



EDITORIAL;

POPULATION BOMB EXPLORED IN PAKISTAN WITH SERIOUS IMPLICATIONS (POPULATION GROWTH AND DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND)

Dr. Asma Bokhari, Public Health Specialist, (03008557495, bokhari_asma@yahoo.com SIAL J Med. Sci. June-2024 V-2 (Issue-04):10-15

Asia encompasses 51 nations spanning a total landmass of 45 million km² (17 million square miles), comprising approximately 30% of the Earth's inhabitable terrain. The coastlines of Asia stretch over a combined length of 220,266 km (136,896 miles). Presently, the continent is home to 4.74 billion individuals, constituting 59.7% of the global populace and contributing to around 38% of the world's economic productivity.¹

Population growth has long been a focal point of concern for numerous nations, including Pakistan. At the time of its independence, both West Pakistan (now Pakistan) and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) had a combined population of 31 million.² However, by 1995, this number had skyrocketed to 140 million. Projections by the United Nations suggest that at this rate, Pakistan's population could reach 380 million by 2050.²

While many developing countries are witnessing declining fertility rates, Pakistan's fertility rate remains persistently high, with consequences at both micro and macro levels. The recent announcement of the results of the 7th Population and Housing Census in 2023, conducted digitally, reveals a population of 241.49 million, marking a historical milestone.³ Despite this, Pakistan's resistance to fertility rate change persists.^{4,5}

Since 2017, population of Pakistan has reached 241.5 million (2023 Census) with an average yearly increase of 2.55% with majority of the population being under the age of 40 years (77.5 percent)¹, Pakistan is characterized as one of the high-fertility country. The United Nation's Population Division's medium projection shows that Pakistan's projected population will reach 263 million by 2030 and 383 million by 2050, i.e., an increase by about 84% during the 2017-2050 period, unless serious actions are undertaken to halt population growth and rationalize population dynamics⁶. Globally, Pakistan is the fifth most populous country, after China, India, the USA, and Indonesia. Like most of the developing countries faced by high fertility rates, population pressure remains one of the leading factors behind lower per capita income, poor health and education outcomes, higher unemployment, inequality and dwindling of common resources, Pakistan too faces a formidable challenge in addressing issues related to economic development and poverty alleviation.⁶

The rapid population growth is a result of a slow decline in fertility rates at national and provincial levels. According to Pakistan Demographic Health Survey (2017-18) indicates that fertility levels differ by area of residence, region, and background characteristics (education and wealth). There is a difference of one child between urban and rural areas (2.9 children compared to 3.9 respectively), while by Provinces/regions, fertility levels range between 3.0 children per woman in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Islamabad and 4.8 children per woman in FATA. In between, fertility levels vary between 3.4 in Punjab, 3.6 in Sindh and 4.0 children per woman in KP and Baluchistan. Prevalent practice of early marriage especially among rural areas, childbearing too begins at an early age: the percentage of adolescents aged (15-19) who are mothers or pregnant with their first child amounts to 8% in urban and increases to about 9% in rural areas. The slow decline of fertility levels during the last one and a half decades delayed the onset of demographic transition, affected the age structure

¹ Health, Nutrition, and Population (HNP) Statistics Database. World Bank Group. Accessed March 3, 2024.



of the country, and created the population momentum that in turn re-contributed to the high population growth rates. Universal marriage and low level of contraceptive prevalence are the major contributors to high fertility levels.⁷

As a result of high fertility, the country continues to grapple with formidable challenges in addressing economic development, unemployment, soaring inflation, climate change, and subsequent poverty reduction. The situation is further complicated by political instability, ongoing conflict in neighboring countries, terrorism, mounting financial debt, prevalent drug addiction, sectarian tensions, and security concerns, contributing to poor law and order situations. The most pressing threat to Pakistan's peace and development is the escalating issue of population growth, with its grave consequences.⁷

The Malthusian theory of population posits that as human productivity increases, it initially leads to improved living standards and resources, fostering population growth. However, when population growth outpaces productivity, it results in decreased output per person, leading to a Malthusian catastrophe characterized by natural checks such as war, conflict, drought, famine, and pandemics. Pakistan's current population trends suggest a failure to curb population growth, potentially leading to adverse effects on national security, economic stability (including resource scarcity, high prices, and associated crime), social stability (including inequality, lack of education and healthcare, and increased crime), and political stability (due to government inability to meet public needs, leading to dissatisfaction and distrust).⁸

Pakistan finds itself amidst one of its most challenging periods in socio-economic and political history, facing severe financial constraints, and having very high inflation rates at 38%. Factors such as increasing oil prices, (post Covid challenges that affected the supply chain worldwide, energy crises) leading to poor exports, high unemployment and resultant financial crises bringing the country at the brink of economic collapse. Thus, necessitating the need for continuous IMF loan agreements to avert potential default.⁸

Pakistan, despite being a relatively minor contributor to climate change at under 1 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions in 2018, consistently ranks among the top 10 countries worldwide most affected by climate change. In the recent past, the country with regularity has experienced large-scale flooding, most notably in 2010 and more recently in June 2022. Pakistan experienced heavy monsoon rains between June and September 2022, which severely affected millions of households, mainly in Sindh and Balochistan which claimed 1,700 lives and caused economic losses exceeding \$30 billion.⁸

The status of women in Pakistani society remains a challenging issue with the country ranking low (near the bottom) of the world's countries on indicators such as women health and survival, educational attainment and equal economic opportunity and participation. Despite observing an increase in female participation in labor force rate in Pakistan from 13.7 percent (1990) to 20.3 percent (2020), the rate of growth continues to be very slow and is among the lowest in the South Asia region. With more than half the country's population not contributing to the economy, the likelihood of economic growth remains a farfetched dream.⁹

Between 2009 and 2016, Pakistan's population growth rate steadily declined from 2.25% to 1.21%. However, it has unfortunately risen again and now stands at 1.96%. This surge in population growth poses a significant threat to Pakistan.⁹ According to the UN Population



Division, without concerted efforts from federal and provincial authorities to curb the growth rate. Pakistan's population could swell to 263 million by 2030.⁹

There are valuable lessons to be learned from success stories in population control from within South Asia region, such as Bangladesh's remarkable achievements. Bangladesh has effectively reduced its fertility rate from approximately 6.3 in the 1970s to 2.1. Additionally, Bangladesh with considerable investments in population control, boasts a much higher Contraceptive Prevalence Rate (CPR) compared to Pakistan (CPR range from a high of 38% in Punjab to a low of 20% in Balochistan²), wherein, the unmet need for contraceptives still is more than 20 percent. Bangladesh's CPR stands at 65.0%, while Pakistan's continues to stagnate around 30-35%, nearly half that of Bangladesh. These statistics highlight the need for urgent proactive measures in population control and family planning initiatives.¹⁰

CAUSES AND FACTORS (Contributing Overpopulation In Pakistan)¹¹:

1. **Religious Beliefs:** Some religious beliefs promote large families, leading individuals to refrain from family planning despite the availability of contraception.
2. **Low Opportunity Cost for Women:** In Pakistan, the women's participation in economic activities is limited with only 20 percent contributing to the labor force.
3. **Unemployment:** High unemployment rates indicate limited opportunities for economic activities, making it difficult to accommodate a growing population.
4. **High Fertility:** The high birth rate results in rapid population growth, straining resources and infrastructure.
5. **Status of Women:** status of women in Pakistani society remains a challenging issue and the country ranks near the bottom of the world's countries on indicators such as women's health and survival, women's educational attainment, equal economic participation and opportunity and decision making.
6. **Influx of Refugees:** The arrival of refugees, particularly from neighboring countries like Afghanistan, increases the population.
7. **Relatively Low Death Rate:** Advancements in healthcare have lowered mortality rates, contributing to population growth.
8. **Low Living Standards:** Low-income families tend to have more children, leading to lower living standards for the population.
9. **Lack of Access to Family Planning:** High unmet need for contraception because of limited availability and awareness of family planning methods which hinders population control efforts.
10. **Joint Family System:** In joint family systems, competition among family members based on family size can contribute to rapid population growth.
11. **Early Marriages:** Early marriage practices result in longer reproductive periods and contribute to population growth.
12. **Illiteracy:** Lack of education hampers understanding of the economic implications of high birth rates.
13. **Population Inefficiency:** A high dependency ratio and low participation in economic activities strain resources.
14. **Inadequate Nutrition:** Vicious cycle of malnutrition and infection affects health and survival, indirectly contributing to population growth.
15. **Vicious Poverty Cycle:** Population growth exacerbates poverty, creating a cycle of economic hardship.
16. **Lack of Alternative Activities:** Limited recreational and employment opportunities

² PDHS 2017-18



result in increased time spent with spouses, potentially leading to more children.¹¹

CHALLENGES (Resulting from high population growth):

1. **Pressure on resources:** Population growth places strain on essential resources such as food, water, housing, and energy.
2. **Unemployment and poverty:** A growing population can exacerbate unemployment and poverty, particularly when women's rights are not acknowledged, limiting their economic participation.
3. **Strain on healthcare and education:** Increased population leads to greater demand for healthcare and education services, which can strain existing infrastructure and resources. Those living in poverty have higher fertility and higher mortality than better-off sections of the population.
4. **Environmental impact:** Population growth contributes to environmental degradation through increased pollution, deforestation, and habitat destruction.
5. **Urbanization:** Rapid urbanization leads to the encroachment on green spaces, exacerbates deforestation, and threatens biodiversity and ecological balance.
6. **Status of women:** High rates of social exclusion, which differs by gender, age, and region. Being aged, a woman and living in Balochistan or Khyber Pakhtunkhwa increases the severity of exclusion, a concept largely rooted in cultural aspects/practices and reflected in the economic disparities.¹²

POLICIES (to Address the Underlying Causes of High Population Growth in Pakistan)¹⁰:

1. **Family Planning and Awareness Programs:** Implement educational campaigns to raise awareness about family planning, contraception, and reproductive health. These programs should utilize various media channels and community outreach initiatives. Involving religious leaders and influencers can help dispel myths and misconceptions surrounding family planning methods.
2. **Women Empowerment and Reproductive Rights:** Promote women's empowerment through education, financial independence, and access to reproductive healthcare. Ensuring women's reproductive rights enables them to make informed decisions about their family size and spacing of children, ultimately contributing to population control.
3. **Healthcare and Child Mortality Reduction:** Invest in improving healthcare infrastructure and access to quality services, particularly in rural areas. Reducing child mortality rates encourages families to have fewer children, contributing to population stabilization.
4. **Economic Implications of Population Growth:** Address the economic challenges posed by rapid population growth through investments in education, skill development, and job creation. Leveraging the demographic dividend requires strategic planning to ensure sustainable economic growth amid population growth pressures.
5. **Investing in education and economic development:** This can alleviate poverty and enhance overall well-being. Educated individuals tend to have smaller families and are more likely to utilize family planning methods effectively.
6. **Urban planning initiatives:** This can mitigate the strain on the infrastructure and the resources in the urban areas. Well-planned urban development can improve living



conditions, reduce overcrowding, and promote sustainable urban growth.

7. **Enhancing living standards and access to essential resources (like housing, healthcare, and education):** This can uplift communities and reduce poverty. Improved socio-economic conditions often correlate with lower fertility rates.
8. **Innovative Government policies:** Such as tax incentives for smaller families and penalties for exceeding a certain number of children can influence family size decisions. These policies can provide incentives for family planning and help control population growth.
9. **Linking population with environment and climate change:** The rapid and unplanned increase in population adversely affects the physical environment, erodes the carrying capacity of ecosystems and increases the exposure to climate-induced disasters in both urban and rural settings.¹³

Conclusion;

Pakistan faces significant challenges due to its high population growth rate and environmental issues. With limited resources and infrastructure, the growing population exacerbates concerns related to food security, water scarcity, and unemployment. Additionally, the country's large youth population places a burden on the economy and social services.¹⁴

World Population Day serves as a reminder of the global population issues faced by countries like Pakistan. It underscores the importance of addressing these issues through collaborative efforts and effective policies aimed at promoting sustainable development and improving the quality of life for all citizens.¹⁵

In conclusion, overpopulation in Pakistan stems from a complex interplay of social, economic, cultural, and environmental factors. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive strategies focused on education, healthcare, economic development, and family planning.¹⁴

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