

Traditional Group Fertility Behaviour: The Case of Jharkhand, India

Ujjwala Gupta

ORCID iD: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8966-6033>

Mariam Seedat-Khan

ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9056-2282>

Aradhana Ramnund-Mansingh

ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1995-6849>

Abstract

Researchers have failed to capitalise on developing traditional demographic scholarship in India. The absence of connecting fertility to fundamentally embedded cultural, interpersonal and familial features is problematic. The research underscores sociocultural, familial, and circumstantial socialised behaviour and how generational and cultural practices determine fertility as a demographic outcome. The study was conducted in three districts in Jharkhand, India, in 2020. The study is bolstered on the theoretical framework of children's original value, reflecting upon the complexity of the social system that functions behind couples' fertility intentions in a family system. The study adopts a mixed methodology to examine the relationship between the value of children and the fertility plans of couples within a familial, cultural and traditional context. The study appraises an extensive review of available secondary data. A multistage sampling method was adopted to identify 180 married couples between the age range of 13 and 49. The data were collected via semi-structured interviews. This framework facilitated understanding the lived experiences and determining factors associated with fertility plans. The study has identified a gradual decline in fertility levels indicating families opting to reduce the number of children in their families'

indicated ratios include 5:4 and 5:3. The impetus is attributed to a set of intersecting factors, including gendered preference and the modifications of cultural and religious influence.

Keywords: behaviour, children, family, fertility, gender, traditional groups, values

1. Introduction

Social scientific studies have directed their attention to an anthropological analysis of fertility, relying extensively on statistical data. Demographers focus on statistical patterns of fertility and its link to progressive developmental outcomes of overcrowding. On the contrary, sociologists are keen to explore the personally lived realities of fertility among couples 'as a unit'. The absence of connecting fertility to fundamentally embedded cultural, interpersonal and familial features is problematic. To determine prevailing fertility behaviour, this paper offers an introductory analysis that endeavours to reconnoitre and convey a balanced understanding of traditional demographic fertility behaviour. Three traditional communities located in Jharkhand, India, have been identified, related to their distinctive cultural heritage. They are conjectured to have extraordinary demographic consequences founded on generational customs, traditions and practices.

An individual couple's education and income distinguish their hardship in determining their fertility level. This paper is a cog of a larger research project. An introductory insight into children's present-day values regulates fertility values and behaviour in these traditional communities. The value of children in families within indigent communities is a significant determinant of fertility behaviour. Familial responsibilities and marriage systems play a significant role in identity archetype familial sizes that consider gender, socio-economic context, and children's birth order.

This paper is an introductory microanalysis of the relationship between family-children, which influences couples' fertility intention. For this study, a mix of rural and peri-urban settings was chosen, considering both limitations and advantages of the complex, non-homogenous nature of the ethnic communities of Jharkhand. A quarter of the Jharkhand population is home to nearly 32 traditional groups, also locally called *Sadan* living in

constant harmony of ecology and community. Water, forest, and land are the three significant resources that demonstrate the identity of traditional groups (Verma & Paul 2016). Owing to the rapid influx of population from outside, particularly from Central and North Bihar, there is a diffusion of sociocultural traits. With this harbinger of new values, there arrives a need to explore the pattern of fertility intentions. This paper's key objective seeks to outline the methodological approach employed to recognise the social dimensions that impact the fertility choices of traditional couples, subsequently gaining preliminary insight from the fieldwork and data accumulation among three traditional communities.

The research questions centred around understanding fertility behaviour in a holistic and multi-faceted manner by exploring the contexts of marriage, family system and indigenous means of birth control. One of the key objectives was for couples to consider all direct and indirect aspects that influence fertility. Further research questions explored were women's education and choices concerning rural migration due to marriage.

2. Scholarship Review

2.1 About the Traditional Communities in Jharkhand

Prehistoric humans have long since inhabited Jharkhand; the region is rich in immeasurable traditional legacy in ecology, etymology and natural landscape. Traditional languages of *Ho*, *Magahi*, and *Sadri* have defined dialects where *Ho* group can preserve their original language, which is *Ho*. Evidence of widespread rousing and social mobilisation through modification and transition in traditional working configurations evolving from hunting and gathering-pastoral settlement and agriculturists to wage labourers. A traditional mechanical society's reconfiguration to an organic structural arrangement has facilitated changes in the familial system (Kachhap & Saw 2016; Singh 2018; Singhal, Ghosh & Bhat 2020).

Jharkhand historically experienced a *resource curse*, which denotes a paradox of plenty. While rich in natural resources, underdevelopment, lawlessness, paralysing economic growth and arrested development negatively impact traditional community members. Traditional groups live a traditional modest life in a hilly forest, topographically isolated from contemporary society and its modern conveniences (Islam *et al.* 2015; Islam, Rai & Quli 2015). The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the govern-

ment of India's district-level composite index were considered before selecting the research site. Measurement of this composite index was ground-ed on; 1) standard of living (per capita monthly income); 2) educational status; 3) health; and 4) key supplementary development indicators. Exploiting this specific composite index facilitated the determination of development levels. Subsequently, three districts fulfilled the specific criteria mandated for this study.

Three sections with distinctive traditional communities included *Korwa*, a *Particularly Vulnerable Traditional Group (PVTG)* located in Garhwa. India assigns PVTG status established on agricultural technology, declining population, illiteracy, subsistence economy and extreme geographical isolation (Chatterjee *et al.* 2016; Raj & Nayak 2018). The second site is Paschimi Singhbhum, which includes the *Chero* group in *Latehar*; they are considered a *Neglected group* due to their paltry incomes, inadequate economic circumstances, isolation, subsistence on negligible farming and exposure to exploitative wage labour. The third traditional community includes the *Ho* group compressed in Paschimi Singhbhum; they are the fourth-most populace group in the Kolhan region, constituting 10% of the total systematised recognised groups of Jharkhand.

2.2 Migration and Labour

Jharkhand is a source of rural and urban migrant labour in significant numbers in different country states. The long-term seasonal migration helps lower-income families to clear themselves of debt. Women also migrate sometimes due to marriage, migration of parents or other family members. The female unemployment rate was 6.9% compared to 2.5% for males. Rural-to-rural migration is the highest for women, and this is due to marriage. Many women are illiterate or have low educational achievement and are from a poor socio-economic class (Meena *et al.* 2017; Kumar & Deogharia 2017). These seasonal migration trends impact family structure, marriage and fertility.

2.3 Family

The adaptation of traditional rituals, property inheritance, parent-child value alignment and marital patterns have been significant contributory factors that

have been instrumental in modifying fertility value outcomes (Sengupta 2018). Jharkhand has transformed not just structurally but also in the form of social and cultural norms that have led to a subtle shift in the family structure, marital bonds and parent-child relationship. The changes have represented an emerging new value system for children.

Marriage and family have undergone considerable changes in the value and norms with the increased mobilisation of people. This is referred to as a *conjugal family* from where the marital relations determine the family's optimal size determining the value and association with children (Gerson & Torres 2015). These changes in mutual relations have a crucial influence on fertility behaviour and can be observed in the present study on ethnic communities of Jharkhand.

Studies of fertility in India have noted that people are motivated to plan their family size based on the economic benefit they would derive from their children after financial spending in their childhood (Singh *et al.* 2017; Driver 2015). The first of its kind in India was by Mamdani (1972), who explained that, irrespective of social class and caste differentiation, parents' perception towards their children is dependent on economic gains and hence serves as insurance against any risk and old age. The actual fertility behaviour is determined by their perception towards children, experiences about ideal family size and satisfaction with the number of living children (Dharmalingam 1996). The pattern in a family and the importance of family labour for cultivating land where land could also be considered a substitute for children as old-age security in the form of pure income effect determines the quantity and quality of children.

Contradictory research exists that children's economic value does not determine that area's fertility (Sovani 1948; Vlassoff 1982). There is no relation between fertility and occupational lineage or financial condition. Bandhopadhyay and Mukhopadhyay (1978) argue that the cost associated with children, including both opportunity cost and direct cost as supposed by parents, is likely to differ based on the family system's nature, extended or unitary. Low-income family children are compulsorily made to start participating in work activities from an early age, and they are expected to provide economic security as well as support to their old age family members; along with other related social problems external to family well-being, the poor couple tends to go for unfettered fertility choices (Das Gupta 1992). Mohanty and Ram (2011) find that a reduction in fertility level was

primarily due to differences in child survival.

Contemporary scholarship offers illustrations of transformations in economic value and old age well-being wherein familial dynamics have a pertinent role (Gerson & Torres 2015). Significant changes in the value of the number of children and familial system are a forceful influence of modernisation and mobility. Overall mobility has been triggered by substantial migratory pull and push factors. A remarkable shift in the ethnic composition and cultural traits of the population has been recognised.

The importance of education and increased individualisation was realised. Consequences are seen in marital relations, and their increased economic freedom influences fertility behaviour. Studies conducted on the total fertility rate concerning women's education levels have established strong links; in Jharkhand, fertility rates increased among illiterate women and decreased among women with higher educational levels between 2011 to 2016 but increased in women who had some form of school education (Ghosh & Keshri 2020). Hence, it becomes imperative to study and understand fertility behaviour from many other contexts, including marriage, family system and indigenous means of birth control.

3. Theoretical Framework

An integrated theoretical approach underpins the study. Interdisciplinary approaches established on sociological, psychological and anthropological underpinnings engaged in positions of values and capabilities of children, and parent-child dynamics to social, economic, emotional, food and age security benefits in circumscribing the ideal number of children in a family (Caldwell *et al.* 1999). The structural entrenchment of social constructivism within the intersectionality approach enhances this. This holistic perspective considers varying approaches to gender while contemplating decisions on the value of children. Women have been given little to no choices based on their circumstances. While society locates women as childbearing and home tending, together with an intersectional perspective, taking into consideration socio-economic factors, forced migration and educational subjugation, women in these positions face the precarious decision of the family size and other factors influencing their fertility evaluation. Florian (2017) confirms that fertility decisions impact employment for women of colour.

The secondary conceptualisation on the value of children by Hoff-

man and Hoffman (1973) defines and measures children's value relationship with fertility. This, however, has been contended by Arnold and Fawcett (1975) and Bulatao (1981). The vicissitudes in children and the family system's predilection are reflected in the amendments placed on children's familial values, independently influencing fertility transformations (Friedman, Hechter & Kanazawa 1994). The family realises children's worth, which is grounded in productive capacities concomitant to prevailing economic or social societal structures (Gupta 2019). These structures include but are not limited to compulsory education, legal prohibition of child labour, improved life expectancy and declining infant mortality rates. Although much of the scholarly outputs focus on limited economic resources, it must also be considered that the value of children changes if a couple's gender profile for a family structure is met (Hu & Chiang 2021; Frejka 2017; Lovenheim & Mumford 2013).

4. Methodology

The empirical evidence for this paper was compiled using a mixed methodology to examine the relationship between the value of children and the fertility plans of couples within a familial, cultural and traditional context. A field survey alongside non-participant observation of couples' traditional living conditions was explored. One hundred eighty field surveys were successfully administered to married respondents. The field survey facilitated a personal narration of lived practical experiences that presented value concern toward children, existing familial relationships and determinants of a couple's fertility.

4.1 Data Collection

The data were collected via semi-structured interviews. The sensitivity and cultural limitations on fertility conversations required an innovative approach to encourage engagement and sharing of views. This initially presented a challenge and influenced a modification of the original research methodological approach. Since respondents culturally refrain from talking freely about family planning, birth control and marital matters, considering it taboo and private, it was necessary to modify the data collection approach to attain accurate information. In addition to the surveys and interviews, the

researcher immersed herself within the ethnographic research (Hammersley 2018; Lubet 2018). This resulted in several informal dialogues to augment the study's explorative and talkative nature. Ultimately a qualitative methodology that focused on narrative interviews and non-participant observation analogous to ethnography was identified as straight forward unpretentious, excluding any falsehood (Jones & Smith 2017). Individual home visits provided the opportunity for data collection and observation. Sensitive and confidential questions were presented to respondents in the privacy of their familial homes (Pink *et al.* 2017). The respondents were probed to provide information on family size partialities, interpersonal relationships involving interaction and decision-making arrangements related to contraceptive practice, abortion, fertility history and value vis-à-vis children. Moreover, questions posed on birth control and pregnancy mitigation methods remained complex, guarded, and private. Similarly, informal discussions with medical doctors, local service providers, traditional spiritual healers, Anganwadi workers and traditional female birthing attendants known as *chamaein* or *ghasin*.

4.2 Sampling Method

A multistage sampling method was used in selecting 180 married couples between the ages of 13 and 49 from each Scheduled group (ST), each of whom shares common socio-economic and cultural diversity; however, they remain mutually exclusive.

The four stages of the sampling process included the following sequential process:

- 1) Identification of the Latehar, Paschimi Singhbhum and Garhwa districts.
- 2) Chaibasa (Paschimi Singhbhum), Ranka (Garhwa) and Manika (Latehar) were identified by the high intensity of ST.
- 3) The selection of specific villages was determined by the high, medium, and low ST concentration. Two Panchayats (group of villages or a village, several villages and four villages), were selected. Villages were selected purposively based on their proximity and access to the primary health centre; the literacy rate and economic engagement played a significant role in their selection.

The selected ST groups provided a pool of respondents (couples), randomly selected employing simple random sampling.

Generous access to an immunisation roster obtained from the Angan Wadi Workers Union (AWWU) helped reduce sampling selection bias. The basic unit of sampling included presently married women living with their husbands as a couple with a minimum of one living child under 18.

The random sample of respondents included in the study was based on careful consideration of the number of households in each local hamlet called a *tola*, consequently allowing the research to be formulated on narrated behaviour, attitude, and value vis-à-vis children. The couples were encouraged to consider all direct and indirect aspects influencing fertility. These factors include marriage, family, children, and birth control. The interviews were conducted in local languages (*Ho*, *Bhojpuri* and *Sadri*), pre-tested, semi-structured interviews, schedule documenting, and obtaining informed consent to fulfil the ethical requirements of the research (Sahu *et al.* 2015). Anonymity, voluntary participation and the right to withdraw from the study were emphasised to mitigate and circumvent challenges endemic to research.

5. Preliminary insights from the field

5.1 Familial and Marriage System

Formerly, *zamindars* (landlords) *Chero* were petty landowners practising settled cultivation primarily dependent on their land supplemented by wage earnings from manual labour such as agricultural labourers and wage labourers in mining and quarrying activities for their livelihood. Child labour was commonly practised due to the extreme poverty faced by families. Migration of *Chero* and *Ho* group males to neighbouring states for wage labour at construction sites or factories was rampant. At the same time, females engaged themselves in petty business or nearby manual labour tasks.

However, *Korwa* males were primarily engaged in activities within their village areas as wage labourers, besides agriculture, with the females involved in managing their households. With their close inhabitation to the forest, they depended on the forest produce for their livelihood and survival. Land and forest were significant economic resources as their ownership was

attained by clearing the forest. *Korwa*, originally called *Beonra* continued to hunt and gather food along with shifting cultivation in the forest. With the ban on shifting cultivation and restricted forest use for hunting, *Korwa* had to deal with real hardship for their survival. Poor fertility of the land and low rainfall added to the nutritional deficiency among men, women and children (McClendon *et al.* 2018). Some of the *Korwa* men and women worked as *dhangars* (servants) annually to get payment in cash or kind. Groups exhibited close association with the forest for their livelihood and dwelling. Though they continued to worship ancestral spirits and supernatural bodies, religion remained in transition.

5.2 Occupational Pattern

Occupational patterns, especially within India, depend on geographic area, resources, socio-economic conditions and gender-specific roles. Girls often have to leave school to take on the financial burden of the home by working. Occupational patterns in rural areas showed a higher rate of gender-balanced workforce participation than in urban areas (Aacharya & Rathore 2017). The groups from the varying districts of Jharkhand are seen as primitive and obtain income and food from the forest and its related products (Sahu 2019). Patterns of migration in Jharkhand districts and calamities such as drought directly impact occupation patterns. Women's occupational patterns and sources of income included the sale of wood and agricultural labour being the top-ranked (Sahu 2019).

5.3 Familial, Kinship and Household Structure

Family is the smallest form of the social structure that serves as a means of production and consumption bonded with sociocultural, economic, and religious affairs. Traditional societies were patriarchal and patrilineal by nature, with men as the heads of every household and sons getting inheritance and succession rights of land and house. Men controlled the resources, reproduction and consumption of the goods until the son(s) attained maturity and married; they co-resided with the natal group, building their structure and establishing their economic unit. The sons controlled the entire resource of the family until the parents grew old. The property was divided among sons equally, but the eldest son was entitled to attain more

than the rest, called *jethans*. The land as a productive unit induced sons and daughters to stay in the same house. Daughters or their in-laws' families had no say on inheritance and succession of land rights. In cases where the daughter was a widow or divorced, they would only get indirect land rights in maintenance (Saxton *et al.* 2016). Among *Chero*, with the influence of Hindu religion, the customary dowry practice included a price paid in exchange for a son during the marriage. At the same time, the daughters got the movable property that their fathers could afford.

The kinship pattern of *Ho* was a model relationship and was based on parentage and marriage. Their idea was that parents and children are related to blood through reproduction, which extends to cousins and not just siblings. Decent is considered patrilineal, where only men are responsible for the lineage. Thus, marriages, even amongst cousins, were not prohibited. Weddings, therefore, created a new bond and relations, not just between couples but also between the two clans. *Ho* society was based on kinship relations. They categorised the consanguine relatives based on their age, lineage, sex, affinity, and residence. The cordial relations were maintained through constant hospitality, feast, invitations, food, service, mutual respect, and many similar things.

Usually, most families were nuclear or extended nuclear, where the married couples stay with their parents within the same compound but separately (Gautam 2016). The independent living units of these groups were called *Dera*, which had very few tangible things, along with a *chulha* where they cooked and ate. Father, mother, unmarried children and siblings all stayed and worked together, but the food was cooked separately. Daughters were sent off to her husband's house after marriage, and old parents remained behind with their son, who took their liability in old age.

At a familial level, the division of labour was gender-specific. Females were relegated to household chores, males earned a livelihood, and the elderly took the duty of taking care of children and domesticated animals and poultry. Besides all these, women also engaged in wage labour and agricultural activities to participate in the family's economic run (Saxton *et al.* 2016). *Ho* women were hard-working, contributed to their family income, and worked on daily chores. They took part in rituals and social and religious affairs but did not take the liberty to be involved in the traditional political structure. Educated women occupied well-paid roles in Government. Women, although illiterate, remained engaged in several other economic

activities like making rice beer (*Hadia*), wall painting, rope making, weaving leaf cups and plates called *dona pattal*, wage labour.

The opinion and positions of women concerning crucial decision-making processes were unwelcome. Women did not have access to many religious affairs, especially in the worship of ancestors and spirits. Only the family's eldest son would get the authority to worship ancestors as Mukhiya (head). In marital conflicts, women were dispossessed of all their rights to file for divorce; in life-threatening cases, the Panchayat decided the outcome of married couples. In cases where a woman was determined to file for divorce, she was compelled to pay *abayahur* or reimbursement. If the husband filed for a divorce, he was not necessarily liable or obligated to pay or offer his wife financial compensation. This reinforced the subjugation and exploitation of women in the family and the traditional community. Historically, traditional society represented and promoted equitable gender dynamics, with women possessing considerable autonomy was now observed to undergo a pervasive transition with prominent gender biases.

5.4 Marriage Systems

Marriages were usually endogamous at the community level and exogamous at the *Killi* (clan) level. Usually, the bride remained patrilocal by residence. Monogamy was a ruled practice. However, men were allowed to marry or 'keep' other women. Men had no limit concerning the number of wives they could have. In extreme cases, men and women had the right to ask for Chuta Chuti (divorce) from each other in front of the village Panchayat. Widow remarriages were followed but not well accepted among *Chero*; this took place based on family convenience if having an unmarried younger brother or cousin of her late husband. In second marriages, whether a widow or divorcee, there was no bride price again. Child marriages were rampant earlier, but now the marriage age for boys has varied from 18 to 20 years, and for girls, it varies from 14 to 18 years. However, among *Korwa*, some instances of child marriages are still observed. In case the girl got married at an early age, she was not sent to her husband's house to prolong the reproduction period, which was performed by a ritual called *Gauna*. Marriage (*Biyah*) usually took place by negotiation, and it had to be introduced by the boy's family through a *bisuthia* (go-between). Groom's family had to pay the bride price, called *Dali paise*. With the recent

socialisation and diffusion of Hinduism, customary practices like dowry were introduced in *Chero* marriages, replacing the contrary bride price form.

The bride price was settled if the relation was agreed upon by both sides before marriage: rice, beer, cash, kind, cattle, and cloths. *Biyah* (marriage) was fixed only if the bride price was agreed upon and paid in full. *Dolkhadi* was the oldest form of marriage practised among *Korwa* where the bride was brought to a close relative and the groom would pay the full amount of bride price, after which the marriage ceremony would take place. The custom of keeping a son-in-law was also prevalent if the bride's father had no son. A woman could ask for a divorce from her husband in front of the village Panchayat if he was cruel and impotent. A woman could also be separated for her childlessness, laziness and extramarital relations. However, the practice of women seeking divorce was not encouraged by society.

Among *Ho* group's traditional elopement form of marriage was practised, where a boy or a girl of marriageable age was free to choose his/her life partner whom they met either at a village fair called a *magha mela* or weekly local market (*Haat*). If they wished to settle down, a *duttam* was arranged to fix their marriages, determining the bride price, ornaments, *Haria* (rice, beer) and a pair of cattle. The girl had the freedom to withdraw from the marriage if she did not find compatibility and settle with another man. Additionally, consanguineous or cross-cousin marriage was also a prominent feature among *Ho* groups, which they considered essential to preserve the same gene pool.

5.5 Education

Literacy among *Chero* and *Korwa* groups was poorer compared to that among *Ho*. With continued emphasis on education by the government and external influence through urbanisation, a slow improvement in the spread of education was observed, including in female children. In addition to the government's formal institutions, there were blooming private educational institutions established by religious groups. Many children attended government schools. Non-government schools had to be paid for by parents. These expensive tuition fees restricted them in pursuing opportunities out of their rural or peri-urban regions. *Ho* is one of the major groups of Jharkhand, and owing to their greater development standards, they benefited under major welfare schemes, especially educational programs. Villages had

schools where children benefited from the reading materials, stipend and other resources as support. Most of the women remained uneducated; however, few from the *Ho* group also received higher education and obtained government service jobs.

Nevertheless, even when parents gradually recognised the importance of education and enrolled their children on schools, it was left to their free will to decide on this. School dropouts were high, especially among girls during the cultivation season, as they would support parents in agricultural activities. Even as children, they had a dual role of performing domestic chores. They became a part of the waged employment early to support their parents through supplemental earnings economically. The *Ho* community recently developed their *Ho* script, which is implemented as a college education language.

Children from the *Korwa* group were observed as products of a rancorous intergenerational cycle of adversity, lacking universal basic needs and negligibly poor living standards. This is due to their primitive, modest nature and geographically isolated inhabitation. The proficiency rate, especially among females, was lower than the study's other groups. The school attendance rate and dropouts were very high among *Korwa* due to their abject poverty and the low affordability of private schools. Still, besides the regular government schools, there were private schools supported by Christian missionaries. Government schools required external tutoring with a professional focus that remained unaffordable to parents.

5.6 Value of Children

The birth of children was considered an auspicious event among traditional couples, family, and their entire community, followed by celebrations and feasts. Both male and female children were valued equally; sons were treated as originators and female children as creators and nurturers of their progeny. Both genders were cared for and given attention until a year or two, and since mothers went out for work too deep inside the forest to gather for wood and tubers, children were left with elders of the family and older siblings for the responsibility of caregiving. Older children carrying their younger siblings were a common sight to be seen during the hours of the day.

With continued government emphasis on school education and progressive development in understanding the relevance of education,

parents felt obligated to send their young children to *Anganwadi centres* (A.W.C.) and primary schools. Parents are expected to provide at least primary education for their children as much as they can afford. The children's education will help them rise from their present parental standard of hardship and poverty. During the season of paddy plantation (*Ropa*), girl children were engaged. They dropped out of school to join hands in economic activity by working as a construction worker or even selling *Haria* (rice beer) during the market days to support the family's and parents' economy.

Additionally, girl children were also expected to provide support in daily domestic duties such as collecting water, cooking and taking care of younger siblings. Parents do not pressure children to attend school or spend time on their studies. Remaining illiterate did not matter much to parents either.

Typically, among *Ho* groups that were observed, there was an adherence to the traditional practices of marriage and mate selection observed. Children who have attained maturity were to select their sexual partners and settle into married life. Parents did not impose restrictions on either girls or boys going to marketplaces, village fairs or engaging in a pre-marital sexual relationship. Despite being patrilineal by its nature and composition, *Ho* society accepted male and female children in the family equally and enthusiastically. Female children were eagerly awaited as being the parent's first preference. Both son and daughter had relevance in the family and the overall clan. The boy child is expected so that land inheritance and the family name could be carried forward, and sons are expected to be a security in parents' old age. Daughters are considered an economic advantage to the family in that before marriage, and girls can support their family not just in domestic chores but also by engaging in wage work and supporting their parents in instances of economic ruin for the family. When the marriage-exchange of the daughter takes place, instead of the bride price, their parents would receive cash or kind for this process. Children have value as a source of joy, not just for the family and couple themselves but also for their community.

Due to the significant influence of different religions and other external forces like urbanisation, traditional practices and customs were replaced by new belief systems and processes. This was the root cause of an imbalance in the historically based egalitarian social setup. Among *Chero*

groups, a girl child is no longer as welcome as a boy child due to the transformation in marriage practices and the inclusion of a groom price called dowry, which involved exchanging money and kind as a price offered for a groom to accept his bride. This was psychologically straining and created stress for parents to save money to pay the fee settled during their daughters' marriage negotiation. Thus, daughters usually receive most of their share from their father's property during their marriage; hence son/sons later become the heir of the father's immovable property. None of the groups' daughters are the inheritors of the land.

5.7 Fertility Behaviour and Value of Children

Couples agreed that fertility was most often a marital obligation. They had to bear and rear children at an appropriate stage of married life, rationalising children's number and sex. The couples' agreed children are the *Gift of God* but the number of children to have should be to the extent they could manage and not just be guided by sentimental values. There were a few cases where they would try to beget as many children as possible. Parenthood was a significant milestone in married life, and nobody wanted to remain childless.

The groups were dispersed, and each group was distinct from one another for several different reasons based on their ecological and environmental circumstances of habitation. This results from a few residing in hilly mountains, plains or inside the forest. The birth of a child proves the fertility power of the couple and removes the stain of barrenness. It enhances the status of men and women as parents. It was observed that the natural fertility was higher, to the extent of five+ children, among *Chero* and *Korwa*, due to their extreme backwardness. *Ho* showed a lower tendency to have many children, especially among newer generations who desired to restrict birth to up to three. Previous generations in *Ho* had five or more children as they considered bearing a child was a woman's responsibility in marriage. Restricting childbirth was considered an offence.

The spacing between two children was commonly between 1.5 to 2 years, which indicated that women hastened to complete their family size. This, however, also points towards the high unmet need for family planning and deficient awareness of spacing childbirth. Fertility remained an area where men did not show their participation but exercised their control in the children's preference of gender. Among *Chero* and *Korwa* inhabiting remote

hilly areas, parents remained under threat of child mortality, which also made couples not restrict their number of children. This was done to keep additional children as a replacement for the loss of a child. The community continued to lack awareness regarding immunisation and the management of neonatal and early childhood diseases. Added was the malnutrition related to abject poverty and isolated geographical inhabitation of *Korwa* and *Chero*, which surrounded children in absolute misery of frequent diseases such as diarrhoea, malaria, fever, cough, scabies, jaundice, typhoid and pneumonia. Most couples were guided by the concept that once married, they would indeed have children, and the number of children they would have would depend on their children's health and well-being.

Although Jharkhand is a patriarchal society in its traditional and cultural structures, fertility decisions were not dominated by patriarchal beliefs (Bhawan & Marg 2010). According to Amraeni, Kamso, Prasetyo and Nirwan (2021), patrilineal traditions which place a high value on children and large families discourage the use of contraception. This is established by the males in the community and their parents. In theoretical matriarchal communities, women have autonomy in decision-making and social support within the community. Recent studies (Ray, Harcey, McQuillan & Greil 2020) in the global north confirm that women who show autonomy in fertility decisions are not necessarily defined as matriarchal. However, in Jharkhand, although men were not interested in fertility, there is overwhelming evidence that the communities are dominated by systemic patriarchy and caste systems. In the social structure and communities, women continue to be relegated to domestic roles and control is credited to patriarchal structures.

Therefore, consideration must be given to all the complexities surrounding these matters. Although minor changes exist between the different groups studied, varied marriage and decision-making power structures allow for considerable changes in family structure, education and fertility choices.

6. Conclusion

Ho – the fourth-most prominent Jharkhand group – has progressed relatively over time. *Chero* – historically once *zamindars*/landowners – are now a neglected group, slowly dissolving into Hinduism with the idea that this would uplift their social status that has been under hardship subsisting of the

plodding progress. *Korwa* – who were enumerated as Primitive Vulnerable Traditional Group (PVTG) – has been experiencing abject poverty and underdevelopment. The preliminary insights from the field suggest that while the groups are considered homogeneous in their behaviour and conditions, understanding precisely how one varies from another is reflected in their developmental pattern and nature of fertility values. It was found that fertility values favoured high fertility in the past, when couples preferred more than five children, but progressively it became three children. Couples from *Korwa* and *Chero* groups continued to have more children due to several factors in play such as high child mortality and gender preference towards male children. The groups preferred both male and female children, male children for lineage to continue, old age security, and female children for economic advantage, supplementing household income through female labour wages. However, the gender-egalitarian social setup of groups was observed to progressively transform due to religion's influences, and modern living due to free movement to urban areas for employment and education. The extent of diffusion of culture varied differently across the groups. Indeed, the fundamental kinship and family system have undergone modification from a collective form of living to a more extended or nucleated form, keeping them aware of considering smaller family size with expected gender composition. Altogether, it can be concluded that sociocultural considerations strongly influence the fertility decision-making process in a couple's life.

The fertility behaviour includes the traditional milieu behind reproductive decision-making. It considers the micro-cultural aspects that determine the family composition (Hoffman & Hoffman 1973; Arnold & Fawcett 1975). The study uncovered its relevance with the findings that suggest that the value of children for a couple is influenced by a juxtaposed set of factors (Caldwell *et al.* 1999). These are, for instance, the primitive ideas of a son performing family rituals after them, inheritance of immovable property to male offspring only, and a marital responsibility of a woman giving them social assurance in the husband's life as well as family and several others, which makes them decide on the adequate family size and gender composition in their family. The empirical evidence provides substantial evidence to augment (Goode 1963) that the dissolution of cultural values from frequent mobilisation is responsible for modifications in the familial composition and structural changes in family structure, from

collective living to more of a conjugal living style. Hence this shows its immediate impact on fertility when couples plan to restrict childbirth to minimise their family size, enabling them to fulfil the aspirations for their children. This diffusion of culture has shown its negative impact on increased gender misbalances in the traditional gender equilibrium of the traditional society (Maharatna 2011). At the same time, among *Chero* and *Korwa* groups, fertility continues to remain high. The potent reason behind this is extreme poverty. Every child, either a boy or a girl, is considered a support mechanism for the family's income and insurance towards any possible child loss (Mohanty 2011; Das Gupta 1992). The findings also reveal the deterrent situation of women in their family in taking up decisions independently on reproductive affairs; men do not play an active role but exercise their control over women's sexuality and fertility.

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Dr. Ujjwala Gupta
Yenepoya (Deemed to be University)
Mangalore
Karnataka
India
ujjwalagupta@yenepoya.edu.in

Professor Mariam Seedat-Khan CCS
Department of Sociology
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Howard College Campus
Memorial Tower Building,
Durban, 4041
South Africa
Seedatm@ukzn.ac.za

*

Dr. Aradhana Ramnund-Mansingh
Durban University of Technology
Steve Biko Campus, Durban
South Africa
aradhanam@dut.ac.za