

Why do women delay childbearing in Mumbai? An exploration into the reasons of delay

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Introduction

India has been a country where early marriage and early childbearing has been more common. But in recent decades, many of the urban pockets of the country have witnessed delayed childbearing with women delaying their motherhood in their thirties and late thirties. This trend was common in western societies but unseen in developing countries like India. With urbanization, changing economic and social role of women, higher educational attainment, growing career aspirations, increased participation in labour force combined with availability of effective contraception, legalisation of abortion in India, more and more women are delaying their childbearing. As educational, employment and career opportunities opened for women, they could choose between motherhood and other activities, which have fundamentally altered the temporal pattern of reproductive behaviour (Van de Kaa, 1987; Goldin, 2006).

Recent evidence shows that postponement of childbearing and the delay in transition to motherhood lead to “very low” fertility in Europe (Sobotka, 2000a, 2000b). The shift from early to late timing of childbearing refers to what Kohler et al. (2002) first coined as the ‘postponement transition’, later elaborated upon by others (Goldstein et al., 2009). Sobotka (2004a, b). Even India is experiencing rapid fertility decline since 1990s, most of the states of India are on the verge of completing first demographic transition and are currently experiencing the onset of second demographic transition where fertility continues to decline below replacement. In fourteen out of twenty major states, the total fertility rate (TFR) in urban areas has reached below replacement level (SRS Statistical Report 2013). Among them, the TFR of most of the states are as low as in developed countries of the world.

The paper makes a detailed analysis in order to understand the underlying reasons of why women postpone having children. The study is conducted in Mumbai as it has one of the highest female working population (18.8 %) compared to 16 % urban women for India (NSSO 2011-12). Mushrooming growth of ART (Assisted Reproductive Techniques) centers with easy availability and access to all advanced medical health care facilities make Mumbai an ideal place for this study.

Need for the study

Abundant study has been done in highly industrialized countries regarding delayed childbearing but no study is done in Indian context which tries to capture the women’s views and their reasons for delay. There is dearth of data which can help to understand the determinants leading to shift in

the timing of fertility. National Family Health Survey (NFHS) shows that the trend of delayed first childbearing for women age 30 and above in urban India has increased from 1.85 percent in 1992-93 to 2.73 percent in 2005-06. The shift in the timing of fertility in India indicates changes in the traditional norms of society regarding childbearing. But it is difficult to say whether it is the individual aspiration or societal norm which is changing and leading to increase in this trend. Therefore, it is required to explore the determinants of delayed childbearing among Indian women.

Material and methods

Survey was conducted entirely by me using semi-structured questionnaire from 308 women between October 2014 and August 2015. Women were randomly selected from nine randomly selected hospitals in different localities of Mumbai after getting approval from ethical committee of the respective hospitals. In this study, age 30 is assumed to be threshold of delay based on the Gijs Beets categorization of Late Fertility (Gijs Beets,2008). All women interviewed have been categorized in two groups; age 19-29 and age 30 & above for comparison purpose. The determinants of delayed motherhood was analysed in detail, with the help of bivariate analysis, logistic regression and other tools using STATA 14.

Findings

Table 1a shows that among 308 women surveyed, around 48 percent women delivered their first child at age 30& above whereas 52 percent women delivered their first child before age 30. In contrast, Table 1b shows that only 37 percent women think that they have delayed childbearing. There were around 1 percent women who reported that they don't think they have delayed childbearing but according to their family and friends, they have delayed it. It shows that some women do not consider 30 as the age of delay.

Age of women having first childbirth	N	Percent
19-29	159	51.62
30 & above	149	48.38
Total	308	100

Do you think your childbearing is delayed?	N	Percent
Yes	114	37.25
No	188	61.44
Not for me but for others, yes	4	1.31
Total	308	100

Table 2 shows most important reason for delayed childbearing according to women. The study finds career (29) as the most important reason for delayed childbearing for majority of women followed by late marriage (28), medical issues (17) and changes in value system (10). Here changes in value system means changes in the traditional norms of the society. Now, most of the couple

want to enjoy togetherness and achieve personal goals for some years before planning a child unlike past when childbearing was the most important goal of marriage.

Reasons	Percent	N
Late marriage	28.4	42
Education	4.7	7
Career	29.1	43
Finance	6.1	9
Medical issues	16.9	25
Difference in partner preferences	3.4	5
Housing	0.7	1
Changes in value system	9.5	14
No reason	1.4	2
Total	100	148

First, women were asked the most important reason for delay, then they were asked all the reasons which led to delay in childbearing. Multiple responses were collected for the same question and frequency for every response was calculated individually.

When asked about all the reasons of delay; out of 24 percent women who mentioned career as one of the reasons, for 29 percent women, career was the most important reason of delayed childbearing. Similarly, 28 percent women mentioned late marriage as one of the reasons out of which 18 percent women mentioned it as the most important reason for delay (Table 3).

Reasons	All reasons for delay*		Most important reason of delay	
	Percent	N	Percent	N
Late marriage	18.2	54	28.4	42
Education	4	12	4.7	7
Career	24.2	72	29.1	43
Finance	14.1	42	6.1	9
Medical issues	14.1	42	16.9	25
Difference in partner preferences	4.4	13	3.4	5
Housing	4	12	0.7	1
Changes in value system	15.2	45	9.5	14
Family reasons	1	3	NA	NA
No reason	0.7	2	1.4	2
Total	100	297	100	148
No. of cases	143		148	

*Based on multiple responses

Table 4 presents various reasons related to career of women/spouse which led to delayed childbearing. Nearly, most of the women (46 percent) wanted to get well established in job before planning a child. Around 40 percent women wanted to secure a job before planning family. Growing career aspirations, demanding nature of job and aspiration to get better packages before starting family were other reasons related to career which resulted in delay in childbearing among many women. One woman narrated, *“Nowadays there is no job security unlike in the past when our parents worked in government organizations. Therefore, it takes long to decide about childbearing since it is important to secure job and have financial stability before starting a family.”* (35 years, Manager).

Career reasons	Percent
I first wanted a secure job situation	39.5
I first wanted to get well established in my job	45.8
I wanted to grow more in career	7.2
I wanted to get promotion/was getting promotions	2.0
I had no time as my job profile is too demanding	2.0
Wanted a better package before starting a family	3.1

Results

Two hundred and ninety-five out of 308 interviewed women answered why they delayed their first child. The most important reasons reported for delaying childbearing were career (29 percent), late marriage (28 percent), medical issues (17 percent) and changes in value system (10 percent). There were other reasons like finance, difference in partner preferences, housing, family reasons and lack of support system for childcare which were reported by the women interviewed. Medical reasons were more common among women age 30& above. Further probe found that the women married late because they could not get compatible match, similar caste partner, groom from same city etc.

Discussion

Some women reported that reasons for delaying childbearing were beyond their personal control. Lack of awareness of the impact of age on fertility contributed to the delay among some women interviewed. Changes in the values system was one of the most interesting findings of the study.

Note: Complete literature review, analysis and detailed discussion of the paper will be given in the final version of the paper.