



**THE ONSET OF FERTILITY DECLINE IN URBAN NEPAL:
A STUDY OF KATHMANDU CITY**

by

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Abstract

This study investigates the causes of change in determinants of fertility such as marriage, value of children, fertility regulation and behaviour among women in the city of Kathmandu, Nepal. The study uses data collected in fieldwork in Kathmandu between November 1991 and May 1992. To explore different mechanisms causing change in fertility behaviour of Kathmandu couples a conceptual framework modified from Freedman (1987b) is adopted.

It was found that a transition is occurring in Kathmandu society from a situation of arranged marriages to one where children are given the scope to either agree or disagree with their parents' choice. The important mechanisms of change in marriage in Kathmandu were found to be attitudinal changes due to increased levels of education and changes in ideas and aspirations. The investigation of the mechanisms causing change in the value of children shows that emotional values and financial costs of children are rising and the traditional socio-cultural values such as dependence on children for old age support are declining in many groups of the study population. This has resulted in a lower demand for children in Kathmandu. The social transformation taking place in Kathmandu is not only impinging upon the value of children but also the values attached to the gender of children. Accordingly, the causes of a higher use of contraception in Kathmandu are not only a result of a decrease in the socio-cultural value attached to children, but also a decrease in the socio-cultural value attached to their sex. Moreover the availability and accessibility of contraception has also contributed to its higher use in Kathmandu.

The massive spread of education has created a favourable climate for rapid social change in Kathmandu. Mass media networks have added to the momentum of the on going social transformation. One of the main reasons for the fertility transition in Kathmandu is a change in traditional family relationships due to socio-cultural change, rather than vast economic change. Even the older generation who used to bless young married couples by saying "may your offspring cover hills and mountains", have started to say "two is enough, more brings sadness", indicating a significant social change in Kathmandu. All these mechanisms of change have contributed to the onset of fertility decline in Kathmandu. Accordingly, the study concludes that Kathmandu's fertility decline is a result of a change in family relationships due to socio-cultural change rather than significant economic change.