in India have an unmet need for family planning.

The unmet need for limiting childbearing increases steadily until age 30-34 and decreases thereafter. The unmet need for spacing, on the other hand, is particularly strong for women under age 25. This is the segment of the population whose family planning needs are least likely to be met by current programmes. Only 12 percent and 19 percent of the family planning needs of currently married women age 13-14 and 15-19, respectively, are being met. Although this percent increases steadily from 43 percent for women age 20-24 to 85 percent for women age 40-44, it is only being nearly fully satisfied for women age 45-49.

Rural areas have a slightly greater unmet need for family planning than urban areas, with a greater unmet need for spacing than limiting in rural areas. Although the use of and demand for family planning is higher in urban than in rural areas, the percent of demand satisfied is also somewhat higher in urban areas. There is little difference in the unmet need for family planning by educational attainment of women, but both the use of and the demand for family planning is lower among illiterate women than among women with some education. Accordingly, the total needs of illiterate women are less likely to be satisfied by current family planning programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> Women with an unmet need or a met need are allocated to the "spacing" or "limiting" group depending on their fertility preference responses, not according to the contraceptive method being used or preferred.

**Table 7.5 Need for family planning services**

Percent of currently married women with unmet need, met need, and total demand for family planning (FP) services by selected background characteristics, India, 1992-93

Background characteristic	Unmet need for FP <sup>1</sup>			Met need-currently using <sup>2</sup>			Total demand for FP			Percent of need satisfied
	To space	To limit	Total	To space	To limit	Total	To space	To limit	Total	
<b>Age</b>										
13-14	29.6	3.6	33.2	3.9	0.8	4.7	33.5	4.4	37.9	12.4
15-19	28.2	2.3	30.4	5.1	2.1	7.1	33.2	4.3	37.6	18.9
20-24	22.8	5.1	27.9	7.0	14.0	21.0	29.8	19.1	48.9	43.0
25-29	11.2	10.5	21.6	4.9	37.5	42.4	16.1	47.9	64.0	66.2
30-34	4.4	13.2	17.6	1.8	54.1	55.9	6.2	67.3	73.5	76.0
35-39	1.5	12.0	13.5	0.7	60.3	61.0	2.2	72.3	74.5	81.9
40-44	0.7	9.0	9.7	0.1	56.2	56.3	0.7	65.2	65.9	85.3
45-49	0.2	4.1	4.4	0.1	45.7	45.8	0.3	49.8	50.2	91.3
<b>Residence</b>										
Urban	8.6	8.4	17.1	5.2	45.8	51.0	13.8	54.2	68.1	74.9
Rural	11.9	8.5	20.3	2.7	34.2	36.9	14.6	42.6	57.2	64.5
<b>Education</b>										
Illiterate	11.0	9.3	20.3	1.5	32.4	33.9	12.5	41.6	54.1	62.6
Lit., < middle complete	10.8	7.2	18.1	4.0	46.4	50.4	14.8	53.6	68.4	73.6
Middle school complete	12.7	6.5	19.3	6.8	44.0	50.8	19.5	50.6	70.1	72.5
High school and above	10.5	7.3	17.8	10.2	44.5	54.7	20.7	51.8	72.5	75.5
<b>Religion</b>										
Hindu	10.9	8.0	18.9	3.1	38.6	41.6	14.0	46.5	60.5	68.8
Muslim	12.9	12.9	25.8	4.6	23.2	27.8	17.5	36.1	53.6	51.8
Christian	8.6	6.7	15.3	5.5	42.9	48.4	14.1	49.6	63.7	76.0
Sikh	7.9	6.2	14.1	5.6	51.9	57.5	13.5	58.1	71.6	80.3
Jain	5.8	5.4	11.2	8.5	54.2	62.7	14.3	59.6	73.8	84.9
Buddhist	7.3	7.3	14.6	2.9	47.9	50.9	10.2	55.2	65.5	77.7
Other	15.7	6.5	22.1	3.8	30.0	33.8	19.5	36.5	56.0	60.5
<b>Caste/tribe</b>										
Scheduled caste	12.3	9.5	21.8	2.2	32.4	34.5	14.5	41.9	56.3	61.3
Scheduled tribe	11.2	7.2	18.4	1.6	31.4	33.0	12.8	38.6	51.4	64.1
Other	10.8	8.4	19.3	3.8	38.6	42.4	14.6	47.0	61.6	68.8
<b>Number of living children</b>										
None	16.0	1.6	17.6	3.4	0.8	4.2	19.4	2.4	21.8	19.3
1	24.4	2.5	27.0	11.0	8.3	19.3	35.4	10.8	46.2	41.7
2	12.6	7.7	20.3	3.6	42.5	46.1	16.2	50.2	66.4	69.5
3	6.7	8.4	15.1	1.2	57.7	58.9	7.9	66.2	74.1	79.6
4	4.0	11.5	15.5	0.6	58.2	58.8	4.6	69.7	74.3	79.1
5	2.6	15.8	18.4	0.5	52.8	53.2	3.0	68.6	71.6	74.3
6+	2.2	22.3	24.5	0.3	39.9	40.2	2.5	62.1	64.7	62.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>11.0</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>19.5</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>37.2</b>	<b>40.6</b>	<b>14.4</b>	<b>45.7</b>	<b>60.1</b>	<b>67.6</b>

<sup>1</sup> *Unmet need for spacing* includes pregnant women whose pregnancy was mistimed, amenorrhoeic women whose last birth was mistimed, and women who are neither pregnant nor amenorrhoeic and who are not using any method of family planning and say they want to wait 2 or more years for their next birth. Also included in unmet need for spacing are women who are unsure whether they want another child or who want another child but are unsure when to have the birth. *Unmet need for limiting* refers to pregnant women whose pregnancy was unwanted, amenorrhoeic women whose last child was unwanted and women who are neither pregnant nor amenorrhoeic and who are not using any method of family planning and who want no more children.

<sup>2</sup> *Using for spacing* refers to women who are using some method of family planning and say they want to have another child or are undecided whether to have another. *Using for limiting* refers to women who are using and who want no more children. Note that the specific methods used are not taken into account here.

Among the religious groups, unmet need is highest among Muslim women, who are least likely to have their total demand satisfied. Differences in the unmet need for family planning services by caste/tribe are not marked. The final panel in Table 7.5 indicates that current family planning services are particularly inadequate for satisfying the childspacing needs of women with fewer than two living children. Consequently, the percentage of total need satisfied is much lower among women with no living children (19 percent) or one living child (42 percent) than among those who have two or more living children.

The most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, has the highest total unmet need for family planning (30 percent), followed closely by Nagaland, Bihar and Meghalaya (Table 7.6 and Figure 7.3). In fact, more than one-quarter of all Indian women with an unmet need for family planning reside in Uttar Pradesh. The total unmet need is lowest in Andhra Pradesh (10 percent). With the exception of Delhi, Punjab, Nagaland, Tripura and Goa, the unmet need for spacing is greater than the unmet need for limiting in every state. There is no difference in the unmet need for spacing and limiting in Punjab. Less than 20 percent of currently married women in Nagaland and Uttar Pradesh are using family planning and women in these two states are also least likely to have their demand for family planning satisfied. On the other hand, more than 80 percent of the overall demand for family planning in Punjab, Mizoram, Tripura, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala is being met by current programmes.

### 7.3 Ideal Number of Children

The above analysis has focused on the respondent's reproductive desires for the future, implicitly taking into account the number of sons and daughters that she already has. Another measure of fertility preferences is a woman's ideal family size. In determining the *ideal* number of children, the respondent is asked to perform a more difficult abstract task of stating the number of children she would like to have if she could start childbearing all over again. In the NFHS, women with no children were asked, "If you could choose exactly the number of children to have in your whole life, how many would that be?" Women who already had children were asked, "If you could go back to the time you did not have any children and could choose exactly the number of children to have in your whole life, how many would that be?" Some women had difficulty in answering these hypothetical questions and often the questions had to be repeated to ensure that they were understood by the respondent. Despite the widespread criticism that asking women to quantify the number of children they would like to have may be an alien concept in many developing countries, 90 percent of respondents were able to give a numeric response when asked for their ideal number of children.

Table 7.7 shows that for a large majority (66 percent) of women, the ideal number of children falls within the narrow range of 2-3 children. A relatively small percentage of women (3 percent) think that one child is ideal and one in five women consider four children or more as ideal. For those who gave numeric responses, the average number of children considered ideal is 2.9. The Third All India Survey conducted in 1988-89 found the ideal family size to be 3.0 (Operations Research Group, 1990). The mean ideal number of children in the NFHS ranges from 2.4 to 2.6 for women with fewer than three children to 4.0 for women who already have six or more children, and is slightly higher in rural areas than in urban areas. Thus, although the "two-child family" norm can not be said to exist in India at this time, the majority of women giving a numeric response to the ideal family size questions consider a small or

**Table 7.6 Need for family planning services by state**

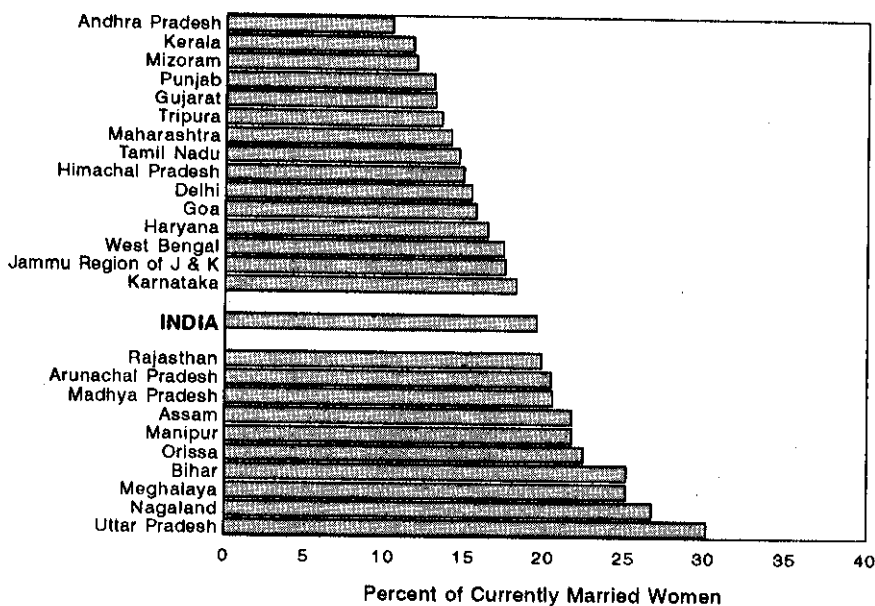
Percent of currently married women with unmet need, met need, and total demand for family planning (FP) services by state, India, 1992-93

State	Unmet need for FP <sup>1</sup>			Met need-currently using <sup>2</sup>			Total demand for FP			Percent of need satisfied
	To space	To limit	Total	To space	To limit	Total	To space	To limit	Total	
<b>India</b>	11.0	8.5	19.5	3.4	37.2	40.6	14.4	45.7	60.1	67.6
<b>North</b>										
Delhi	7.6	7.9	15.4	10.7	49.6	60.3	18.2	57.5	75.7	79.6
Haryana	8.8	7.6	16.4	4.4	45.2	49.7	13.2	52.8	66.0	75.2
Himachal Pradesh	9.2	5.6	14.9	3.7	54.7	58.4	12.9	60.3	73.2	79.7
Jammu Region of J & K	8.9	8.6	17.5	5.4	44.0	49.4	14.3	52.6	66.9	73.9
Punjab	6.5	6.5	13.0	5.4	53.4	58.7	11.8	59.9	71.7	81.9
Rajasthan	10.8	9.0	19.8	1.6	30.2	31.8	12.4	39.2	51.6	61.7
<b>Central</b>										
Madhya Pradesh	13.1	7.4	20.5	2.0	34.6	36.5	15.1	42.0	57.1	64.0
Uttar Pradesh	16.7	13.4	30.1	2.0	17.8	19.8	18.6	31.2	49.9	39.7
<b>East</b>										
Bihar	14.4	10.6	25.1	1.9	21.1	23.1	16.4	31.8	48.1	47.9
Orissa	12.7	9.7	22.4	1.5	34.7	36.3	14.3	44.4	58.6	61.8
West Bengal	9.4	8.0	17.4	10.2	47.2	57.4	19.6	55.2	74.8	76.7
<b>Northeast</b>										
Arunachal Pradesh	12.9	7.4	20.4	5.3	18.3	23.6	18.2	25.7	44.0	53.7
Assam	11.0	10.7	21.7	8.6	34.2	42.8	19.5	44.9	64.5	66.3
Manipur	11.7	10.0	21.7	7.4	27.5	34.9	19.1	37.5	56.6	61.7
Meghalaya	20.6	4.6	25.1	5.0	15.7	20.7	25.5	20.3	45.8	45.1
Mizoram	9.2	2.8	11.9	7.1	46.7	53.8	16.2	49.4	65.7	81.8
Nagaland	12.9	13.8	26.7	1.9	11.1	13.0	14.7	25.0	39.7	32.7
Tripura	5.3	8.2	13.5	9.8	46.4	56.1	15.1	54.5	69.6	80.7
<b>West</b>										
Goa	7.8	7.9	15.7	5.7	42.1	47.8	13.5	49.9	63.5	75.3
Gujarat	7.6	5.5	13.1	2.6	46.7	49.3	10.2	52.2	62.4	79.0
Maharashtra	7.3	6.8	14.1	3.1	50.7	53.7	10.4	57.5	67.9	79.2
<b>South</b>										
Andhra Pradesh	6.3	4.1	10.4	0.9	46.1	47.0	7.2	50.3	57.4	81.9
Karnataka	11.8	6.4	18.2	2.3	46.8	49.1	14.1	53.2	67.3	73.0
Kerala	7.2	4.5	11.7	6.6	56.6	63.3	13.9	61.1	75.0	84.4
Tamil Nadu	7.8	6.7	14.6	3.3	46.5	49.8	11.1	53.2	64.4	77.4

<sup>1</sup>Unmet need for spacing includes pregnant women whose pregnancy was mistimed, amenorrhoeic women whose last birth was mistimed, and women who are neither pregnant nor amenorrhoeic and who are not using any method of family planning and say they want to wait 2 or more years for their next birth. Also included in unmet need for spacing are women who are unsure whether they want another child or who want another child but are unsure when to have the birth. Unmet need for limiting refers to pregnant women whose pregnancy was unwanted, amenorrhoeic women whose last child was unwanted and women who are neither pregnant nor amenorrhoeic and who are not using any method of family planning and who want no more children.

<sup>2</sup>Using for spacing refers to women who are using some method of family planning and say they want to have another child or are undecided whether to have another. Using for limiting refers to women who are using and who want no more children. Note that the specific methods used are not taken into account here.

Figure 7.3  
Unmet Need for Family Planning by State



NFHS, India, 1992-93

moderate size family as ideal rather than a very large one.

Some critics argue that women tend to adjust their fertility ideals upwards in keeping with increases in their actual family size (Lightbourne and MacDonald, 1982). However, it is evident that in India a large proportion of women say that their ideal number of children is less than the number they already have. For example, among women who have six living children or more, 65 percent state that their ideal family would consist of fewer than six children. Similarly, 66 percent of women with five living children think that fewer than five children is ideal. Thus, family size norms are relatively low and nearly half of women with more than two children actually have more children than they consider ideal. This may be taken as another indicator of surplus or unwanted fertility.

Table 7.8 shows the mean ideal number of children for ever-married women by age and selected background characteristics. The mean ranges between 2.7 and 2.8 for women below age 30 and then increases steadily to 3.2 for women age 45-49. Rural women in India on average desire half a child more than urban women. The mean ideal family size declines as educational attainment increases, from 3.1 for illiterate women to 2.1 for women with at least a high school education. The ideal family size for Muslims is one child higher than for Jains and about half a child higher than for Hindus and Christians. Similarly, women belonging to scheduled tribes have an ideal family size that is half a child larger than the non-SC/ST women. There is little difference in the ideal family size by women's work status. Women whose husbands are illiterate desire one child more than women whose husbands have studied beyond

**Table 7.7 Ideal and actual number of children**

Percent distribution of ever-married women by ideal number of children, and mean ideal number of children for ever-married women and currently married women, according to number of living children and residence, India, 1992-93

Ideal number of children	Number of living children <sup>1</sup>							Total
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+	
<b>URBAN</b>								
None	0.2	--	--	--	0.1	--	0.1	--
1	10.9	15.9	6.3	3.2	1.7	1.2	0.5	6.5
2	58.3	62.4	69.5	40.3	35.1	24.8	16.2	50.1
3	16.1	12.7	16.2	40.9	28.0	31.3	23.6	23.7
4	4.0	3.2	3.9	7.8	24.0	16.0	24.5	9.4
5	1.3	0.6	0.4	1.4	2.0	10.1	5.3	1.9
6+	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.5	1.1	2.8	10.9	1.3
Non-numeric responses	8.9	4.9	3.4	5.9	8.1	13.8	18.8	7.0
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of women	2250	4266	5880	4828	3110	1619	1503	23455
Mean ideal number <sup>2</sup>								
Ever-married women	2.2	2.1	2.2	2.6	2.9	3.2	3.7	2.5
Currently married women	2.2	2.1	2.2	2.6	2.9	3.2	3.7	2.5
<b>RURAL</b>								
None	0.1	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
1	3.3	4.6	1.5	1.4	0.8	0.5	0.5	2.0
2	40.6	46.2	47.6	25.6	21.3	14.8	10.1	32.4
3	28.1	28.3	29.7	44.2	25.3	26.7	20.7	30.6
4	11.4	9.6	11.1	15.3	33.0	22.1	24.5	16.9
5	2.1	2.1	2.1	3.0	5.1	13.0	7.9	4.1
6+	0.7	0.8	0.9	1.3	2.9	5.5	14.6	2.7
Non-numeric responses	13.7	8.4	7.0	9.0	11.6	17.4	21.7	11.2
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of women	7622	11123	13407	13676	9352	5625	5518	66322
Mean ideal number <sup>2</sup>								
Ever-married women	2.7	2.6	2.7	3.0	3.4	3.6	4.1	3.0
Currently married women	2.7	2.6	2.7	3.0	3.4	3.6	4.1	3.0
<b>TOTAL</b>								
None	0.1	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
1	5.0	7.7	3.0	1.9	1.0	0.6	0.5	3.1
2	44.6	50.7	54.3	29.5	24.7	17.0	11.5	37.0
3	25.3	23.9	25.6	43.3	25.9	27.7	21.3	28.8
4	9.7	7.8	8.9	13.4	30.8	20.8	24.5	14.9
5	1.9	1.7	1.6	2.6	4.3	12.4	7.3	3.6
6+	0.6	0.7	0.7	1.1	2.4	4.9	13.8	2.4
Non-numeric responses	12.6	7.4	5.9	8.2	10.7	16.6	21.1	10.1
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of women	9872	15389	19286	18503	12461	7244	7021	89777
Mean ideal number <sup>2</sup>								
Ever-married women	2.6	2.4	2.5	2.9	3.2	3.5	4.0	2.9
Currently married women	2.6	2.4	2.5	2.9	3.2	3.5	4.0	2.9

-- Less than 0.05 percent

<sup>1</sup>Includes current pregnancy, if any

<sup>2</sup>Means are calculated excluding the women giving non-numeric responses

**Table 7.8 Ideal number of children by background characteristics**

Mean ideal number of children for ever-married women by age and selected background characteristics, India, 1992-93

Background characteristic	Current age								Total
	13-14	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	
<b>Residence</b>									
Urban	(2.5)	2.5	2.4	2.4	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.8	2.5
Rural	2.9	2.7	2.8	2.9	3.1	3.1	3.3	3.4	3.0
<b>Education</b>									
Illiterate	2.9	2.9	2.9	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.5	3.1
Lit., < middle complete	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.7	2.8	2.9	2.6
Middle school complete	*	2.4	2.3	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.4
High school and above	*	2.2	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.2	2.2	2.3	2.1
<b>Religion</b>									
Hindu	2.8	2.7	2.6	2.7	2.8	2.9	3.0	3.2	2.8
Muslim	(2.9)	3.0	3.0	3.3	3.5	3.6	3.8	3.8	3.3
Christian	*	2.7	2.8	2.8	2.8	3.0	3.1	3.4	2.9
Sikh	*	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.5	2.6	2.8	2.8	2.5
Jain	NC	*	2.1	2.0	2.1	2.5	(2.6)	2.7	2.3
Buddhist	*	2.6	2.3	2.4	2.8	2.7	2.7	(3.3)	2.6
Other	*	3.0	2.9	3.3	3.0	3.7	4.1	4.3	3.3
<b>Caste/tribe</b>									
Scheduled caste	(2.8)	2.7	2.8	2.9	3.1	3.1	3.3	3.3	3.0
Scheduled tribe	(3.0)	2.9	3.0	3.3	3.4	3.5	3.6	3.8	3.3
Other	2.8	2.7	2.6	2.7	2.8	2.9	3.0	3.2	2.8
<b>Work status</b>									
Not working	2.8	2.7	2.7	2.8	2.9	3.0	3.2	3.3	2.9
Working in family farm/business	(2.7)	2.7	2.8	2.9	3.0	3.0	3.2	3.4	3.0
Employed by someone else	(2.9)	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.8	2.8	2.8	3.0	2.8
Self employed	*	2.6	2.7	2.8	2.8	2.9	2.9	3.3	2.8
<b>Husband's education</b>									
Illiterate	3.0	2.9	3.0	3.1	3.3	3.3	3.5	3.5	3.2
Lit., < primary complete	(3.0)	2.7	2.8	2.8	2.9	3.0	3.1	3.2	2.9
Primary school complete	(2.4)	2.6	2.6	2.8	2.9	3.0	3.1	3.1	2.9
Middle school complete	*	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.8	2.9	3.0	3.2	2.8
High school complete	(2.7)	2.6	2.5	2.6	2.6	2.7	2.7	2.8	2.6
Above high school	*	2.3	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.6	2.3
Don't know, missing	*	*	*	(2.8)	*	*	*	*	2.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>2.9</b>

Note: Means are calculated excluding women who gave non-numeric responses.

NC: Not calculated because there are no cases on which to base a mean.

( ) Based on 25-49 unweighted cases

\* Mean not shown; based on fewer than 25 unweighted cases

high school.

The ideal family size varies considerably by state, as shown in Table 7.9. Women in four of the seven northeastern states (Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland) state that at least four children are ideal. In contrast, two children are considered ideal in Tamil Nadu. In general, states in the southern, western and northern regions of the country have a lower ideal family size than states in the central, eastern and northeastern regions of the country.

**Table 7.9 Ideal number of children by age and state**

Mean ideal number of children for ever-married women by age and state, India, 1992-93

State	Current age								Total
	13-14	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	
<b>India</b>	2.8	2.7	2.7	2.8	2.9	3.0	3.1	3.2	2.9
<b>North</b>									
Delhi	NC	2.5	2.4	2.4	2.5	2.6	2.6	2.8	2.5
Haryana	*	2.4	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.6	2.7	2.8	2.6
Himachal Pradesh	NC	2.2	2.2	2.3	2.3	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.4
Jammu Region of J & K	*	2.7	2.5	2.7	2.7	2.9	3.1	3.1	2.8
Punjab	*	2.4	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.7	2.9	2.8	2.6
Rajasthan	*	2.6	2.7	3.0	3.1	3.2	3.4	3.4	3.0
<b>Central</b>									
Madhya Pradesh	*	2.7	2.8	3.1	3.2	3.4	3.5	3.8	3.1
Uttar Pradesh	*	3.0	3.1	3.3	3.5	3.6	3.7	3.8	3.4
<b>East</b>									
Bihar	(3.2)	3.2	3.1	3.3	3.5	3.5	3.8	3.8	3.4
Orissa	*	2.9	2.8	2.9	3.0	3.1	3.5	3.6	3.0
West Bengal	(2.8)	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.8	2.8	2.6
<b>Northeast</b>									
Arunachal Pradesh	*	3.8	4.3	4.5	4.8	4.9	5.6	(5.9)	4.7
Assam	*	3.0	2.9	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.5	3.7	3.2
Manipur	NC	*	3.2	3.5	3.7	4.0	4.2	4.4	3.7
Meghalaya	*	3.6	4.2	4.4	4.7	5.1	5.2	5.4	4.6
Mizoram	NC	(3.5)	3.8	3.8	4.1	4.5	4.9	5.1	4.3
Nagaland	NC	(3.0)	3.4	3.7	4.2	4.5	4.7	4.2	4.0
Tripura	*	2.5	2.4	2.5	2.5	2.7	2.9	2.6	2.6
<b>West</b>									
Goa	*	(2.6)	2.4	2.3	2.4	2.8	3.0	3.1	2.7
Gujarat	*	2.6	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.5	2.7	2.8	2.6
Maharashtra	(3.0)	2.5	2.4	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.6	2.8	2.5
<b>South</b>									
Andhra Pradesh	(2.6)	2.5	2.5	2.7	2.8	2.9	3.2	3.3	2.7
Karnataka	*	2.5	2.4	2.4	2.5	2.6	2.8	2.9	2.5
Kerala	*	2.7	2.5	2.4	2.5	2.7	2.9	3.2	2.6
Tamil Nadu	*	2.1	2.1	2.0	2.0	2.1	2.1	2.2	2.1

Note: Means are calculated excluding women who gave non-numeric responses.

NC: Not calculated because there are no cases on which to base a mean.

( ) Based on 25-49 unweighted cases

\* Mean not shown; based on fewer than 25 unweighted cases

In the NFHS, women who gave a numerical response to the question about the ideal number of children were further asked how many of these children they would like to be boys and how many they would like to be girls. Parental attitudes and aspirations regarding the sex of their children have attracted considerable research interest because of the belief that sex preference may sustain higher fertility levels than would be the case if parents are indifferent to the sex of their children (Cleland et al., 1983). Researchers argue that childbearing may continue beyond a preferred family size if women (or couples) desire a particular combination of sons and daughters. Empirical support for a strong influence of son preference on fertility, however, is rather weak (Arnold, 1987; Bairagi and Langsten, 1986). Numerous research studies in India have found a strong preference for sons, particularly in North India (Das Gupta, 1987; Miller, 1981; Population Research Centre, CRRID, 1993; Rastogi and Raj Kumari, 1992;



Basu, 1989; Khan et al., 1989).

Stated preferences about the sex composition of children in the ideal family (Table 7.10) confirm the existence of a strong son preference in India that was observed earlier in the discussion of the preferred sex of the next child. Overall, the ideal family size consists of 1.6 sons, 1.1 daughters and 0.2 children of either sex. Son preference is stronger in rural areas than in urban areas. Sons are preferred to daughters in both urban and rural areas irrespective of the number and sex composition of a woman's living children. There is a general tendency for women who have more daughters at each parity to indicate a weaker preference for sons.

**Table 7.10 Ideal sex composition of children by actual sex composition of living children**

Mean ideal number of sons and daughters for ever-married women by sex composition of living children, according to residence, India, 1992-93

Sex composition of living children	Urban			Rural			Total		
	Sons	Daughters	Doesn't matter	Sons	Daughters	Doesn't matter	Sons	Daughters	Doesn't matter
None	0.9	0.7	0.5	1.4	1.0	0.3	1.3	0.9	0.3
<b>1 child</b>	0.9	0.7	0.4	1.4	0.9	0.2	1.3	0.9	0.3
1 son	1.0	0.7	0.4	1.4	0.9	0.2	1.3	0.8	0.3
No sons	0.9	0.8	0.4	1.4	1.0	0.2	1.3	0.9	0.3
<b>2 children</b>	1.0	0.8	0.4	1.5	1.0	0.2	1.3	0.9	0.3
2 sons	1.1	0.7	0.5	1.5	0.8	0.3	1.4	0.8	0.3
1 son	1.0	0.9	0.3	1.5	1.0	0.2	1.3	1.0	0.2
No sons	1.0	0.9	0.4	1.4	1.2	0.2	1.3	1.1	0.3
<b>3 children</b>	1.4	1.0	0.3	1.7	1.1	0.2	1.6	1.1	0.2
3 sons	1.5	0.8	0.3	1.9	0.9	0.2	1.8	0.9	0.2
2 sons	1.5	0.9	0.3	1.7	1.0	0.2	1.7	1.0	0.2
1 son	1.3	1.0	0.3	1.6	1.2	0.2	1.5	1.2	0.2
No sons	1.2	1.1	0.4	1.6	1.3	0.2	1.5	1.2	0.2
<b>4+ children</b>	1.7	1.2	0.3	2.1	1.4	0.2	2.0	1.3	0.2
2 or more sons	1.8	1.2	0.3	2.1	1.4	0.2	2.1	1.3	0.2
1 son	1.5	1.2	0.2	1.8	1.3	0.2	1.7	1.3	0.2
No sons	1.4	1.2	0.4	1.8	1.4	0.2	1.7	1.3	0.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>0.2</b>

Note: Table excludes women who gave non-numeric responses to the questions on the ideal number of sons and daughters.

## 7.4 Fertility Planning

Another way to gauge the extent of unwanted fertility is to focus on recent births. For each child born in the four years before the survey and for each current pregnancy, women were asked whether the pregnancy was wanted at that time (planned), wanted at a later time (mistimed), or not wanted at all (unwanted). Information from these questions may result in underestimation of unplanned pregnancy due to rationalization. A woman may retrospectively declare an unplanned pregnancy as one that was wanted at that time. Nevertheless, these questions form a potentially powerful indicator of the degree to which couples successfully control their childbearing.

Table 7.11 shows the percentage distribution of births during the four years preceding the survey and current pregnancies by fertility planning status, according to selected background characteristics. Almost one out of four births in India (including current pregnancies) in the four years preceding the survey was not wanted at the time the woman became pregnant. Nine percent were unwanted and 14 percent were mistimed. Differentials in fertility planning by

<b>Table 7.11 Fertility planning</b>						
Percent distribution of births during the four years preceding the survey and current pregnancies by fertility planning status, according to selected background characteristics, India, 1992-93						
Background characteristic	Planning status of pregnancy				Total percent	Number of births
	Wanted then	Wanted later	Wanted no more	Missing		
<b>Residence</b>						
Urban	75.2	15.2	9.3	0.3	100.0	12878
Rural	77.4	13.4	8.6	0.5	100.0	44299
<b>Education</b>						
Illiterate	78.2	11.7	9.6	0.5	100.0	37845
Lit., < middle complete	72.4	18.2	9.1	0.3	100.0	9509
Middle school complete	73.8	19.6	6.5	0.2	100.0	4089
High school and above	78.2	16.8	4.7	0.2	100.0	5734
<b>Religion</b>						
Hindu	77.4	13.6	8.5	0.5	100.0	45412
Muslim	73.6	14.7	11.4	0.2	100.0	8765
Christian	76.2	17.2	6.3	0.3	100.0	1174
Sikh	82.7	11.3	6.0	--	100.0	970
Jain	84.1	11.2	4.7	--	100.0	177
Buddhist	80.1	13.4	6.4	0.1	100.0	398
Other	75.6	19.0	5.3	0.1	100.0	281
<b>Caste/tribe</b>						
Scheduled caste	77.0	13.0	9.2	0.8	100.0	7750
Scheduled tribe	82.6	10.7	6.1	0.6	100.0	5483
Other	76.2	14.4	9.0	0.4	100.0	43944
<b>Birth order<sup>1</sup></b>						
1	89.0	10.2	0.4	0.4	100.0	15934
2	79.1	19.0	1.5	0.4	100.0	13754
3	75.8	15.9	7.9	0.4	100.0	9983
4	71.7	14.0	13.6	0.6	100.0	6621
5	66.7	12.1	20.7	0.5	100.0	4293
6+	56.6	9.7	33.0	0.6	100.0	6592
<b>Mother's age at birth<sup>2</sup></b>						
13-14	83.4	16.0	0.4	0.2	100.0	471
15-19	83.3	14.9	1.2	0.6	100.0	12699
20-24	79.6	15.7	4.3	0.4	100.0	21675
25-29	75.0	13.3	11.4	0.3	100.0	13206
30-34	68.0	9.3	22.3	0.4	100.0	6136
35-39	57.6	7.3	34.2	0.9	100.0	2245
40-44	53.5	6.1	39.3	1.0	100.0	645
45-49	54.6	6.3	36.4	2.8	100.0	98
<b>Total</b>	<b>76.9</b>	<b>13.8</b>	<b>8.8</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>57177</b>

-- Less than 0.05 percent  
<sup>1</sup>Includes current pregnancy, if any  
<sup>2</sup>For current pregnancy, estimated maternal age at birth

residence and caste/tribe are not very substantial. Although fertility planning does not show a clear trend by education, more educated women are less likely to have unwanted births. However, mistimed births are more common among literate than illiterate women. Muslim women are most likely to have unwanted births and Christian women and women belonging to other religious groups not otherwise classified are most likely to have mistimed births. Major differences are apparent by birth order and the age of the mother at the time of the birth. First births are relatively well planned, second and third births are most likely to be mistimed, and fourth and higher order births are particularly likely to be unwanted. Similarly, the percentage of pregnancies that were unplanned increases steadily with increasing age to a level of 45 percent for women age 40-44. Mistimed births are more common among younger women (below age 30), whereas older women are more likely to have unwanted births.

The impact of unwanted fertility can be estimated by comparing *wanted fertility rates* with the total fertility rates presented in Chapter 5. The wanted fertility rate is calculated in the same way as the total fertility rate, except that unwanted births are excluded from the numerator. A birth is considered unwanted if the number of living children at the time of conception was greater than or equal to the current ideal number of children, as reported by the respondent. Women who gave a non-numeric response to the question on the ideal number of children were assumed to want all their births. The wanted fertility rate represents the level of fertility that theoretically would result if all unwanted births were prevented. A comparison of the total fertility rate with the total wanted fertility rate indicates the potential demographic impact of the elimination of all unwanted births. Table 7.12 provides information on wanted fertility rates.

The wanted TFR for India of 2.6 is lower by three-quarters of a child (or 22 percent) than the TFR of 3.4. Large differences between these two measures are evident for all population subgroups, and especially Muslims, scheduled castes, illiterate women, and rural women.

Table 7.13 provides similar information for each state. In Haryana, Assam and Uttar Pradesh, the wanted TFR is at least one child less than the TFR. On the other hand, the smallest differences between the wanted TFR and TFR are seen in Kerala and Mizoram (0.2 child). In general, the northern states show the largest percentage difference between the two rates (23-31 percent). In contrast, the difference between the two rates is 10 percent or less in Kerala and in four of the seven northeastern states (Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland).

For India as a whole, the total fertility rate would drop by 22 percent if unwanted pregnancies could be eliminated. A reduction of this magnitude would bring the TFR down more than halfway between its current level and the replacement level of approximately 2.1 children per woman. Similarly, the contraceptive prevalence rate would increase from 41 percent to 60 percent if the unmet need for family planning could be totally satisfied. These underlying facts (based on women's stated preferences) provide a clear opportunity for improving the results of the family welfare programme. If women's expressed needs can be satisfied, then the quality of their lives and their children's lives will improve and considerable progress will be made toward achieving the country's population goals.

**Table 7.12 Wanted fertility rates**

Total wanted fertility rates and total fertility rates for the three years preceding the survey, by selected background characteristics, India, 1992-93

Background characteristic	Total wanted fertility rate	Total fertility rate
<b>Residence</b>		
Urban	2.09	2.70
Rural	2.86	3.67
<b>Education</b>		
Illiterate	3.15	4.03
Literate, < middle complete	2.31	3.01
Middle school complete	1.95	2.49
High school and above	1.78	2.15
<b>Religion</b>		
Hindu	2.58	3.30
Muslim	3.35	4.41
Christian	2.41	2.87
Sikh	1.79	2.43
Other	2.20	2.77
<b>Caste/tribe</b>		
Scheduled caste	2.93	3.92
Scheduled tribe	2.94	3.55
Other	2.57	3.30
<b>Total</b>	<b>2.64</b>	<b>3.39</b>

Note: Rates are calculated based on births in the period 1-36 months before the interview to women age 15-49. The total fertility rates are the same as those presented in Table 5.3.

**Table 7.13 Wanted fertility rates by state**

Total wanted fertility rates and total fertility rates for the three years preceding the survey, by state, India, 1992-93

State	Total wanted fertility rate	Total fertility rate
<b>India</b>	<b>2.64</b>	<b>3.39</b>
<b>North</b>		
Delhi	2.20	3.02
Haryana	2.81	3.99
Himachal Pradesh	2.04	2.97
Jammu Region of J & K	2.21	3.13
Punjab	2.15	2.92
Rajasthan	2.78	3.63
<b>Central</b>		
Madhya Pradesh	3.21	3.90
Uttar Pradesh	3.82	4.82
<b>East</b>		
Bihar	3.18	4.00
Orissa	2.32	2.92
West Bengal	2.20	2.92
<b>Northeast</b>		
Arunachal Pradesh	3.84	4.25
Assam	2.52	3.53
Manipur	2.29	2.76
Meghalaya	3.39	3.73
Mizoram	2.09	2.30
Nagaland	2.95	3.26
Tripura	1.98	2.67
<b>West</b>		
Goa	1.60	1.90
Gujarat	2.33	2.99
Maharashtra	2.13	2.86
<b>South</b>		
Andhra Pradesh	2.09	2.59
Karnataka	2.18	2.85
Kerala	1.82	2.00
Tamil Nadu	1.76	2.48

Note: Rates are calculated based on births in the period 1-36 months before the interview to women age 15-49. The total fertility rates are the same as those presented in Table 5.2.