

## Some Psychological Reflections on Population Control\*

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In this paper an attempt is made to discuss the psychological factors which may be cited as affecting population growth. Population is made up of the people, Psychology is the study of people. So far demographers, economists and sociologists have been discussing the population problem from their point of view, but psychologists attempted only recently to make their contributions to this burning problem. Our intention here is to show how and what measures there are to reflect psychologically in relation to population control.

Julian Huxley has thus stated the problem in human terms, "the world's demographic situation is becoming impossible. Man, in the person of present generation of human beings, is laying a burden on his own future. He is condemning his children's children to increased misery: he is making it harder to improve the general lot of mankind; he is making it more difficult to build a united world free of frustration and greed. More and more human beings will be competing for less and less, or at any rate each will have to be content with.....if nothing is done about this problem by who are now alive, the whole of mankind's future of our own children's and grand children's, the next twenty five years will be decisive."<sup>1</sup>

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\* The following works and writings constitute the more important contributions on this topic

(1) On family planning communication, *Demography* (2) 1964, Pp. 94-105. (2) Chandrasekeran, C. and Bebart, P. G. The relative role of information sources in the dissemination of knowledge of family planning methods in Bombay city, *Journal of family welfare*, June 1963, Pp. 5-14. (4) Fryer, P. *The birth controllers*, London, : Martin Seeker and Warburg, 1965. (5) Gustavus, S. O. and Nam, C. B. The formation and stability of ideal family size among young people, *Demography* 7 (1) Feb. 1970, Pp, 43-51. (6) Poffenberger, T. Two thousand voluntary vasectomie performed in California; background factors and comments: *Marriage and Family Living*, 25 (4) Nov. 1963, Pp. 469-474. (7) Centers, R. and Blunberg, G. Social Psychological factors in Human procreation; A survey approach, *A Journal of Social Psychology*, 40, Nov. 1954, Pp. 245-257. (8) Back, K. W. New frontiers in Demography and Social psychology, *Demography* 4(1) 1967 Pp. 90-97. (9) Groat, H. T. and Neal, A. G. Social psychological correlates of urban fertility, *American Sociological Review*, 32 (6) Dec. 1967, Pp. 945-959. (10) Wyatt, F. Clinical notes on the motive of Re-production, *Journal of Social Issues*, 23 (4) Oct. 1967, Pp. 29-56. (11) Johnson, M. H. Social and Psychological effects of Vasectomy, *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 121, Nov. 1964. Pp. 482-486.

1. Huxley, J. *The Human Crisis*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1963, Pp. 78-80

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But what are the causes of high fertility?. Sociologists and Demographers analysing differences in fertility within and between societies and changes over time, have provided explanations in terms of social stratification variables, such as education, religion, urban, rural residence and work status of females. Psychologists have not provided corresponding analyses at the level of the individual. Personological factors related to fertility differences are obscure<sup>2</sup>.

Psychologists have attempted to state their reflections on the population problem. M. B. Smith shows it thus, "the fertility of a population can be viewed as the resultant of many individual acts and decisions made within the framework of biological and environmental constraints"<sup>3</sup>.

Psychological attributes reflect the changing socio-cultural context (individual modernity) more relevant than culture free or situation free personality variables in explaining the change process of social institution, the family<sup>4</sup>. This statement elucidates the importance of personal factors in relation to population control. We expect to clarify this with the help of four major types of social psychological variables. These four variables are as follows: 1. Value orientation, 2. Modernization, 3. Family planning attitude, 4. Perception of environment.

1.1 What is the value of a child? This question has been answered endlessly in cave drawings, myths, religious and popular songs. It has not been answered scientifically. We know that children are not an inadvertent consequence of sex. We know they are not wanted for utilitarian reasons alone. It is possible to list many non-utilitarian values that children might provide, but in most cases there is no evidence that these values are held by any sizeable group. Data are virtually non-existent on why certain values are important, why children seem to satisfy them, which of the values are salient at certain times, which actually motivate the parents to have a child. Indeed the most impressive thing about the literature on the value of children and motivation for reproduction is that there are so few facts. Edward Pohlman has taken an excellent first step by gathering together the motivation for childbearing that have appeared in empirical and theoretical literature<sup>5</sup>.

1.2 Value orientation refers to human nature. Man is governed by nature and he has to obey the environmental factors which would be important for his behaviour. The recent discoveries in population control introduce

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2. Fawcett, J. T. *Psychology and Population*, An occasional paper of the Population Council, New York, 1970, p. 3.
  3. Smith, M. B. *Social Psychology and human values*, Aldine publishing Co, Chicago, 1969. p. 292.
  4. *Population Studies, A Journal of Demography*, L. S. E. London, Vol. 28, No. 1 1957. p. 171.
  5. Pohlman, E. H. *Psychology of Birth Planning*, Cambridge, 1969.

various types of contraceptives but people would not agree with those which are contrary to nature. Some Sinhala Buddhist families would not agree with the use of those contraceptives due to the values they have already accepted about life. People's behaviour has been moved by the values they prefer, as reproductive behaviour is affected by their attitudes and values they prefer. Accordingly, they would not agree with any and every type of contraceptive. A duty of a psychologist is to convince and make them change their values regarding the use of contraceptives. As mentioned earlier, if we do not think or tackle this problem accurately it would be a very grave position that people in the world would face. That is why the psychologists have been attached to population centres and private foundations for population work<sup>6</sup>.

1.3 There are basically four reasons why the value of children to their parents should be studied. They are directly relevant to the study of population and population planning; to affect motivation for fertility, to anticipate compensations that might be necessary should a smaller family size be achieved, and to predict fertility motivations and thus population trends. The fourth reason is only indirectly related to population: to consider the value of children as a possible influence on the parent/child relationship<sup>7</sup>.

1.4 Interest in the value of children has been generated by concern about overpopulation and increasing appreciation of the fact that the desire for children is in excess of optimum population growth. Judith Blake and others have argued persuasively that even if all couples had only those children they want and not others, a disastrous population explosion will occur. Improved means of birth prevention and the encouragement of their use is considered by these demographers to be an insufficient basis for an effective population policy. Accordingly a number of alternative approaches to decreasing family size have been advanced<sup>8</sup>.

One extreme suggestion advocates placing the decision about family size in the control of the state through involuntary sterilization at the birth of the nth child<sup>9</sup>. Another suggestion is to increase the cost of having a child either directly through taxation or indirectly by giving parents a bonus for not having a child<sup>10</sup>. However in a recent article Blake has pointed out, that a

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6. Fawcett, J. T. Op. cit. p.9

7. Fawcett, J. T. (ed) *Psychological perspectives on population*, Basic books, Inc. New York., 1973, p. 20.

8. Ibid. p. 21

9. Hardin, G. *Parenthood: right or privilege*, *Science*, 169, p. 427., 1970

10. Davis, K. Population policy; will current programme succeed? *Science*, 158, Spengler J. J. Population problem: in search of a solution, *Science*, 166 Pp. 1234-1238. 1969.  
Kangas, L. W. Integrated incentives for fertility control, *Science*, 169, Pp. 1278-83

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policy that penalizes fertility and leaves the desire for children untouched requires constant vigilance if it is to have any effect; it would also create disaffection<sup>11</sup>.

1.5 Examining the value of children has two very practical purposes; knowing these values may suggest a means of satisfying them other than by having children that may help reduce the very desire for children and if smaller family size should be achieved in some other way, the values may suggest an appropriate form of compensatory satisfaction that might be considered. Studying the value of children should also facilitate prediction of population trends over time and across cultures. Fawcett notes that hypotheses about reproductive motives often involve the underlying theme that social change brings about changes in the way children are valued in relation to alternative source of satisfaction.<sup>12</sup> Failure to understand the increase in desired family size that began in 1940s might thus be seen as a result of insufficient attention to the social changes that had altered the function formerly served by children. Demographers had focussed on the economic value of children which was decreasing, but they ignored the social changes that were enhancing the non-economic value of children.

2.1 The second variable will be concerned with three different but related sets of data pertaining to modernization, a societal process; individual modernity, a personal level pattern of traits; and fertility, which may be measured at the aggregate level as fertility rates or at the individual level as the number of children born to a woman or to a couple.

2.2 Modernization is the term usually used to describe the movements of socio-economic systems towards higher levels of development, as revealed by cross-national comparisons and by changes in socio-economic indices over time. As noted by Lerner the level of such indices in the industrialised, urbanized technologically oriented nations has produced an image of what is modern, providing a goal for the aspiration of less developed nations and stimulating among social scientists. 'Effort to conceptualize modernization as the contemporary mode of social change that is both general in validity and global in scope'<sup>13</sup>. The scales or dimensions used to define modernization include diverse kinds of variables, and their components are often labelled differently depending upon the professional interest or theoretical orientation of the investigator.

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11. Blake, J., Reproductive Motivation and Population policy, Bio-Science No. 21 Pp. 215-220. 1971.

12. Fawcett, J. T. Op. cit. P. 110.

13. Lerner, D. Modernization: Social aspect, D. Sill's Ed. *International Encyclopedia of the social sciences*, Mcmillan and free press, N. Y. 1968 p. 386-395

2.3 Demographic analyses have shown consistent relationship between modernization and fertility in a number of ways; fertility changes associated with societal changes over time; fertility comparisons among groups within a society (urban, rural, educated, uneducated) and among societies. In general more advanced level of modernisation has been shown to be negatively correlated with fertility. Few social phenomena are as well documented as the inverse relationship between modernization and fertility<sup>14</sup>. Individuals may differently perceive, interpret, or react to their immediate social settings with special reference to the consequences for family size preferences, contraceptive performances and actual fertility. Fawcett gives a wealth of information on these aspects<sup>15</sup>.

2.4 Some of the social psychological themes related to fertility change can be incorporated only loosely within a theoretical framework. There does not exist a systematic and a comprehensible theory of fertility, although some useful attempts have been made to develop *conceptual schemes that incorporate diverse kinds of variables*<sup>16</sup>.

Davis and Blake have provided an exhaustive classification of intermediate variables through which fertility change must be effected. They are grouped under the three general categories of intercourse variables, conception variables and gestation variables<sup>17</sup>. Yaukey has suggested that separate attention should be given to social and psychological factors affecting Davis's and Blake's intermediate variables and fertility<sup>18</sup>. This research strategy is proposed as a substitute for the traditional macro-analytic approach of correlating social stratification variable directly with fertility.

2.5 It should also be noted that apart from differing analytic perspectives of investigators, that some data have been classified in different ways in studies of modernization, individual modernity and fertility. For example fertility rates have been taken as contributing to the pace of modernisation,

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14. Adelman, I and Morris, C. T. *A quantitative study of social and political determinant of fertility*, Economic development and cultural change, No. 14, pp. 129-157.
  15. Fawcett, J. T. *Psychology and population: Behavioural research issues in fertility and family planning*, The population council, N. Y. 1970.
  16. Freedman, R. and T keshita, J. *Family planning in Taiwan; an experiment in Social Change*, Princeton Press, Princeton, 1969  
Hill, R. Stycos, J. M. and Back K. *The Family and population control*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1959.  
Mishler, E. G. and Westoff, C. F. *A proposal for research on social psychological factors affecting fertility: Concept; and Hypothesis* Milband memorial Fund, Current research in human fertility N. Y. pp. 121-150.
  17. Davis, K. and Blake, J. Social structure and fertility; an Analytical frame work: *Economic Development and Cultural change*. Vol. 4 pp 211-235.
  18. Yaukey, D. *Fertility differences in a modernizing country: A Survey of Lebanese Couples*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1961. *And On theorising about fertility*, American Sociologist Vol. pp 100-104.

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as resulting from the modernization process, or as being an essential part of the definition of modernization. A concept such as values has been used in some studies as a social stratification index, focussing on commonalities among religious or cultural groups, while in other studies attention has been directed to differences in specific value orientations within social categories<sup>19</sup>.

There has also been a considerable overlapping between the categories used to define social class and modernity, that is, in comparative perspective the higher social classes have been viewed as more modern. The data pertaining to traits of individuals (attitudes, values, personality characteristics) are essential to an understanding of how social and environmental factors have an effect on fertility outcomes and that these personal variables should in general be studied in relation to social stratification variables. We would know, for instance, how education affects a person's life aspirations and what part children play in that pattern of aspirations for people at different levels of education. As noted by Rosson and Simons, this kind of understanding is required<sup>20</sup>. Prominent among the themes that relate modernization processes to fertility change are the effect of changes in cultural and religious values.

2.6 Buddhist point of view: We wish to discuss here the value system of a Sri Lanka family from the Sinhala Buddhist standpoint, to determine the type of values they prefer, in this context. It has to be emphasised that the value system in Sri Lanka has been determined primarily by Buddhism which is the faith of over 80 percent of the population today.

2.7 Buddhism visualizes a society in which a lay male and female have an important role to play, unfortunately, this is a point which has not received adequate attention of many social psychologists of modern times. The family occupies a crucial position in the Buddhist social system. It may be argued that Buddhism does not encourage marriage and procreation as in the case of Hebrew and Biblical tradition. According to Buddhism all forms of sentient existence lead to suffering, but once life has come into being, Buddhism takes the stand that life has to be channelled along proper lines to enable it to achieve the highest possible material, mental and moral well-being in this world. Therefore Buddhism gives an important place to family life.

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19. Clifford, W. B. *Modern and Traditional Value Orientations and Fertility behaviour: A social demographic study*, Vol. 8, pp 37-48.

Kahl, K. A. *The measurement of modernism: A study of Values in Brazil and Mexico*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1968.

20. Rossen, B. C. and Simmons, A. B., Industrialisation, family and fertility: a structural psychological analysis of the Brazilian case, *Demography* No: 8 pp 49-68 1971.

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2.8 Family consists of parents and children and Buddhism clearly sets out the moral obligations of the former towards the latter and vice versa<sup>21</sup>. \* This type of values implies not only the importance of family planning for the benefit of human beings in this world, but also a correct understanding to convince the people about these values is very essential. It has to be conveyed through the joint efforts of the moral philosopher and the social psychologist.

2.9 In Sri Lanka a standard sociological and the psychological micro level survey has not been done yet in this connection, and it is very essential to initiate a survey on the values and their behavioural pattern of family planning. Generally people in Sri Lanka, accept the medium family-size, i.e.a family of four or five children. But this value varies in rural families, due to motives like the continuation of the family name, to help with work around house especially the family holdings in agricultural areas, and their attitudes towards contraceptives. The other factor that keeps them from family planning is the religion. It is necessary to convince these value holders, that some small families could be used to improve their family welfare a lot in life, than the big families, in our given economic circumstances. But in rural areas the role of family members is to perform specific duties as their point of view on family planning is negative. In agricultural areas these peasants' children have their own role of duties and due to the above factors they do not come into the positive view of family planning.

2.10 Some people argue against family planning with the idea of preservation of the nation feeling, that is, they feel if family planning is continued their racial number would decrease. Specially in Sri Lanka Tamils and Muslims do not give much support at all for population control, and the Sinhalese majority of this country, has a reasonable fear that if the Sinhala people control their births they would soon become the minority in this country. These are some of the difficulties which have to be overcome by family planning organizations. In this respect, they must get the support of the psychologist to make people's motivations changed by convincing the danger of over population and the difficulties that children and parents have to face in the world, in the near future.

3.1 The other variable in this study is the family planning attitudes, where the people's motivations in this connection are considered. Measurement of family size norms is important in launching programmes of population control. It is important to know what number of children the people consider to be ideal and also whether they favour large families or small families. No family programme is likely to be successful if initially a wide gap exists between the ideal family size and the actual number of children born to an average

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21\* Rhys Davids, (Ed.) Sacred Books of the Buddhists Vol. IV *Dialogues of the Buddha*, Part III, Luzac & Co., London 1957 pp. 168-184.

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couple by the end of the reproductive period. If on the other hand, it is found that people favour medium or large families, the first step will be to bring about a change in the family size norm. By suitable interview techniques the reasons for the large family ideal should be investigated and propaganda should be initiated pertaining to the advantages of a small family. Special techniques of persuasion also may be used in changing beliefs and attitudes<sup>22</sup>.

3.2 A theoretical approach for child bearing is found in the psychoanalytic literature<sup>23</sup>. A central concept in these writings is the wish for a child or wish for a pregnancy which Freud viewed as a derivative of the castration complex. Wyatt has provided a useful critical review of post Freudian psychoanalytic work on this topic<sup>24</sup>. Two main trends are discerned: the origin of the wish for a child has been traced back to a pre-Oedipal phase of development and also carried towards adulthood with significant inputs through social learning in later phases; and a new and specific emphasis has been given to the effect of the menstrual cycle with implications for both hormonal behaviour<sup>25</sup>.

3.3 The modern psycho-analytic approach views motivations for child bearing within a comprehensive framework of biological and social development. Sexual drive and sensations are given prominent place, modified by transactions with the family and the social world. In a recent article that provide a comprehensive and complex psychoanalytic viewpoint, Kestenberg discusses differences between male and female motivations in the context of developmental phases, and emphasizes the role that husband and children fulfil as organizers of female sexuality<sup>26</sup>.

3.4 In psycho-analytic theory, motivation is seen as being at least in part conscious, and physiological factors (perhaps instinctive factors) are viewed as determining elements in the wish for children. To the extent that these considerations are valid, the usefulness of methods to measure motivations for child bearing by simple verbal responses is open to question and the appropriateness of family planning campaigns based upon rational persuasions may be doubted. However, psycho-analytic theory deals mainly with the general concept of child bearing and does not address itself adequately to the question of family size.

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22. Fawcett, J. T. (ed.) op. cit. pp. 354-55

23. Fawcett, J. T. op. cit and occasional paper, p. 59.

24. Wyatt, F. : Clinical notes on the motive of reproduction, *Journal of Social Issues*, No: 23, 1967, pp. 29-56

25. Benedick, T. Psycho-sexual functions in woman, Ronald press, N.Y, 1952. Parenthood as a development phase, *Journal of the American Psycho-analytic association*. No. 7, 1959, pp 289-417.  
The organisation of the reproductive drive, *International journal of Psycho-analysis*, No. 41 1960, pp. 1-15.

26. Kestenberg, J. S. Outside and inside , Male and Female, *Journal of the American Psycho-analytic association*, No: 16 1968, pp. 457-520.



3.5 Bogue<sup>27</sup> has a list of motives for and against birth control (Appendix) phrasing motives mainly in terms of their conscious meaning in everyday life. These motives are related to small vs. large family size. The descriptive utility of this system of classification was demonstrated in an intensive long-term study of Indian families by Poffenberger<sup>28</sup> which focussed on communications and motivations related to family planning. Family planning services should be based on a philosophy that include an awareness of people as individual human beings who bring their total life experience to the matter of use of contraceptives. The attitudes are related to the dynamics of their family lives as well as their interactions with the larger environment.

4.1 The final variable in this discussion is the environmental perception of pressure; that is how the individual perceives his social environment as sanctioning modern behaviour with respect to birth control. Today fourteen countries in East and South Asia have adopted official population policies and programmes to reduce fertility<sup>29</sup>. This elucidates the position of family planning all over the world. Heer<sup>30</sup> has examined in detail the possible relationships between increased education and fertility, pointing out that a rise in income that accompanies education may enhance fertility but other effects of education, such as awareness of new goals and activities, tend to reduce the relative preference for children or to raise their relative cost<sup>31</sup>. In this analysis also fertility is seen as being basically related to perception of available resources. Finally modern man is coming to understand his place in ecological balance with nature and to regard overpopulation as disruptive. Possibly this perception will in the long run be linked to personal child bearing decisions and have an effect on societal fertility.

5.1 As has been discussed so far in this paper, in a recent presidential address to the American Psychological Association, George Miller has pointed out that psychology has the capacity, as yet unrealized, to contribute significantly to the diagnosis of personal and social problems<sup>32</sup>. In concluding this short paper we wish to record this statement in a recent report prepared for a United Nation Advisory Committee: "a voluminous sociological re-

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27. Bogue, D. J. (Ed) Mass communication and motivation for British control; *Proceedings of the summer workshop at the University of Chicago, Community and family study centre, University of Chicago, 1967.*

28. Poffenberger, T., Motivational aspect of resistance to family planning in an Indian Village, *Demography, No. 5, 1968 pp. 757-766.*  
Husband wife communication and motivational aspect of population control in Indian Village, *Central family planning institute Monograph series, New Delhi, 1969, No. 10.*

29. Population Studies: *A Journal of Demography, Vol. 30, No. 2 1976, pp. 343.*

30. Heer, D. M. Educational advance and fertility change, Paper presented at the *London conference of the international union for the scientific study of population, September, 1969.*

31. Fawcett, J. T. (Ed) Op. cit. p. 114.

32. Miller, G. A. Psychology as a means of promoting human welfare, *American Psychologist, No: 24, 1969, pp. 1063-1075.*

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search literature on reproductive performance has accumulated which has gone far in describing the general sociological milieu of fertility. However, social factors generally shown to be directly associated with fertility are few: social economic status, religious affiliation and the labour force participation of women. Much more is needed to explore these factors, and to identify other relevant structural properties. Too often, investigations begun in a sociological mode end up with post hoc explanation of fertility levels in terms of psychological variables..... psychological understandings must ultimately become an important element in general theories of population change<sup>33</sup>.

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33. Report of the United Nations Advisory Committee: Carolina, 1968, pp. 49-50.

## Appendix

### Motives for and against Birth control

#### High Fertility Motive

1. *Health.* 1.1 Children often die.
2. *Economic condition*
  - 2.1 Children are an economic advantage.
  - 2.2 Social security in old age.
3. *Family Welfare.*
  - 3.1 Can help with work around house.
  - 3.2 Big families are happy families.
  - 3.3 Children from big families have better personalities.
  - 3.4 Continue the family name.
  - 3.5 Strengthen the Clan
4. *Marriage Adjustment:*
  - 4.1 Large families promote good marriage adjustment.
5. *Personality Needs*
  - 5.1 Ego support, Virility, Manliness.
6. *Community and National welfare*
  - 6.1 Large families are good for the community or nation.
7. *Moral and Cultural*
  - 7.1 Large families are God's will.
  - 7.2 Large families promote morality traditions.
  - 7.3 You have high status in the community.

8. *Dislike for contraceptions*
  - 8.1 Dislike use of contraceptions

#### Low Fertility Motive

1. *Health.*
  - 1.1 preserve health of mother, assure healthy children, lessen

worry and overwork.

2. *Economic Condition*
  - 2.1 Every day general expenses are less.
  - 2.2 Avoid worsening present (poor) economic condition.
  - 2.3 Gain a higher standard of living.
  - 2.4 Permit saving for future.
  - 2.5 Desire to avoid subdividing property or savings.
3. *Family welfare.*
  - 3.1 Improve children's lot in life.
  - 3.2 Give them good education.
  - 3.3 Happier family life, more companionships, less tensions.
  - 3.4 Opportunity to do a better job of rearing children.
  - 3.5 Avoid overcrowding of house.
  - 3.6 Easier to find a more desirable house or apartment.
4. *Marriage and Adjustment*
  - 4.1 Provide husbands and wives more leisure opportunity.
5. *Personality needs:*
  - 5.1 Facilitates realization of ambitions.
  - 5.2 Facilitates self development.
  - 5.3 Facilitates realization of social needs.
  - 5.4 Reduce worry of the future.
6. *Community and national welfare*
  - 6.1 Helps avoid over-Population
  - 6.2 Helps community meet demands for education and other community services.
  - 6.3 Helps nations with economic development.
  - 6.4 Helps reduce welfare burden of the community.

*Source:* Mass communication and motivation for birth for birth control: Proceedings of the summer workshop at the University of Chicago and New York: Community and Family Study Centre : University of Chicago 1967.