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DIVINE GUIDANCE AND AWARENESS: UNDERSTANDING FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAMS AMONG THE PUBLIC IN PAKISTAN

Muhammad Ibrar¹, Zuhaib Ali², Kamran Naeem³, Ihsan Jamil⁴, Muhammad Waseem⁵

¹ Department of Business Administration, Ilma University, Karachi, Pakistan

¹ Software College, Shenyang Normal University, Shenyang, China

² Assistant Professor Sociology, Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur Ghotki Campus,
Pakistan

³ Department of Management Sciences, Mir Chakar Khan Rind University, Sibi, Pakistan

⁴ School of Economics and Finance, Xi'an Jiaotong University, Xian, China

⁵ College of Economics and Management Huazhong Agriculture University, Wuhan China,
4300070

Corresponding Authors Emails: ⁴ihsanjamil@stu.xjtu.edu.cn, ⁵wasim2817@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Sacred Understanding: Evaluating the Community's Perception and Awareness of Family Planning Program in Three Villages of District Malakand, Pakistan. The study conducted among 169 married males in these villages revealed that family planning is not only beneficial for the society but also aligns with the religious teachings of spacing/gaps between children. The findings further emphasized the positive impact of family planning on the health of children and mothers, a value upheld in Islamic beliefs. The study suggests involving religious leaders in awareness programs to strengthen their effectiveness and ensure the program's continued success, ultimately contributing to the betterment of society and the fulfillment of religious duties.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of population has been a matter of great concern for Pakistan and the world for decades. It is a challenge that needs to be addressed not just

from an economic and social perspective but also from a religious point of view. Developed nations were able to handle this challenge with their resources, but developing countries like Pakistan are still struggling to address it. The formation of economic blocks and initiatives like BRICS and One-Belt-One-Road shows promise, but more needs to be done to tackle this challenge. As a faithful nation, Pakistan needs to embrace the teachings of Islam and consider the impact of rapid population growth on the environment and future generations (Omran, 2012). We need to act responsibly and make efforts to educate people on the importance of family planning and sustainable living to ensure a better future for all (Muhammad Ibrar, Kakepoto, Manzoor, & Khan, 2022; Muhammad Ibrar et al., 2018; Muhammad Ibrar, Mi, Rafiq, & Ali, 2019; Muhammad Ibrar, Mi, Rafiq, & Karan, 2016; Muhammad Ibrar, Mi, Rafiq, & Karn, 2016). Unfortunately, in many developing countries, including Pakistan, the situation remains unchanged. Despite efforts to tackle the issue, the rapid population growth continues to be a significant challenge, and limited resources are being stretched thin to meet the needs of the growing populations. As believers, we must take into account the teachings of our religion, which advocates for responsible use of resources and consideration for future generations. It is imperative that we work together to address this challenge, prioritize the implementation of family planning programs, and promote sustainable living. Only then can we ensure that our resources are used wisely, and future generations inherit a better world (Ph, 1984).

The concept of family planning is not limited to birth control but encompasses a wider range of practices and methods to help couples regulate the timing and number of children they have. Islamic teachings encourage responsible family planning, emphasizing the importance of spacing children and considering the health and well-being of mothers and children. The ultimate goal of family planning is to ensure the happiness and well-being of families while fulfilling their religious duties. Family planning has been shown to significantly reduce maternal deaths and ensure a healthy future for our communities. However, limited access to family planning supplies and social norms have hindered its consistent and effective use in many developing countries, requiring more education and support for responsible family planning (Nettey et al., 2015). In countries like Pakistan, where population densities are high, family planning is about planning for smaller families and implementing measures that create conditions for the well-being of individuals and families (Muhammad Ibrar, Khan, Mohammad, & Salahuddin, 2022). In line with Islamic teachings, family planning aims to help couples make informed decisions about the number of children they have, taking into account their specific circumstances and ability to provide for their families. It is important to ensure that every child is loved, cared for, and provided for, as emphasized in Islamic teachings. Family planning efforts may include promoting late marriage and advocating for monogamy, which is in line with the teachings of Islam. By doing so, we can reduce the number of children being born and ensure that every child is given the love and care they deserve.

Family planning is an essential component of Islamic teachings, promoting the responsible use of resources and consideration for future generations. It

enables individuals and couples to make informed decisions about the size and spacing of their families while fulfilling their religious duties. In Pakistan, where the population is growing rapidly, it is imperative that effective family planning programs are implemented. The government of Pakistan has launched various initiatives to promote family planning, reflecting the importance of responsible family planning in Islam. These programs aim to raise public awareness about the benefits of family planning, emphasizing the need for couples to take a responsible approach to their reproductive health (Muhammad Ibrar, Mi, Shah, & Rafiq, 2020). However, the level of awareness about family planning programs and their availability remains low, particularly in rural areas.

Family planning is an important aspect of Islamic teachings, and it is essential to ensure that the public is aware of the benefits and importance of responsible family planning. This research paper aims to investigate the level of awareness of family planning programs in Pakistan, taking into account individuals' knowledge, attitudes, and practices. It also seeks to identify the challenges in implementing effective family planning programs and the factors contributing to the low level of awareness. By doing so, we can better understand the needs of the public and develop effective strategies that align with Islamic teachings to promote responsible family planning practices.

The findings of this research paper are significant from an Islamic perspective, as responsible family planning is an essential component of Islamic teachings. Policymakers and healthcare professionals in Pakistan must develop effective strategies to promote family planning and increase awareness among the public, as it aligns with Islamic teachings and promotes responsible resource management. By doing so, we can improve the reproductive health of individuals and families in Pakistan, leading to a more sustainable population growth rate in line with Islamic principles.

Since the 1960s, numerous governments have attempted to slow Pakistan's population growth, but these have largely failed. One of the main reasons for this is the fear of birth control that exists among a large section of the population, which is influenced by socio-cultural factors (Elahi, 2012). In some developing countries, including Pakistan and India, there is a pressing need to address the lack of education and awareness about family planning methods, while also taking into account cultural and religious beliefs. However, it is important to note that Islam promotes responsible family planning and recognizes the importance of considering one's financial and physical ability to provide for children. Efforts to increase the use of family planning methods in these countries should be guided by Islamic teachings and values to ensure their effectiveness and sustainability. Furthermore, economic and political challenges should be addressed, in accordance with Islamic principles, to enable individuals and families to make informed decisions about their reproductive health.

Pakistan is an Islamic nation that places great emphasis on family values and the importance of procreation. Islamic teachings encourage individuals to get married and have children as it is considered a blessing from God. However,

Islam also stresses the importance of responsible parenthood and encourages the use of family planning methods to ensure that couples are financially and emotionally prepared to raise their children. Despite these teachings, Pakistan faces significant challenges related to uncontrolled population growth, which have negative implications for the country's development and progress. Therefore, this study's aim to assess males' family planning knowledge in the study area is critical in promoting responsible parenthood and aligning with Islamic principles.

Justification of the Study

In Islam, having a large family is considered a blessing and a source of pride. However, it is also important to remember that Allah has given humans the responsibility to take care of the earth and its resources. The Quran reminds us to be responsible stewards of the planet and not to waste its resources. Therefore, while having a large family is encouraged, it is also important to plan and manage the family size in a way that is sustainable and does not harm the environment or society. This study aims to explore the underlying causes of rapid population growth in Pakistan from a religious perspective and offer solutions that align with Islamic values of responsible family planning and stewardship of resources.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In Islam, the concept of family planning is not new, and it has been discussed in religious texts for centuries. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) himself encouraged couples to space their children and limit the number of children they have, as this would enable them to provide better care and attention to each child. However, despite these religious teachings, cultural and religious beliefs in Pakistan continue to pose significant challenges to the adoption of family planning methods. These beliefs often dictate that having more children is a sign of prosperity and blessings from God, leading many to resist the use of family planning methods. As a result, there is a need for increased awareness and education about the compatibility of family planning with Islamic teachings and the benefits of utilizing family planning programs to achieve a more sustainable population growth rate in Pakistan.

For instance, (Shaikh, Hatcher, & Hatcher, 2010) conducted a study in rural Sindh and found that the awareness of modern contraceptive methods among women and men was as low as 39% and 52%, respectively. The authors attributed this low awareness to a lack of education, cultural and religious beliefs, and limited access to healthcare facilities in the area. In Islamic teachings, family planning is considered a permissible practice and is allowed as long as it is done with mutual consent between husband and wife. Despite this, in some rural areas of Pakistan, cultural and religious beliefs remain a significant obstacle to the adoption of modern contraceptive methods. This study in rural Sindh found that education and awareness on family planning are essential to overcome these challenges. Religious leaders can play a vital role in promoting family planning in communities by highlighting the importance of responsible parenthood and the benefits of family planning

programs. It is crucial to develop effective strategies that consider cultural and religious factors in promoting family planning in rural areas of Pakistan.

Similarly, (Memon, Kumar, & Khokhar, 2018) conducted a similar study in rural Sindh and found that only 32% of women were aware of modern contraceptive methods, and the withdrawal method was the most commonly used. This study also identified several barriers to the utilization of family planning programs, including cultural and religious beliefs, lack of spousal support, and limited access to healthcare services. Religious and cultural beliefs have always been a significant factor that affects family planning programs in Pakistan. This study in rural Sindh showed that many women and their families were not aware of modern contraceptive methods due to cultural and religious beliefs. According to Islamic teachings, children are considered a blessing, and many people believe that having more children is a sign of prosperity and a duty towards society. This belief often results in families having more children than they can support financially, leading to poverty and other social problems. Additionally, traditional gender roles and lack of spousal support can also prevent women from utilizing family planning services. The findings of this study highlight the need to address these cultural and religious barriers to improve the utilization of family planning programs in Pakistan. (Bawah, Akweongo, Simmons, & Phillips, 1999)

In contrast, (Agha, Do, & Ouedraogo, 2011) found a higher level of awareness and utilization of family planning methods among women in urban areas of Pakistan. The study revealed that 90% of women were aware of at least one modern contraceptive method, with the oral contraceptive pill being the most commonly used. However, the study also found that cultural and religious beliefs, fear of side effects, and lack of spousal support were some of the challenges that hindered the utilization of family planning programs in these areas. Religious beliefs play a significant role in shaping attitudes towards family planning in Pakistan, with some communities adhering to conservative interpretations of Islamic teachings that discourage the use of modern contraceptives. Additionally, many women face pressure from their families and communities to have large families and are often expected to prioritize their roles as wives and mothers over their personal health and well-being (Palamuleni, 2013).

Similarly, (Ahmed, Tariq, & Sadiq, 2019) examined the variation in the level of awareness and utilization of family planning programs across different regions of Pakistan. The study found that the level of awareness was higher in urban areas than in rural areas, and the oral contraceptive pill was the most commonly used method. The study also revealed that education level, age, marital status, and access to healthcare services were some of the factors that influenced the utilization of family planning programs.

Family planning is an important aspect of reproductive health, but in Pakistan, its awareness and utilization are relatively low, particularly in rural areas. Research suggests that cultural and religious beliefs play a significant role in hindering the use of family planning methods. It is essential to develop culturally sensitive family planning programs that take into account the

religious and cultural norms of the people to increase awareness and utilization of these programs. Furthermore, access to healthcare services and education must be improved, and fears of side effects must be addressed to encourage the adoption of family planning methods.

METHODOLOGY

This section details the methodology implemented for the study, including the scope of the research, sample size, data gathering, and analysis. The research was carried out in Tehsil Dargai, located in the Malakand district of Pakistan. The research scope comprised 13 union councils, with Union Council Mehrdai being randomly chosen for this study. This particular union council comprised 18 villages, and for data collection, three villages (X and Y) were chosen at random. The target population for this study was married individuals residing in the selected area, and the total population size was estimated at 700 individuals, with the composition of the three villages being Hijab killy (300), Sarogai (150), and Wazirabad (250). The union council office was the source of the necessary information about married males in the area. According to the standards established by (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016), a sample size of 169 respondents were randomly chosen for the study and distributed using the proportional allocation method. The collected data were subjected to analysis using SPSS-20, a suitable software application for data analysis. The results were presented in frequencies and percentages to facilitate an accurate representation of the data. In order, The chi-square test was used to examine the potential relationship between independent and dependent variables at the bi-variate level.

Data Collection Tools

To gather the necessary data for the study, a structured interview schedule with seven closed-ended questions was used. The interview schedule was created to fully cover every facet of the research and achieve its goals. It's important to note that the interview schedule was created using the Likert scale and adhered to (Nachmias & Nachmias, 1992) criteria. SPSS-20 software was utilized to analyze the data collected from the study. To make the results easier to understand, the data were presented as frequencies and percentages. The Chi-square test was used to evaluate the potential association between independent and dependent variables at the bivariate level using (Tai, 1978) directions for calculating the chi-square were followed.

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{j=1}^j \sum_{j=1}^k \frac{(o_{ij} - e_{ij})^2}{e_{ij}}$$

Where

χ^2 = Two categorical variables in Chi-square

o_{ij} = the cross-classified category's observed frequencies in the *i*th row and *j*th column

e_{ij} = the anticipated frequency for a given category, assuming there is no correlation between the variables being studied

Table 2 displays the three levels of qualitative data collected for the study. Although the data was originally qualitative, it was later transformed into an

ordinal scale to facilitate analysis using the chi-squared test in a contingency table. (Din, Shah, Asadullah, Jamal, & Bilal, 2015).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In Table 1, the frequency and distribution of community awareness of family planning are shown. The relationship between the respondents' level of knowledge and their level of awareness has been thoroughly discussed. According to the results, which are consistent with other studies, the respondents had a high level of knowledge about family planning techniques. According to the data, 91% of respondents were aware of spacing/gap, and 100% of respondents were aware of family planning and contraceptives. The respondents, however, lacked adequate and clear knowledge of family planning methods. It is significant to note that, according to the United Nations' 2015 Trends in Contraceptive Use Worldwide report, the use of contraceptives has been rising throughout much of the world, including Asia (Mosha, Mgimwa, & Msuya, 2017). A study directed by (Fareed, Siraj, & Mahajan, 2017) also backed up the finding that merely being aware of family planning does not guarantee use. The study emphasizes the need for improvement, inspiration, and educational programs to encourage the use of contraceptives and lower the high fertility rate. By the results shown in Table 1, 76% of respondents think family planning is essential for society's advancement, while only 9.5% disagree. Family planning is crucial for a higher standard of living, according to the majority of respondents (69.8%), while 16% disagree and 14.2% did not respond. Additionally, according to the data, 70.4% of respondents agree that family planning benefits women and children, while only 10.7% disagree. It is interesting to note that in a study conducted by (Kiani, 2003) on "Male Attitude and Motivation for Family Planning in Pakistan," the majority of participants thought having a large family could result in health issues for the wife and kids. This finding highlights the importance of promoting family planning practices to ensure the health and well-being of both women and children in Pakistani society. Inyang-Etoh and I Abah (2017), analyzed that a high percentage of the population had knowledge about family planning, and a majority of them held a positive attitude toward it. Religious beliefs and attitudes towards the use of contraceptives vary widely among different religions and denominations. Some religious groups and leaders endorse the use of contraceptives as a way to promote responsible parenthood and prevent unwanted pregnancies, while others oppose it on the grounds of religious teachings that advocate for procreation and the sanctity of life. For instance, the Catholic Church opposes the use of artificial contraceptives and instead encourages natural family planning methods, while some Protestant denominations, such as the United Methodist Church, endorse the use of contraceptives as a way to promote responsible parenthood and family planning (Campbell, 1960). In Islam, the concept of family planning is supported and encouraged as a means of responsible parenthood. Muslims are advised to plan their families based on their financial capability, physical and emotional health, and overall well-being. While the Quran does not explicitly mention the use of contraceptives, Islamic scholars have generally supported their use as a legitimate means of family planning (Yusuf, 2005). The sanctity of life is also highly valued in Islam, and Muslims believe that every human life is precious and must be

protected (Shomali & Medicine, 2008). However, the preservation of life also includes the well-being of the mother, and family planning can help ensure that pregnancies are spaced out and managed in a way that is safe and healthy for both the mother and child. Islam promotes responsible parenthood through the use of family planning methods that are safe, effective, and in line with religious teachings on the sanctity of life and the well-being of the family (Pinter et al., 2016).

Overall, religious attitudes towards the use of contraceptives are complex and multifaceted, and they reflect the diversity of religious beliefs and values across different cultures and societies.

Table 1 – Distribution of Frequencies and Percentages

Statements	Yes	No	Don't know
Understanding of FP?	169(100)	0.00	0.00
Are you familiar with contraceptives?	169(100)	0.00	0.00
Understanding of the gap/birth?	154(91.1)	0.00	15(8.9)
Are you familiar with the concept of abortion?	169(100)	0.00	0.00
FP works to make society better	129(76.3)	16(9.5)	24(14.2)
FP is required for a higher standard of living	118(69.8)	27(16.0)	24(14.2)
FP has favorable effects on the health of your wife and children	119(70.4)	18(10.7)	32(18.9)

Analysis (Bi-variate)

To evaluate the relationship between community awareness and family planning, a select number of statements were employed to measure the community's perceptions, which are presented in Table 2. The findings suggest a robust correlation ($p = 0.000$) between awareness of spacing/gap and family planning initiatives. Furthermore, a significant ($p = 0.001$) association was identified between family planning programs and the perception that family planning is beneficial for society. The study also revealed a highly significant ($p = 0.000$) relationship between family planning programs and the belief that family planning is essential for a better quality of life. Additionally, a strong correlation ($p = 0.000$) was observed between family planning programs and the positive effects of family planning on the health of both the mother and child.

Table 2 - Community Awareness and Family Planning program Association

Attributes	Family planning program	Chi-square (χ^2) (P value)
Understanding of FP?	Family planning program	$\chi^2=15.658$ (P=0.000)
FP works to make society better	Family planning program	$\chi^2=19.706$ (P=0.001)
FP is required for a higher standard of living	Family planning program	$\chi^2=25.756$ (P=0.000)

FP has favorable effects on the health of your wife and children	Family planning program	$\chi^2=24.285$ (P=0.000)
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SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study's findings indicate that cultural and religious beliefs play a significant role in family planning practices in the research area. To successfully implement family planning programs, it is essential to address these cultural prejudices, including those related to religion. The government and NGOs should collaborate with religious leaders to design and implement culturally sensitive family planning campaigns that consider religious beliefs. Religious leaders can play an important role in promoting family planning practices that align with their faith's teachings and values. They can also educate their communities about the importance of family planning and its benefits for maternal and child health. Proper training of staff, including religious leaders, is crucial to improve their understanding of family planning methods and to effectively communicate this information to their community.

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