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Q9

"Empowering women is the key to control population growth." Discuss.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2019 · GS I · 10 marks · Women, Population and Urbanisation

Role of women and women's organization, population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues, urbanization, their problems and their remedies.

Core demand of the question

- "Empowering women is the key to control population growth." Discuss
- Discuss how far women's empowerment explains fertility decline, and what else matters
- Keep the answer within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Women's education, work, and health delay marriage and cut births.

Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and similar states show low fertility with stronger women's indicators.

Contraception and child survival are needed so wanted smaller families can happen.

Coercion without rights is not empowerment and can harm women.

The statement is largely true, but men, services, and income still shape the transition.

Introduction

Population growth slows when births per woman fall. Women's schooling, paid work, health, and say in marriage strongly cut fertility, which is why the statement is largely true, though income, child survival, and contraception supply also matter.

Body

Why women's empowerment is central

- Female literacy and years in school delay marriage and first birth, as seen in Kerala, Goa, and Tamil Nadu compared with high-fertility pockets of the Hindi heartland.
- When women earn or control assets, the opportunity cost of many births rises, and son preference weakens if girls also stay in school.
- Access to contraception, antenatal care, and safe abortion, through public health and ASHA workers, lets women match wanted family size to actual births.
- NFHS rounds show total fertility near or below replacement in several southern and small states where women's education and health indicators are stronger.

The statement is not the whole story

- Child survival, old-age security, and the cost of raising children also drive the demographic transition; parents have fewer births when more children live and school fees bite.
- Unmet need for family planning still exists where clinics are far, even if women wish to stop childbearing, so supply of services remains a key.

- Coercive two-child rules without rights can cut births yet harm women's health and political voice, which is not empowerment.
- Male migration, kinship, and religious or caste norms can keep fertility high even where some women are schooled, so men and communities must change too.

Policy that joins the two

- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao**, Mission Shakti, maternity support, and later legal steps on marriage age work only with jobs, safety, and contraceptives on the ground.
- Kerala's path of education and health is a better population policy than panic about numbers alone.

Flow diagram

School work health voice -> Lower fertility
Contraception child survival -> Lower fertility
Norms unmet need coercion -> High or harmful path
Lower fertility -> Slower population growth

Conclusion

Empowering women is the most reliable social key to lower fertility because it changes the person who bears the child. Population policy should therefore fund girls' schooling, health, and work, not only set a birth target.

Facts & figures

NFHS fertility pattern

National Family Health Survey rounds show TFR already at or below replacement in several states with better women's education.

Kerala path

High female literacy and health services with low fertility without a China-style birth quota.

ASHA and public contraception

Frontline health workers and free methods that reduce unmet need when they actually reach women.

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao

Union scheme that links the girl child, schooling, and sex-ratio concerns to social change.

Replacement TFR

About 2.1 children per woman, the level at which population eventually stabilises, other things equal.