

Changing Family Formation Process: An Exploration from Intergenerational Perspective

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KONYAK NAGAS

Konyak Nagas the indigenous tribal people and the major inhabitants of Mon District of Nagaland, India, is an exotic tribal group different from the mainstream India Tribal group. The society is not stratified on the basis of caste, but is both a democratic and autocratic society. Traditionally known for their head-hunting raids, inventor of morung system (dormitory) and other peculiarities from other Naga tribes such as adorning the face, chest with tattoo as a token of staining the blood of enemy during the headhunting trophy of tribal warfare and fierce resistance to British rule. Head-hunting was linked with the idea of fertility, as both cause and effect. On one hand, the men who took a head demonstrated their potency; taking the head was a manifestation of their contact with fertility. On the other hand, taking the head brought further in touch with fertility and through them the village, as a whole was able to share in fertility (Julian, 1990, *The Nagas*¹).

The Konyak society is a patriarchal society and is dominated by males. Both neolocal and partilocal rules of residence are followed. Joint family system prevails among this study tribe, specially the stem-extended family where the eldest married son with parents and unmarried siblings reside together. The primogeniture (being first born) among sons and other siblings have key importance in defining rank, succession and other social rights and responsibilities. Deference to the older generation is general and married sons are required to support their aging parents. Parents usually live with or very near one or more of their married children. They are an endogamous and clan exogamous tribe. They have exogamous clan arranged in a hierarchical order of those of the chiefs and of the commoners. Clan exogamy and monogamy is the general rules of marriage among them and arrange marriages are preferred type/mode of marriage. Spouses are generally acquired through negotiation and with mutual consent from elders. Traditionally, the family structure did not permit or least encouraged individual choice in the selection of mates. Parents, relatives, or friends did the 'shopping around' and selected a good prospective bride for a dutiful son. There was wide spread use of the system of 'go -betweens'. Often the go-betweens who arranged the marriages were parents and relatives who where usually versed in the genealogy and history of the locality.

The tribe inhabiting major part of rural area, mostly ill educated and practicing agriculture was more in support of high fertility and adhered strong to their traditional customs and values. However in contemporary Konyak society, traditional structure concepts, values are fast changing. The new technologies, modernization, are bringing extensive changes in the people's way of life, family and the community as a whole. The

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¹ Jacobs Julian (1991). *The Nagas, An Indian Frontier tribe*, Thames and Hudtson Limited, London.

process of modernization has brought changes affecting the values and institutions in the society. Penetration of mass media, improvement of transportation system connecting the remote areas, etc. is bringing new attitudes, new values and aspiration, as a consequence has undermined traditional forms of social behavior. Thus in this context, with modernizing taking place, to know whether the traditional familial values have changed, the study of family formation process is adopted.

FAMILY FORMATION PROCESS

Family Formation process is viewed as the progression through first marriage, first, subsequent and last births. Childbearing as a behavior occurring primarily within a family context is the cumulative response on an ever-changing series of decision over the family's life cycle (Hout, 1978²; Namboodiri, 1972³). Socialization process for reproduction behavior evolve differently during individual cohort life cycle/ over generation and lead some cohort to be more committed to the rapid establishment of large families than others. These behavioral family patterns of family growth emerge from the varied passage of members and through the stages of family formation. Periodic variations in economic conditions also impinge on family size decisions and outcomes (Esterlin, 1978⁴; Waite, 1980⁵). Family formation process is also differentiated by individual background factors. The manner in which individual arrive at decision of birth timing is differentiated by the cumulative interaction with social conditions and life cycle stages. It also intimately related to the structure of its internal composition, for example, education indicates differential capacities for social change and hence varying patterns of family formation.

CONCEPTUAL ASPECTS OF FAMILY FORMATION PROCESS

In the present study, an attempt is made to explore the changing patterns of family formation process, through the main phases of formation, expansion and completion where the final family size is achieved.

Formation: Under the phase of formation, age at first marriage and mode of spouse selection and mode of marriage are taken into consideration.

When individual's first experience in family formation is focused, age at marriage is taken as the classic measure. The marriage event marks the inception of family activity and identifies a critical transition in personal history from which intervals to subsequent family events can be assessed meaningfully. The type of marriage and spousal selection also helps to know and ascertain the nature of change in marriage pattern of the society.

² Hout, M. (1978). *The determinants of Marital Fertility in the United States, 1968-70: Inferences from a Dynamic Model*. Demography 15: Pp 139-160

³ Namboodiri, K. (1972). *Some Observation on the Economic Framework for Fertility Analysis*, Population Studies Vol. 26: Pp 185-206.

⁴ Easterlin, R. (1978). *What Will 1984 be like? Socioeconomic Implication of recent twist in Age structure*, Demography Vol.15: Pp397-432.

⁵ Waite, L. (1980). *Working Wives and the Family Life Cycle*, American Journal of Sociology Vol. 36: Pp 272-294.

Expansion: The family begins to function as a reproductive unit with the first birth, thus gap between marriage and delivery is taken as a measure of study. The age gap between spouses is also taken into consideration as it has an important role in bridging spouses' reproductive desire and childbearing decisions. Historically, family growth has been very soon after marriage and in many societies, especially in developing countries it still continues to be.

Completion: This phase is the last phase of the reproductive cycle or family formation process. For the present study Children ever born is taken as a measure of completed reproductive cycle.

METHODOLOGY

In order to analyze changes in family formation process over generations' simple measures of central tendencies and cross tabulation of family formation variables by generation are generated from the sample of 300 households. Statistical confirmation of association between the changing family formation variables of father and son as well as mother and wife is carried out with chi square test (χ^2) as a measure predictivity of family formation behavior in the next generation from that of the status of the preceding generation.

FINDINGS

Family has been undergoing gradual transformation and adjustment in different situation and epoch of history. There is no doubt that the study tribe has witnessed change in its institution over time. The pattern of family formation process like the age at marriage has changed over the generation. Although the pattern of early marriage persists among the Konyaks, the trend towards later marriages appears to be pervasive social phenomena among the Konyaks. The mean age at marriage for the younger generation is found to be lower than the older generation.

With regard to mate selection, in both the younger and the older generations, we see the predominance of mate/spouse selection by themselves, which reflects the flexibility of the Konyak society in terms of mate selection. The flexibility is seen more in the younger generations, as can be seen from the higher representation of mate selection by self among the sons followed by both or other category compared to the older generations (fathers). The insignificant value of χ^2 and the liberty and flexibility of choice expressed in spouse selection suggest possible distancing of the younger generation from the authority of their parents. Among the Konyak, society though arrange marriages are preferred type/mode of marriages; the practice of love marriage has been more prevalent. In one way, the declining prevalence of arranged marriage could be associated with increasing education and rising autonomy in decision-making.

Like most societies, among the study tribe, the husbands are typically older than their wives, although the extent of the age gap varies widely across couples. The Gap between marriage and delivery is also less (less than one yr) for the younger generation, which indirectly reflects the prevalence of premarital pregnancies among the younger generation. The incidence of premarital pregnancies may be attributed to the exposure of western life style and social change. In the days of yore, the tribal were liberal with

premarital relationships and promiscuous but after embracing Christianity, the moral codes of conduct dictated the prohibition and maintenance of virginity before marriage. However, with growing social change, it shows a parabolic curve returning to old habits as new evolutionist supports. There is low practice of contraception/FP in both the generation 32.3 among the Younger Generation 3.3 percent in Older Generation. Mean and Median age for first adopting FP is 26.49 and 26 yrs in the younger generation and in the older generation it is 28.20 and 29 yrs respectively. The Mean and Median number of Children at the time of FP adoption is 2.7 and 2 for the younger generation and in the older generation it is 2.9 and 3 children respectively.

It is found that family planning was adopted generally to limit family size after attaining desired family size rather than to space children. One can also see the desire among the younger generation to limit family size to the minimum because they want to take proper care of their children within the context of increasing high cost of living and are more concerned with quality care of their children. The mean average children ever born for older generation (4.2) were more than that of the younger generation (3.1). The decrease in mean children ever born could be due to the influence of increased education among the younger generation and the aspiration of the younger generation to improve the quality of life. It is also found that older and younger generation is independent of each other, regarding children ever born. This again reflects the influence of modernization, to limit the family size.

It is also worthwhile to mention here that the family structure of the Konyak society is fast dwindling, the traditional stem joint-family among the Konyaks is decreasing, and there is rise in nuclear families. The key role of primogeniture to stay with parents and look after parents and younger unmarried siblings has become flexible. In fact there had been lot of migration of the primogeniture from rural to urban areas, and the responsibility of looking after parents are passed down to any sibling whosoever does not migrate.