

# Fertility Desire of Working Women in Kathmandu

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** This study is done to describe the fertility pattern and factors associated with unmet desire for additional children among women working in formal and informal sector in Kathmandu, Nepal.

**Methods:** This is a cross-sectional study. Married 177 women in reproductive age group, with at least one child are selected using purposive sampling. Housewives without paid job are excluded. Interview using semi structured questionnaire is conducted.

**Results:** Around 14 percent of women want additional children however due to various reasons they do not intend to have another. Women in age group of 25-29 followed by 30-34 years of age have higher desire for more children as compared to women in more than 40 years of age. Women who earn 25000-33000 Rupees per month have significantly more desire for another child.

**Conclusions:** Childcare time and economic conditions play vital role in fertility desire among working women. Family help is available to most of the women to care their children. These women wish more facilities at workplace during child bearing and rearing period.

**Key words:** fertility desire, unmet desire for additional child, working women

## INTRODUCTION

Research findings in developed countries has suggested that the participation of women in salaried work force has depressing effect on fertility, however the findings in least developed countries show different results in different settings.<sup>1</sup>

The unmet desire for the additional children is one of issues not addressed properly so far. Competition in labour market and lack of incentives during pregnancy and childbirth in workplace, changing women's status and family structure, education and socio economic

situation may have impact on declining fertility in many of the developing countries where many women live with unmet desire for more children. These issues need to be discussed thoroughly in our context.

This study is designed to understand the fertility pattern and unmet desire for the additional children among women participating in labour force. This studies also tries to determine the child care support availed by these women.

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**METHODS**

A cross sectional study was conducted in the Kathmandu Metropolitan City from January to June, 2008. There are 505835 women in Kathmandu.<sup>2</sup> Around 71 percent of women in Kathmandu are engaged in salary/wage or own economic enterprises.<sup>3</sup>

A pretest is done on 30 selected respondents and the women with unmet desire for additional children is found to be 13.3% of the total. Using this percentage the sample size is calculated by using the formula;

$$n = z^2pq/d^2$$

Where  $z = 1.96$ ,  $d = 0.05$ ,  $p = 0.133$ ,  $q = 0.867$

Necessary changes in the questionnaire was also done.

The calculated sample size of 177 married women with at least one child, working in different fields and between age group of 15 to 49 are selected from different households from six clusters of Kathmandu Metropolitan City proposed by Kathmandu valley mapping programme.<sup>4</sup> The women with paid job are purposively selected as respondents and housewives without paid job are excluded from this study. This study uses purposive sampling technique due to absence of complete sampling frame of working women in Kathmandu. An interview with these women using semi structured questionnaire is conducted to collect data. The women are verbally informed about the study purposes and their verbal consent was taken prior to interview.

Descriptive measures, chi square test and diagrams are used to interpret the data. Multivariate logistic regression is used to determine the relationship between variables. Data analysis is done by using statistical software like Excel and SPSS 13.

**RESULTS**

Out of 177 women, 87 (49.2%) women are from joint and 90 (50.8%) women from nuclear family. Majority of the respondents have one or two children (Figure 1). The mean age of marriage was 22.5 (Table 1). There is no significant difference found in number of children among women working in formal and informal sector ( $p=0.10$ ). Around 139 (79%) women work in formal sector and 38 (21.5%) women work in informal sector. The formal sector includes jobs in bank, schools, colleges, international non governmental organizations, non governmental organizations, civil services and private services. The informal sector includes women working as daily wage earner, housemaids, carpet weaver, sweater weaver and unregistered shopkeepers. Two (5.3%) women from informal sector and 23 (16.5%) women from formal sector show desire for additional children, however difference is not significant ( $p=0.07$ ) (Figure 2).

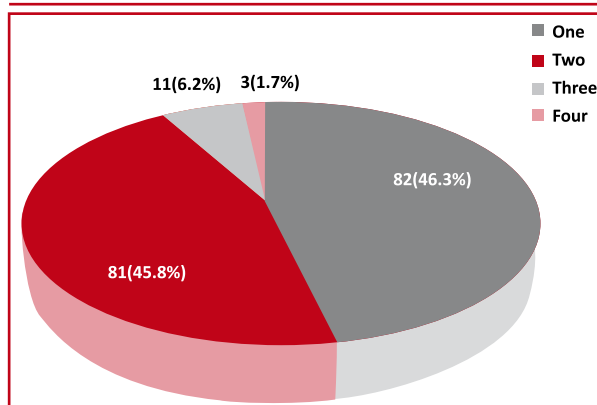


Figure1. Percent women with different number of children.

**Table 1. Age at marriage, their husbands, age at first birth, actual and desired number of children for the respondents**

	Mean	SD
Age at marriage of the respondents	22.5	4.3
Age at marriage of the husbands	26.2	4.0
Age at first birth of the respondents	24.4	4.2
Actual number of children	1.63	0.67
Desired number of children	1.80	0.73

SD = Standard deviation

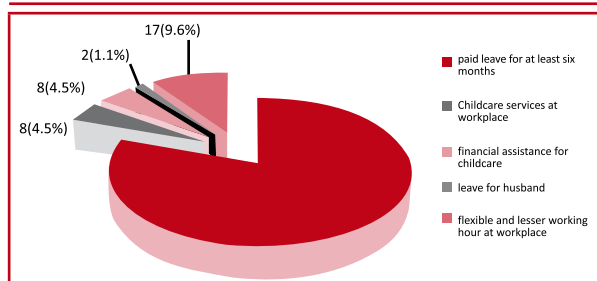
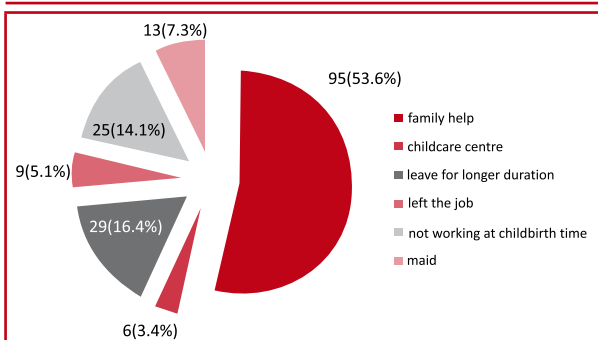


Figure 2. women with various suggestions for maternity facility at workplace.

As compared to women above 40 years of age, women in age group of 25-29 and 30-34 have 9.44 and 5.35 times higher likelihood for unmet desire for additional children respectively (Table 2). Women earning 7000-15000 and 25000- 33000 Rupees per month have higher chances as compared to women with 1500-6000 Rupees of monthly income. Women with literacy, secondary and higher secondary education have higher likelihood as compared to graduate and above educated women. Women from joint family have lesser desire for additional children as compared to women from nuclear family. Desired number of children has high likelihood and actual number of children has less likelihood for desire for additional children among these women.

**Table 2. Unmet desire for additional children by different background variables**

Variables	Odds ratio	p value
<b>Age</b>		
20-24	-	0.99
25-29	9.44	0.03
30-34	5.35	0.10
35-39	1.18	0.88
>40 (reference)		
<b>Education</b>		
Illiterate	.000	.99
Literate	1.46	0.77
Secondary	2.03	0.44
Higher secondary	2.59	0.16
Graduate and above (reference)		
<b>Monthly income (Rupees)</b>		
1500-6000 (reference)		
7000-15000	3.21	0.07
16000-24000	.000	0.99
25000-33000	10.8	0.02
34000-42000	.000	0.99
<b>Type of family</b>		
Joint	0.36	0.09
<b>Nuclear (reference)</b>		
Desired number of children	6.72	0.001
Actual number of children	0.26	0.02

**Figure 3. Percent women receiving various options for child rearing for their last child.**

In this study majority of the women i. e 95 (53.6%) received help from the family members like mother and mother in law to take care of their children during their office hours however these women have to maintain the triple burden of home, office and childcare (Figure 3). Few women had to quit their previous job for child rearing and rejoined the workforce after upbringing their children.

## DISCUSSION

We have heard so many cases of women of developed countries, where the women in paid work force, due to the career objectives delay the child birth and hence

are denied of motherhood as a result of their late reproductive age. However one quarter women in Nepal have first birth by 18 and half of the women give first birth by age 20 and almost 90% have given first birth by age 25.<sup>5</sup> This study shows that 22(12.4%) women give birth by age less than or equal to 19 and 61(34.4%) women at the age of 20-24. At the age of 25-29, 75(42.4%) women and at the age of 30-34, 17(9.6%) women give birth. Results also suggests that there is a positive relationship between educational attainment and median age at first birth, but the impact of education is more obvious at secondary and higher level of education. Women with no education or only primary education give birth to their first child at least three years earlier than women who have a secondary and higher level of education.<sup>5</sup> This study results show that mean age at first birth is 19.8 and 20.4 years among illiterate and literate women respectively. But for secondary, higher secondary and graduate or above women, it is 23.4, 24 and 26 years respectively. Similarly, among women working in informal sector, the age at first birth is  $23.2 \pm 4.1$  as compared to formal sector with  $24.7 \pm 4.2$  ( $p=0.04$ )

The average ideal number of children of all these women is 1.80 with standard deviation of 0.73 whereas the average actual number of children of these women is found to be 1.63 with standard deviation of 0.67 ( $p = .004$ ). This shows that ideal number of children for working women is significantly higher than the number they really have. This may be explained as their unmet desire to have additional children.

Out of 177 women, 152(85.9%) do not want another child. They have given different reasons. Among which childcare time 60(39.5%), fulfillment of their ideal number of children, older age, embarrassed to have another child when already having big children etc. in total 58(38.2%) and economic conditions 34(22.3%) are the major concerns. Majority of women do not want additional children even they get the maternity facilities from their respective organizations. In addition they wish for other women to get certain facilities such as paid leave of at least six months so that they can breastfeed their babies and reduction of working hours for certain time is another facility they wish for child rearing from their employer organizations. This shows that these women want certain policies that can be beneficial for the women to continue their job even in vulnerable period of pregnancy and lactation, and even when they have to look after their small children.

Twenty five (14.1%) of the respondents want additional children but they hesitate to fulfill their wish due to various reasons and live with unmet desire for additional children. Out of these reasons, childcare time 15(60%) and economic condition 6(24%) are found to be the major

causes. Though they are employed, they worry about the economic difficulties for more number of children. This shows their awareness as well as the economic pressure of upbringing the children in current era of urbanization and competitive labour market. Another major factor is childcare time management. Because giving birth to a child means a vulnerable pregnancy period followed by sleepless nights and backbreaking work burden for many years as well as compromise of professional life. Similar results are seen for a study from Pakistan which shows professional difficulties during child bearing and rearing are the main reason for less number of children among employed women.<sup>6</sup> Results showed that women tend to adjust reproductive behavior to work life and, at the same time, adjust work life to reproductive behaviors and plans; and found that women appeared to control the number of children.<sup>7</sup>

Women in age group of 25-29 ( $p=0.03$ ) followed by 30-34 ( $p=0.10$ ) years of age have higher desire for more children as compared to women in more than 40 years of age. Women who earn 25000-33000 Rupees per month have significantly more desire for another child ( $p=0.02$ ). However, women with more than 33000 income per month, do not have higher desire for more children. This may be due to the nature of job of these women. According to the respondents working in international organizations, though they earn more money but at the same time their nature of job is usually on contract basis and they can switch on to another job easily. So they can quit job during pregnancy and infancy of their children. But women working in permanent job may not quit work for fertility purposes. Again these women working in international organizations are aware of the economic costs of upbringing children. Hence these women are satisfied with the number of children they have.

Though found insignificant, the women in joint family have lesser desire for additional children as compared to women in nuclear family ( $p=0.09$ ). Women in nuclear family may not get child care support from their family specially in laws, this can be one of the reasons for limiting the child birth in spite of the desire.

## CONCLUSIONS

The women with high income are found to have unmet desire for additional children. The women in economically active age of 25 to 34 have higher desire as compared to other age group. Childcare time and economic conditions play vital role in fertility pattern. Family help in child rearing in the form of parental or in laws is found to be the privilege for these women. However, women wish to have special facilities during child bearing and child rearing period. Hence, if given special facilities for child bearing and rearing time, at least formal sector working women may not have to go for a triple burden of work.

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