

Influence of Mother in Law on Family Size

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Abstract

Background: Under the patriarchal joint family society system, a young married woman is under the control of the mother-in-law, who heads the power hierarchy.

Objective: To assess the influence of mother-in-law on family size and to compare it between two geographically different communities of Lahore and Bahawalpur.

Methodology: Study Design: Cross-sectional comparative Setting: Lahore and Bahawalpur, Punjab. Duration of study: May to July 2019. A total of 100 questionnaires were filled, 50 from Lahore and 50 from Bahawalpur. Information on demographics, family size, and mother in laws responses to her wish related to family size was noted. The influence of mother-in-law on family size was assessed by analyzing the family size of the daughter in law with regards to the mother in law wishes to have more children.

Results: Overall, 57% of mother in law wanted more children, 66% of sons favored mothers, and 62% of mothers hold household budget. This study showed that in Lahore, the majority, 29 (58%) families had 0-2 children, whereas, in Bahawalpur, 14 (28%) % had 0-2 children. (P-value =0.00) In Bahawalpur, 23(46%) of mother-in-law wanted their daughter-in-law to have more children versus 34(68%) in Lahore, (p value=0.02). In Bahawalpur, 33(66%) and in LHR 34(68%) of mother-in-law said that the bearing of more children will badly impact the health of their daughter-in-law. (p value=0.4).

Conclusion: Mother-in-law's wish to have more grandchildren has a significantly inverse influence on the family size of her daughter in law. The majority of the mother in-laws knew that more children could result in poor child care. The majority of the mother-in-laws has control over the household budget and their son favored them.

Key words: Family size, Mother-in-Law, Decision

Article Citation: Waheed F, Hassan S, Arif MA, Abbas SF, Azmat U. Influence of Mother-in-law on Family Size. JSZMC 2020;11(3):17-20.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47883/jszmc.v11i03.43>

Introduction

In many Asian, Arab, and African countries, where the patriarchal joint family is ubiquitous, most rural women live with their mother-in-law during early married life.¹ During the years when women make vital fertility and human capital decisions, they are under the supervision of the mother-in-law.^{2,3} In our cultural system, the decisions are still made in the domestic group by the mother in law who holds the authority to make important decisions. The domestic groups are structured around female bonds backed by the positive cultural valuation of the role of the mother.⁴ Upon marriage a couple comes to live with the husband's mother. In extended families, the families or the widowed mothers hold the positions of authority. It's up to them to decide in matters that concern most of the household works and number of grandchildren.^{3,5}

It is hypothesized that the quality of a spouse's

relationship with their parents-in-law would predict a spouse's marital successes.⁴ These are among the first prospective, longitudinal findings demonstrating that, even in long-term marriages, conflicts in extended family relations will erode marital stability, satisfaction, and commitment over time. So to avoid any such conflicts most of the couple act upon the decisions or otherwise soon after marriage, the married couple sets a separate dwelling in the camp.^{6,7,8}

Under the patriarchal joint family society system, a young married woman is under the control of the mother-in-law, who heads the power hierarchy operating among the women and has an important influence on family decisions pertaining to activities within the household.⁶ The mother-in-law may affect the reproductive health decisions and fertility decisions made by young couples. However, not much is known about how intra-family relationships per se influence the family size. They are also likely

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to influence the number of sons their daughter-in-law had and the timing of their daughter-in-law being sterilized as well as human capital investments in grandchildren. These decisions in turn influence the economic activities and outcomes of families, and consequently, that of society as a whole.^{3,9} This research sheds light on a widely prevalent, but little studied, demographic feature of patriarchal societies in Punjab Pakistan, from both urban and rural areas, that could have a significant influence on the empowerment, health, and human capital of women and children. The results of this study highlight the importance of tailoring awareness-generation tools for mother-in-law. Targeting the mother-in-law has the potential to improve the effectiveness of development programs, in wide-ranging areas from women's health care to microcredit, and also promote women's empowerment. The objective of this study was to find the influence of mother-in-law on family size and compare the influence of mother-in-law between two geographically different communities of Lahore and Bahawalpur in Punjab.

Methodology

Study Design: Cross-sectional comparative study. **Study Setting:** This study was conducted in Lahore, which is a big city in the province, and in Bahawalpur, which is a relatively small city in the province, and represents predominantly rural areas. **Duration of study:** This study was conducted from May to July 2018. **Study population:** A population of 100 mothers-in-law living with their sons in both study areas i.e Lahore and Bahawalpur. **Sampling Technique:** Convenient sampling technique. **Inclusion Criteria:** Mother-in-law living with their sons. **Exclusion criteria:** Mother-in-law refusing to give data. **Data Collection:** A pretested questionnaire was designed in Urdu so that it can be easily filled by the respondents. The questionnaire contained two parts. Part A consisted of demographic data whereas part B consisted of questions related to the subject. The aim was assessing the role of the mother-in-law in decisions involving heavy expenditure, responses of “mother in Law wanted more children”, family size, “sons favor mother”, “mother in law knows that large family will badly affect Daughter in Law health” and “more children will result in poor child care”. The

influence of a mother in law on the family size was assessed by analyzing the wish of the mother in law for more children versus the number of children in the family. **Data analysis:** The data was analyzed by using SPSS version 20, and frequencies and percentages were calculated and presented in the form of tables and figures. Ethical approval was sought from the ethical committee of the Hospital.

Results

The results of the current study showed evidence regarding the influence of mother-in-law on family size and the results were compared between two cities of Punjab, Lahore, and Bahawalpur. Overall, 57% of mother in law wanted more children, 66% of sons favored mothers, and 62% of mothers hold a household budget. This study showed that in Lahore, the majority, 29 (58%) families had 0-2 children, 12 (24%) % had 3-4 children, and only 9 (18%) had more than 5 children, whereas, in Bahawalpur, 14 (28%) % had 0-2 children, 24 (48%) had 3-4 and 12 (24%) % had more than 5 children.

In Bahawalpur, 23(46%) of mother-in-law wanted their daughter-in-law to have more children versus 34(68%) in Lahore, (p value=0.02); 66% of them want an increase in family size or replacement of deaths of previous children, 24% of them want more sons of their daughter-in-law while 10% of them remain stuck to the ancient idea that their daughter-in-law should bear a dozen of children.

Table-I: Responses of Mother in law at Lahore and Bahawalpur, regarding decisions of family size.

Responses	Lahore (n=50)	Bahawalpur (n=50)	Total	P-value
Mother in Law knows that a large family will badly affect Daughter in Law's health	34(68%)	33(66%)	67(67%)	0.4
Mother in Law holds the household budget	29(58%)	33(66%)	62(62%)	0.6
Sons favor mother	15(30%)	18(36%)	66(66%)	0.4
Mother in Law wanted more children	34(68%)	23(46%)	57(57%)	0.02
More children will result in poor child care	33(66%)	44(88%)	77(77%)	0.01

In Lahore, 68% of mother-in-law wanted their daughters-in-law to have more children; 37% of them want an increase in family size or replacement

of deaths of previous children, 55% of them want more sons of their daughter-in-law while 8% of them remain stuck to the ancient idea that their daughter-in-law should bear a dozen of children. In Bahawalpur, 33(66%) and in LHR 34(68%) of mother-in-law said that bearing more children will badly impact the health of their daughter-in-law. (p value=0.4) In Bahawalpur, 33(66%) of mothers-in-law were concerned about bringing up of their children and approved the fact that more children will result in poor care, whereas in Lahore 44(88%) approved this fact. (Table-I)

Discussion

Our study was conducted on a sample size of 100 mothers in-laws selected from the same number of households, Overall, 57% of mother in law wanted more children, 66% of sons favored mothers, and 62% of mothers hold household budget. The results showed that in most aspects that decide the role of mother in law family size there was a significantly inverse influence. In Lahore despite 68% mother-in-laws wishing their daughter-in-laws to have more children majority (58%) had only 0-2 children. Similarly, in Bahawalpur, 46 % mother-in-laws wanting their daughter-in-laws to have more children, 28% had 0-2 children. (p=0.00) So this study concluded there was an influence of mother-in-laws on the family size. These results were similar to a study conducted in Bihar, India where 440 pairs of married women were studied and their family size preference was significantly associated with mother in laws fertility.¹ Results of this study were also contrasted to another study conducted in Indonesia which proved that mother in laws fertility behavior is not associated with women's fertility intentions.²

The findings of my study were in comparison to a study conducted in India on 500 couples where women's family size preferences were positively associated with the fertility of mother-in-laws. Mother in laws desired number of grandchildren, as well as husband's fertility behavior, was positively associated with the preferred family size of women.⁴ In that study, only 42% of mother-in-law were inquired about that issue in the previous study. This difference is because in our society the role of mother-in-law is more predominant as compared to her son regarding such issues of family and she is also considered to

have more knowledge gained through experience in her life.

In case, if daughter-in-law falls ill, advice of 67% of mother-in-law considered the bad impact on the health of daughter in law, in previous study this percentage was 44% because in that society usually, males have a major role in family decisions.⁴

Now, regarding family size, our main objective was whether mother-in-law wants more children to form their daughter-in-law or not. The answer to this question depends upon two factors; firstly, the influence of mother-in-law and secondly, the pre-existing family size of her son. Overall 57% and in Bahawalpur 46%, whereas, in Lahore 68% of mother-in-law want their daughter-in-law to have more children. The percentage of mother-in-law demanding more children is greater in Lahore than Bahawalpur because in Lahore most selected families were those having 1 or 2 children, so they are obvious to demand more children while in Bahawalpur, more families are those having more than 5 children. Another factor may be the difference in educational status in the two cities.

In a previous study, the perception of mothers-in-law on different aspect of household decisions, including family size and so the decision to uptake family planning methods, conducted at Karachi showed that decisions which are related to the schooling and health of the children, were taken by husband and wife, however, there was a difference of opinion among mother in law, husband and wife on the desire of more children. That study found that 28% of mothers-in-law versus 58%, daughters-in-law not wanted more grandsons/sons whereas, 36% mothers-in-laws versus 66% of daughters-in-law have not wanted more granddaughters/daughters. This difference more among mother-in-law/daughter-in-law pairs versus mother/son pairs. Overall, the mother-in-law's role was found to be overshadowed by that of her son, except for limiting family size. In contrast to over study, they suggested that mothers-in-law must be included in health education campaigns about family planning.¹⁰

A previous study that was conducted in Bihar India to determine the associations of the family size of women of rural areas with fertility behaviors of their mother and mother-in-law, showed that the family size was not significantly associated with the mother's fertility, however, it was associated with the mother's education. Mother-in-law's wish to have more grandchildren was also positively associated

with women's family size. They however found that woman who had a higher education than their mother-in-law, have smaller family size, clearly suggesting the role of education which provides greater autonomy in the decision on childbearing.¹¹

Conclusion

This study concluded that mother-in-law's wish to have more grandchildren has a significantly inverse influence on the family size of her son. The majority of the mother-in-laws knew that more children could result in poor child care. However, both of the above effects were significantly different among the two study locations selected in this study. The majority of the mother-in-law's has control over the household budget and their son favored them.

Authors Contribution: **FW:** Conception of work and Design of Work. **SH:** Drafting and Revising. **MAA:** Acquisition & analysis **SFA:** Analysis of data and drafting. **UA:** Analysis of data and drafting. **MR:** Analysis of data and drafting.

All the authors gave final approval for publication and agreed to be accountable for all aspect of work.

Conflict of Interest: None

Sources of Funding: Self

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