CONCEPTUALISATION OF FACTORS

AFFECTING CHILD PLANNING

IN INDIAN SOCIETY

By

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ABSTRACT

This study was calibrated to explore the attitudes and beliefs of married and soon to marry individuals regarding Child Planning and Rearing. An attempt was made to gauge the Subjective Meanings and Visualisations of Parenthood, Waiting Periods and Perceived Barriers to Parenthood by interviewing 2 females and 1 male residing in Kolkata and one male residing in Shillong. Initial and focused coding was performed on the interview transcripts and further triangulation was utilised to strengthen validity. These attitudes and beliefs were compartmentalised under Biological, Psychological and Socioeconomic domains since they ranged from Obesity or Hormonal Imbalance as Barriers to Child-Planning, the Need for Adequate Finances prior to Child-Planning, Mental-Preparedness and Self-Evaluation as Perceived Psychological Prerequisites to Parenthood and Familial/Societal Obligations in shaping Child-Planning or Rearing. Furthermore, the technique of triangulation was instrumental in establishing an audit trail, along with the interview schedule.

Keywords: *waiting period, child-planning, child rearing.*

Introduction

From the first cry we let out upon breathing the air of planet earth, outside the body of and in the arms of our mothers, the journey of life begins. The metaphor of journey is applied universally because a journey is quantified by milestones which, in the human context, manifest as biological and cultural. Biological milestones apply more objectively than cultural milestones even if we crunch all the humans coming from any and all parts of the world together and view them from the lens of concrete parameters such as object permanence, mathematical and spatial understanding, language development (goal-directed or not) and egocentrism. Conversely, as we navigate individual/community development that is achieved by crossing cultural milestones, the need to calibrate our lens for abstract, contextual phenomena rather than concrete parameters rears its head. Cultural milestones are usually seen as more collective than individual and unique to the peculiar community they are observed in, such as initiation rituals, courtship rituals, fertility rituals, ascension ceremonies and the like.

One such milestone has the distinction of being virtually ubiquitous among all tribes, cultures, races and societies in the world- the milestone of childbirth and parenthood. Societies have also agreed upon an acceptable age for marriage and subsequently, childbirth. Regulation of the age of marriage has historically been indistinct and more prone to mutual settlement between the marrying parties but in numerous modern societies, judicial bodies have laid down the law on matters of marriage. For example, in India, the legal age of marriage for a girl is 18 years and that for a male is 21 years of age, failure to comply with which is a punishable offence. Childbirth after marriage, however, largely remains an area of personal prudence with the law exercising negligible authority. Here, a plethora of societal, interpersonal and miscellaneous

factors dictate whether and when married couples decide to cross the next big milestone in the journey of their life.

This study dovetails said factors and elucidates the phenomenon of parenthood in all its vastness, while endeavouring to investigate answers to imposing questions such as:

1. How do couples arrive at the decision of having a child?
2. What do couples think is required for their child to have a good life?
    a) What is their role as parents in providing their child a good life?
3. What is a couple's notion of a delay when it comes to child planning?
    a) What are the consequences of said delays?
4. What causes the couple to get to that "delay" period?
    a) What is the role of Covid-19 pandemic in child-bearing?
5. What are the couples' ideas about child-rearing?

Child planning and related concerns

While observing the phenomenon of child planning and rearing, it is imperative to understand the thought processes that pervade every sphere of a would-be parent's life so that no expense is spared in the pursuit of positive parenthood. It usually takes an adolescent quite some time to attain realisation of the passage of time which comes with its own share of obligations and ought-to's. When they surmise that the path ahead leads to marriage, it is practical to assume that it will culminate in parenthood. For some, the visualisation of marriage and parenthood (or the mere possibility of them in the future) comes early and subsequent efforts are made to prepare for the same. This "preparation" or "planning" typically commences when the husband and wife have a conversation about having a child. An interesting phenomenon to note here is that in the

Indian context, familial pressure has the potential to hold sway over the couple's decision. In certain cases, it is overpowering while on the contrary, total discretion rests with them. Once the desire to have a child is mutualised, the plausibility of having a child is discerned. A lucid conceptualisation of the biopsychosocial factors that affect child planning and rearing practises in Indian society is the aim of the study. In the past few centuries, we have observed how comparatively little time is taken by the human population to grow by the billions than earlier, owing to an increase in birth rate. The overpopulation burden is being borne today by numerous countries around the globe and particularly by India. We have limited land as a nation but a steadily increasing population to feed and provide shelter to. Overpopulation is most conspicuous in Indian cities where employment opportunities are vast but not unlimited, to which condition the lower socioeconomic or economically weaker sections of society fall prey. According to a 2019 UN report, 28% of Indians or 364 million individuals live below the poverty line and according to Pew Research Center, survive on less than Rs 150 or $2 USD. Factoring in the pandemic in this backdrop, the attitudes and ideas of a few members of the current adult population of urban India warrant examination in order to get an idea into the timing of childbirth, child rearing, perception of parental requirements and precursors to positive parenting. The addition of the results of this study into the existing body of research might prove beneficial in understanding what parents might focus on giving a child a good life or understanding whether their present biopsychosocial dimensions are conducive to having a child. This explains the rationale behind conducting this study.

The dimensions that have been identified in this study are more broadly imbibed within a biopsychosocial framework, meaning that the nature of factors or ideas that go into child planning and rearing are collectively biological, psychological and social in nature. These

include biological age and health, psychological factors and certain societal or familial obligations. These factors are characterised by the duality of being of singular as well as allied importance when shaping couples' decisions. For example, biological factors may single handedly prevent couples from child planning even though other factors may indicate conduciveness.

Review of Literature

In order to compare, contrast and gain scientifically sound information about the aforementioned issues in this field, a literature review seems to be of importance. By exploring scientific research about similar topics conducted in the past years, an attempt is made to discern any emerging patterns or gaps in the same, which can be filled by this study. Review of scientific literature also gives us an idea of what is known, how much has changed, what still needs to be explained, how best it shall be explained and so on. It is always in the professional interest of a researcher to consult data that has been scientifically tried, tested and studied, rather than formulate an ostensible semblance of scientific knowledge from random online articles that pose the risk of being rudimentary in their trustworthiness.

It is not novel for a woman to independently pursue a professional career in early 21st century India where merely 30 years ago the same would raise eyebrows. Conservatively, Indian women were discouraged from being employed or even spearheading a family business since the principal role expected of them was of being homemakers and whether it was a practice that sat well with them is a matter for future discussion. Presently, approximately 21% of the Indian workforce comprises women. Indian or not, the receptivity of working women to the notion of parenthood seems to be stunted because of how demanding work-life can be. A 2012 study by Bulanda and Lippmann seems to confirm the same in the quote "the decision to delay entry into parenthood is related to lower degrees of family-to-work conflict". However, it is difficult to account for other factors that may slow down the journey to the milestone of parenthood besides work, even for working women, which this particular study falls short of.

More studies continue to account for delays in childbirth, some attributing it to past negative experiences of childbirth that generate apprehension in the mother regarding future plans on

having a child (Shorey, Yang, & Ang, 2018). These researchers conducted multiple studies with consequent results that fell along the contingent of mothers either delaying, forthrightly denying having another child or requesting a caesarean section because of unpleasant prior childbirth experiences. However, the gap of qualitative parameters such as culture or region is congruent with the previous research which demands rigorous investigation, despite being satisfactorily quantified.

Perils of adolescent childbearing

In societies where adolescent marriage is prevalent, childbirth is also hastened up where it is routine for many females as young as sixteen to bear up to two children. It is a proven fact that early marriage and pregnancy dictates a worrisome probability of child mortality as well as severe maternal health crises, with low- and middle-income countries accounting for 99% of global maternal deaths of women aged 15–49 years (Neal, Matthews, Frost, Fogstad, Camacho, & Laski, 2012). A pioneering 2015 study has ventured into the territory of early marriage and pregnancy in Bangladesh, where the perpetuating factors were misinformation about fertility, social stigma towards childlessness and the fear of losing face of the husband's family (Henry, Lehnertz, Alam, Ali, Williams, Rahman, ... & Winch, 2015). Referring to these studies, one can construct a compelling argument for delaying childbirth past the adolescent age to the advantage of having a relative level of immunity from disorders linked to early pregnancy such as endometritis and eclampsia (Neal, Matthews, Frost, Fogstad, Camacho, & Laski, 2012). Upon continual study of research emanating from South Asian and sub-Sahara Africa, one notes a rising trend in the health and socioeconomic dangers of child marriage and early childbirth prevalent in said populations. Interviews with 128 respondents revealed how child marriage, pressure to have children and lack of information proves debilitative to family planning

(McClendon, McDougal, Ayyaluru, Belayneh, Sinha, Silverman, & Raj, 2018). Remedial measures designed with the purpose of promoting a proactive attitude towards family planning were identified as school-based and community based, with the former indicating a competitive edge. The provision of family planning systems can minimally improve the lives of populations before it reaches a period of saturation. Factors contributing to these doldrums usually precipitate when there is a disparity within race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status of the population. A more lucid understanding of these issues can be obtained by quoting an article in the American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology:

"Attention to the unique personal, historical, economic and cultural context in which family planning decisions and outcomes occur is an indispensable consideration in promoting reproductive health for all women." (Dehlendorf, Rodriguez, Levy, Borrero, & Steinauer, 2010).

Family planning

5 years after the independence of India from the British, the Indian government implemented a family planning policy and by 1985, this step was replicated in 37 governments all around the world. A 1990 article analyses the success of government or non-government family planning programs (supported directly or indirectly by the government) in bringing about a reduction in the fertility rate of populations. Researchers observed a sharp trough in fertility rates of women in developing countries around the years of 1980-1985. They also mention that in the beginning of the 1990s, 95% of the world's population lived in countries providing some avenue of support to family planning programs (World Bank, 1984; Brown, 1987). Upon examination of said trough, it was concluded that the presence of family planning programs reduced the fertility rate of women in developing countries to 4.2 births from 5.4, which would have been the projected scenario without family planning programs (Bongaarts, Mauldin, & Phillips, 1990). This

additionally translates into a long term reduction in the population growth by 4.6 billion by 2100 (in other words, this implies that the total population of the developing world, in the year 2100, would be 14.6 billion without family planning programs and 10 billion with the same).

According to World Health Organisation, 5%-33% of females in low-middle income group countries aged between 15-24 have to drop out of school/ college due to early marriage or pregnancy. Young women in India are largely disadvantaged with respect to sexual and reproductive health and rights and these sometimes culminate in the expectation of bearing children immediately after marriage. In this context, "early" pregnancy corresponds to the mother being 19 years old or younger and a preferred "waiting period" before pregnancy was deduced to be around 2 years after marriage. Hindu general caste women living in urban areas, women having had higher education, wealthier women and women who had been exposed to some form of family planning on social media were reportedly more likely to wait it out before having a child (Ibarra-Nava, Choudhry, & Agardh, 2020).

It ought to be noted that child-timing can be connected with fluctuations in fertility rates over a certain period of time on a macro level. On a micro level, a childbearing during the teenage years predicts lower education and occupational gains, adverse health consequences and unstable economic and interpersonal well-being (Bumpass, Rindfuss & Janosik, 1978). On the contrary, women who had had their first child no sooner than the age of 30 were observed to have more financial stability in their 60s in a study by Hofferth (1984). In a 1994 study by Miller and Pasta, 201 couples with no child and 200 couples with one child were interviewed and administered interviews and inventories such as Child Timing Questionnaire (CTQ) which was also developed by them with the purpose of measuring the impact of timing of first or next child on the spouses' health, career and readiness, as well as beliefs linked with these factors. It revealed that being

personally ready was more prioritised by wives than husbands and the necessity of spouses being personally ready was emphasised more by participants without a child than by participants with one child.

Balaji (2020) used the Kernel Density Function (KDF) to ascertain intensity of poverty reduction and consequently assist in formulating poverty alleviation policies to free households from clutches of poverty. The states of Bihar and Kerala were compared and it was concluded that rural health expenditure was concentrated densely around Patna district and sparsely around rural districts of Bihar. The researcher also pinpointed an "inexplicable link" between lesser population, better status of women in society, increased household expenditure and also commented on the role of well-informed women in determining household size in Kerala (Balaji, 2020).

Research gap

Apart from the final study, the majority of scientific research reviewed above points out to factors which are unipolar. The present study shall endeavour to fill in the gap of multidimensional biopsychosocial and economic aspects of child planning and rearing by exploring what causes would be parents to wait out while having a child, the preparation and considerations that go behind making the grand decision of parenthood and the possibility of providing the best care to the child. Even though the research topic in question superficially appears to be researched to the point of saturation, one must remain open to the possibility that additional knowledge can still be pursued in this voluminous field of child-planning.

Method

Participants

The participants for the study were adults who were married and unmarried without children. Purposive sampling was used to gather participants, as well as word-of-mouth or snowball sampling. The sample was chosen with no stringent assertion that they be married or belong to any particular religion, ethnicity or gender. The emphasis was given on obtaining information about the lived experiences of the participants in a way that made the induction of the ideas of potentially representative Indians into scientifically validated knowledge possible.

4 participants-2 male and 2 female- participated in this study. Both women and one man were Hindu, whereas one man was Muslim. All participants had similar socioeconomic backgrounds and were all working professionals- one man was a government employee, one woman was a freelance psychologist, one woman was an MNC employee and the other man was a marketing executive. They belonged to the age group 28-40 and were based in urban/suburban households. Two of the participants reported medical conditions which were initially surmised to uncover unique and specific information about child planning/rearing. To reiterate, although sampling was kept purposive, there were not many exclusion criteria for the study while keeping in mind the emergent design of the study. Liberty to frame the design of the study as it progresses is key to providing a backbone to the study, as is reflected in the sampling of diverse individuals who were not made to correspond to any fixed inclusion/exclusion criteria.

Tools used

There were no psychometric or other diagnostic tools used in the study. Because the Covid-19 pandemic destroyed any opportunity to conduct an in-person interview, online video-conference

platform Zoom was the chosen alternative over which to hold an audio-only interview. As is the nature of qualitative research, the researchers themselves become an instrument or tool of interpretation of data because of the unique comprehensive or perceptive potential of individuals. In the short-run, it can be argued that, essentially, different researchers could have different interpretations of similar phenomena, which could contribute in honing their effectiveness as tools of qualitative research. It is up to the researcher to formulate the exact wording so as to maximize diversification of the data stream, including the minute details of discourse. However, this needs to be done by simultaneously ensuring that the questions remain as open-ended and conducive to inducing reflection within the respondents as practically possible.

In the interest of the same, an interview schedule was designed. It consisted of a list of questions that the researcher asked the participants in order to gauge their lived experiences with respect to their notion of being a parent, their perception of a waiting period before parenthood, their attitudes about child planning and rearing and perceived barriers in child planning, as well as to explore the precursors behind arrival at the decision to have a child by couples.

Furthermore, the interview schedule also is an attempt to establish an audit trail by explicitly delineating the steps in which the interview was conducted, the complete verbatim list of interview questions, and highlighting the aim of the interview clearly.

It is fundamentally conceded that sociodemographics of the participants paint a vivid picture of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that they face in their individual socioeconomic and cultural lives. One of participants in this study (initials: J.S, 40, male) is a Muslim by religion and is of Khasi-Bangladeshi heritage. His attitudes, opinions, perceptions and approximations of child-planning and rearing bear a substantial possibility of being moulded significantly by his heritage. Augmenting the above assertion, it is subsequently noted that his

mother belonged to the matrilineal Khasi tribe. A 2004 study on Khasi matrilineal society measured the additional assistance that a husband can provide his wife, who is endowed with direct control over resources and help from matrilineal kin, in reproductive success. Results implied that women who have had only one husband have fewer live born children than those who have had more than one husband (Leonetti, Nath, Hemam, & Neill, 2004).

Participant O.V.N.S., 32 year old Hindu female from a Telugu Brahmin family reported that the patriarchal figure in her nuclear family, her father, was the "boss of the house". Her reportedly orthodox background and the perception of her sister's tumultuous experience with child planning influenced her attitudes towards the same.

Participants C.T, 28 year old female and S.S, 32 year old male share a common Bengali ethnicity. They are both Hindu by religion and are working professionals. The diversity in the sociodemographic background of these participants systematically translates into more diverse attitudes and perspectives on relevant matters of the study.

Procedure

The interview questions were framed with close reference to the research questions mentioned earlier. It was conducted in a semi-structured manner by giving the respondent the opportunity to lead the discussion freely after a central, open-ended question was asked.

Before the commencement of the interview, the participants were briefed about the topic of the study in as much detail as was pertinent to their understanding. Furthermore, a whole-hearted attempt was made to ensure that the participants feel comfortable or are empowered to refuse to answer a question which might prove sensitive for them. They were additionally assured that their responses would remain confidential and they were encouraged to speak in as much detail

as they could while avoiding monosyllabic answers. Once they were ready for the interview, the meeting was recorded for ease of interpretation. The recorded audio was then transcribed and coded.

Analysis

The transcribed interviews were then scrutinised to determine what aspects of the interview questions and, correspondingly, the research questions they have answered. Noteworthy quotes were highlighted and used as initial codes for further extraction of relevant data. An initial code can succinctly be understood as a quote from a participant's interview in which they answer the interview question that the researcher asks them. It was scrutinized to note which corresponding research questions were answered. Similar initial codes were grouped together and tabulated for convenient representation. Upon observation of the grouped initial codes, it was found that various codes appeared to tell a story that progressed along a similar trajectory. These implied shared lived experiences of the various participants and were christened under focused codes. A focused code is a certain phenomenon or factor that participants insinuate in their answers, which can technically be derived from the initial codes. A group of initial codes obtained from various participants can broadcast the same or similar idea and consequently be compartmentalised under one focused code. These focused codes were essentially the gist of the study as they represented a common phenomenon that emerged as the study results were interpreted.

Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Patton, 1990). Triangulation also has been viewed as a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources.

Another miscellaneous note would be that there was utilisation of both inductive as well as deductive analysis in this study. The initial codes represented complex, heterogeneous information out of which precise, homogeneous focused codes were developed. This process denotes deductive analysis. Furthermore, as will be explained below, the focused codes gave us a broader understanding and empathisation of the individual's worldview when examined simultaneously with the initial codes. In this process, inductive analysis is employed.

Results

Participants	Initial codes	Focused codes
Initials:J.S Age: 40 Sex: male Religion: Muslim Residence: Shillong, Meghalaya	"Being a parent is, like, you are taking so many responsibilities, your next generation is about to come. You want the best for your next generation" "...to be a parent, you should be financially sound, then you should know how to take care of your child,..." " Then the other thing, we need to see that we should be able to provide the necessities for that child." "they are not being able to provide the facilities to their children. So that idea of being a parent is wrong."	Adequate finances are desirable for optimal child rearing

	" If we have too many children, we will not be able to provide them with proper food, proper education. Then, it is a form of crime that we are committing on the upcoming generation." "Being a parent is, like, you are taking so many responsibilities, your next generation is about to come. You want the best for your next generation" "As far as I learned from what my parents had been doing for me or seeing my siblings taking care of their child, I understand that it is a very tough thing to be…to face in the future."	

	"Taking care of your child doesn't mean you give them everything they want- there are certain things that they need to earn" "Another concept of being a parent- you should be able to guide them" "We should encourage our children to do things by themselves" "we need to teach them how (to) think independently. We need to teach them how to solve their own problems" "People don't have so much time to give their children so that they learn all these things."	Avoidance of overindulgence and providing proper guidance to the child Being able to provide quality time to children is essential for parenting

	"After a certain time, when the child will be growing and he will become a teenager or an adult. That time, the child will be very busy with their studies or some other activities and they will not be having time for their parents so whatever time that they are able to spend with their children-like, from the time they are born to the time they grow up to be teenage." "But being a real parent, we need to see exactly what our child is good at-first thing we need to see."	
		Parenting is a "challenge"

	"being parents is quite a challenging thing that you will be facing in future" "raising a kid is already a complicated endeavour and there is no one who seems to be doing it right." "For a sportsperson, he will like his child to be a sportsperson, for a musician, they would like their child to be a musician." " it is the duty of the parents to take proper care of the child and to give the best to the children"	Couples' beliefs about child rearing
	"it depends at what age they are getting married and the delay can be done according	Relevant factors for child planning

	to that, based on the age of marriage” “Depends at what age they are getting married. Some of them are getting married at the right age, like 25 to 27 years of age, then they could delay their childbirth” “getting married late at above 30, then it is a bit risky that they may not have a child in future. As we all know, the woman, she is fertile up to the age of 40-45” “Whatever child you are getting, it’s like…it’s so precious that it’s given by God.” “you should be able to take care of any type of child-if	

	we get a girl or a boy, we should be able to take care equally”	
	“It depends on the couple-if they are ready to have a child, they should have. But understanding should be from both sides. It should not be that a man wants a child and the woman does not, or if the woman wants the child and the man is not ready to take the responsibility.” “if one is not ready for having a child, then the responsibility will also not be that much for raising that child.”	Both partners need to be agreeable when it comes to child planning
	“But if, by mistake or by fluke, any of the symptoms	Beliefs (apprehension) about child and maternal care at health

	are coming there-in that case, this…..tendency that proper care will not be taken by the hospital while the woman is giving birth to a child. So, there is a chance that the mother may lose her life."	facilities during pandemic
Initials: C.T. Age: 28 Sex: Female Religion: Hindu Residence: Kolkata	"... I think a certain amount of financial backing also has to be there in bringing up a child in a good environment but more so, the financial stability is a key and both the genders are nurtured in certain ways to reach a certain place in their work place and, why not? So, I think probably it is- there is a wait for many people and	Adequate finances are desirable for optimal child rearing

	especially working parents as well.”	
	“I think it’s about nurturing an offspring and giving him full support mentally as well as emotionally.” “I think you have to be ready to be a parent before actually bringing up a child. Being a parent has to have a positive outlook towards nurturing a child because that has an effect on the growing offspring. You should be open to having a child, is my perspective.“ “Positive parenting outlook, not to be very authoritative in nature, to maintain that openness with a certain boundary, definitely, so that	Couples’ beliefs about child planning

	your child comes and shares things with you and you also share the same thing with your child” “...definitely respecting the individual and a child also because even a one-year-old or a two-year-old demands respect, even if the individual is small. So, I think mutual respect is something that would help nurture the child well.” “So, I feel the child should have at least a positive bond with some family member where the person can be treated as a safe place to, you know, connect with the child and so that the formation of the personality and the nurturance of the child is on the right path.”	

	“I think, in textbook knowledge, anytime above 30 is a delay but in the current day and age, I think an individual, by the time he or she gets a particular stability in his or her career, this is the minimum age that the person would reach up to.” “It should not be a forced decision, it should not be something that society makes you do- It's not a box that has to be ticked off the list. “...I think waiting out is more about being mentally ready or emotionally ready like I said but it shouldn't be really late also so that...you don't have the energy to rear up a child- like, you	Relevant factors for child planning

	shouldn't have a child in the late forties or mid forties so that by the time the child is five years old, you're fifty years old." " So, it's not in all cases but mostly as per research also, late pregnancy does, kind of, cause problems in the child but it's not always biologically that you can rear up a child at a later age. You have other ways and means also to bring up a child if you want to fulfil your desire to become a parent." "The difference between two children should be a little lesser- an eight to ten year gap, I think, world be a lot because if the children are both younger, they	

	understand each other better and it is easier for you as a parent to bring them up if they're in the same primary school or in the same pre-school." "So, I think a huge age gap should not be there because then the elder one starts parenting the younger one- it's not bad but the mental match is not there. I feel a closer age gap is better"	
	"Yes, because the pandemic is an uncertain situation- if there was a certain timeline that it would end the next year or the year after that, you could wait or whatever. That depends on the parents solely but it's an uncertain time so you don't know what	Beliefs about pandemic & child planning

	the future holds at all. So, possibly just go with the flow." "Where situations come to play, you know, with an uncertain time period, you can't really be physically or mentally ready, so you don't have a- you don't know how long to wait. So, might as well, I guess, you can go with the flow."	
	"...a congenial family environment is very much necessary in bringing up a child."	Partners being in a congenial relationship
Initials: S.S Age: 32 Sex: Male Religion: Hindu	"Financial and health stability." "...financial stability, second is our life stability and third is the ongoing pandemic."	Financial and health stability of both partners

Residence: Kolkata		
	“See, at the end of the day, me and my wife will have to bear the brunt, if I say. So, I would like to simplify it and the decision will be ours only. People- for my case, it is good that my parents or her parents or their relatives do not push us.” “Responsibility to the power infinity for the rest of your life” “ Like love, emotional attachment, then.... planning, their studying, like, everything, like, comes one by one.” “That is what, I haven't actually, uh, burdened me of that. Actually speaking, it is	Couples’ beliefs about child rearing

	quite a tough job to do and which requires a lot of time." "There is, I would say for me only, there is not one definition of delay. If we find that this is the time that we are responsible enough, we are able enough to bring someone into this world, then we would go for it. So, there is no fixed timeline that after two years, you have to-there is no preconceived notion that this is the timeline within which we have to.... "	
	"Pandemic is one reason but if pandemic was not there also, I wouldn't have thought right now but pandemic has been one of	Belief regarding child planning & pandemic

	the reasons. “ “So, it is better to keep our lives simple- we are already stressed with our jobs, with the societal and everything- other expenses are there. So, we have to keep our lives simple and that is why I try to keep these things as simple as possible.”	
Initials: O.V.N.S. Age: 32 Sex: Female Religion: Hindu Residence: Kolkata	“Being financially very strong then, psychologically, emotionally, in every way, both husband-wife relationship should be harmonious so that it doesn't affect the child in the future.” “So, we have to take a very conscious decision before- you know, just randomly becoming a parent like “oh,	Harmonious relationship between would-be parents permits positive parenting

	I want to become a parent" type of attitude- that shouldn't be the case. You see, in a marriage, if you think you are not compatible and all, you can leave but when it comes to parenthood, if we cannot take the responsibility, we cannot leave them or abandon them, right?" "I think my husband and I, we need to stabilise our relationship a bit more before we bring a new life into this world because- so that, you know later on, it doesn't affect psychologically to the child- whatever, because of the personal differences that we have."	

	“See, to be precise all parents would love to give their children the quality life, right, maybe what they did not get from their parents. It's not that we are complaining about it but how the generations have been passed on, right? So, somewhere, there has been something which was not fulfilled from my parents, I would ensure that that doesn't happen to my children.” “If I would say as per the society then, uh, it is the moment you finish one year or the moment you enter the second year of marriage, the delay period starts.” “I think as per society, girls’ age matters a lot because of	Relevant factors for child planning

	the various biological effects that happen over the period of time, right? So, age and the time of marriage- I think these two play a very vital role as per the society." "medically, yes, because of my obesity as of now. I visited a lot of doctors because of my hormonal imbalance, obesity, thyroid, where they told me-you know, "you have these menses issues, uh, overweight thing and in case you're planning to have a baby, you have to reduce the weight."". I don't know how good a mom I will be, I don't know if I have that much patience to invest being a kid, right?" "... and then peer pressure-	

	not peer pressure, he sees his friends getting- the moment they're married, in a year or two they are getting.... parents or something. It's been four years for him."	
	"I would say it is more of a delay because of finances which plays a very vital role and the second thing is being mentally prepared like, you know, "we are ready to take this responsibility". (take this statement within quote under a separate focus code namely: mutual understanding between partners). So, maybe the time we are not mentally prepared, we will not be	Adequate finances are desirable for optimal child rearing

	able to, uh- I think that would be one of the reasons of delay- being mentally prepared and finances." "Right now, I think we have more other commitments with finances, that is the reason we are still a little reluctant to bear a child as of now because that is a lot of expenses."	
	"I mean, it's more of my personal opinion- I find this pandemic to be more of a breeding season than a pandemic." "Because as I told you about the factors- the reasons for me for not having a baby are nowhere related to the pandemic. Because, I think the pandemic can only	Beliefs about pandemic and child planning

	help..... Having the man in the house to help.”	
	“I think that it is very important because upbringing of your children is in your hands, you cannot just leave it to someone else. I mean, it's not that I'm looking down on a nanny or something-no, but the affection and the closeness with the child comes only when you're with them and when you spend time with them.” “Yeah, *ayah* or nanny. I see that the child is more inclined towards them because the parents are not giving sufficient time. So, I think that this would also add to pre-parenting	Couples’ beliefs about child rearing

	decision- like, the decision of becoming parents that you should have ample time and when I say finances, that includes when even one of the parents is leaving the job to take care of the child so that twenty-four by seven, you're with your child.” “Certainly. I think that it’s a very big responsibility. It doesn't just start from the time the child is born- I think even before. The moment we conceive, the very moment we become parents and the responsibility of taking care of them from the womb until they are out, they grow up and they are by themselves or maybe even	

	after that.	

Discussion

The plethora of findings gathered from this study confirm that the venture of child-planning and rearing is multifaceted. Focused codes fall along a common trajectory for the various participants and elucidate their lived experiences as being shared across urban Indian society. As can be noted from the results table, one of the foremost uniting focused codes across participants is the consideration that adequate finances are desirable for optimal child rearing. Since participants are working individuals who belong to the median socioeconomic stratum of Indian society, they emphasized that financial stability is paramount prior to child-planning.

"Right now, I think we have more other commitments with finances, that is the reason we are still a little reluctant to bear a child as of now because that is a lot of expenses." (O.V.N.S., 32, Female, Hindu)

The financial aspect of child-planning delineates the tangible necessities that a parent ought to provide their children. With sound financial status comes convenience in attainment of basic human necessities such as food, clothing, shelter, education, healthcare and leisure. Arguably, this is the bedrock over which the rest of the factors segregate themselves and is considered logically as well as emotionally significant. Hence, it is emphasized that couples only plan as many children as they are financially capable of sustaining.

" If we have too many children, we will not be able to provide them with proper food, proper education. Then, it is a form of crime that we are committing on the upcoming generation." (J.S., 40, Male, Muslim)

A phenomenon of interest was noted in the study that was unique to the two female participants. They collectively reported that in order for the planned child to have a good life, parental congeniality is of essence. A harmonious relationship between would-be parents predicts fewer

instances of spousal arguments and/or abuse. Although it sounds like hyperbole, a harmonious relationship between would-be parents could save a child's life, as is precisely demonstrated by research confirming that physical violence against mothers is associated positively with the increased risk of death of their children in both infancy and childhood (Singh, Mahapatra, & Dutta, 2008).

"I think my husband and I, we need to stabilise our relationship a bit more before we bring a new life into this world because- so that, you know later on, it doesn't affect psychologically to the child- whatever, because of the personal differences that we have." (O.V.N.S., 32, Female, Hindu)

Biological precursors such as fertility and societal constructs such as family obligations dictate the couples' perception of a waiting period for child-planning. Couples reportedly expressed that they could wait out before planning a child if they were in the fertile bracket of their age. One respondent shared a narrative of emotional pressure from family to have a child within a short period of time after their marriage. Another noteworthy biological reason to wait it out before planning children is obesity or hormonal imbalances. A biological caveat such as maternal obesity has consistently been associated with an increased rate of fetal and early neonatal death (Ramachenderan, Bradford, & Mclean, 2008).

"getting married late at above 30, then it is a bit risky that they may not have a child in future. As we all know, the woman, she is fertile up to the age of 40-45" (J.S. 40, Male, Muslim)

"medically, yes, because of my obesity as of now. I visited a lot of doctors because of my hormonal imbalance, obesity, thyroid, where they told me-you know, "you have these menses

issues, uh, overweight thing and in case you're planning to have a baby, you have to reduce the weight.””. (O.V.N.S., 32, Female, Hindu)

Child planning beliefs and its precursors form the fundamental auxiliary segment of the participants' discourse. Since this study is being conducted in the midst of a pandemic, it is an imposingly decisive factor in child planning, with some participants reporting an apprehensive feeling towards child planning. It is verily verified by a study that the normal physiological, anatomical and immunological changes that accompany pregnancy may increase a pregnant woman's susceptibility to a newly emergent viral pathogen as well as increase the severity of infection (Schwartz, 2020). Attitudes ranged from indifference towards the Covid-19 pandemic owing to its uncertain duration to even viewing a potential advantage in it. Namely, the work-from-home protocol has ensured that husbands were available in the vicinity to help out their wives in case of pregnancy.

"But if, by mistake or by fluke, any of the symptoms are coming there-in that case, this…..tendency that proper care will not be taken by the hospital while the woman is giving birth to a child. So, there is a chance that the mother may lose her life." (J.S., 40, Male, Muslim)

"Where situations come to play, you know, with an uncertain time period, you can't really be physically or mentally ready, so you don't have a- you don't know how long to wait. So, might as well, I guess, you can go with the flow." (C.T., 28, Female, Hindu)

"Because as I told you about the factors- the reasons for me for not having a baby are nowhere related to the pandemic. Because, I think the pandemic can only help..... Having the man in the house to help." (O.V.N.S., 32, Female, Hindu)

A consequent behavior relevant to child-planning is determining the gap between the births of children. A respondent asserted that the gap be little such that like-mindedness and deeper connection become easier with closeness in age. She further theorised that an unnecessarily long gap between the timing of 2 children could lead to the transformation of assumed roles of the elder sibling towards the younger sibling on to more "parenting" roles.

"The difference between two children should be a little lesser- an eight to ten year gap, I think, world be a lot because if the children are both younger, they understand each other better and it is easier for you as a parent to bring them up if they're in the same primary school or in the same pre-school." (C.T., 28, Female. Hindu)

"So, I think a huge age gap should not be there because then the elder one starts parenting the younger one- it's not bad but the mental match is not there. I feel a closer age gap is better" (C.T., 28, Female. Hindu)

An immense sense of responsibility was emphasized by participants as their evaluation of the perceived experience of parenthood. Being mentally and emotionally prepared was given as much importance as was financial stability while chalking out their own roles in the provision of a good life to children. A participant conceptualized parenting as a "challenge" because of the financial and emotional preparedness it demands. It is important to evaluate one's own capability before taking the imposing decision of parenthood-be it at being patient enough to troubleshoot minor parenting inconveniences or being able to guide or mentor the child in order to foster morals, autonomy and the discovery of strengths of the child.

"Being a parent is, like, you are taking so many responsibilities, your next generation is about to come. You want the best for your next generation" (J.S., 40, Male, Muslim)

“being parents is quite a challenging thing that you will be facing in future” (J.S., 40, Male, Muslim)

“I don't know how good a mom I will be, I don't know if I have that much patience to invest in a kid, right?” (O.V.N.S., 32, Female, Hindu)

“we need to teach them how (to) think independently. We need to teach them how to solve their own problems” (J.S., 40, Male, Muslim)

“Another concept of being a parent- you should be able to guide them” (J.S., 40, Male, Muslim)

So, maybe the time we are not mentally prepared, we will not be able to, uh- I think that would be one of the reasons of delay- being mentally prepared and finances.” (O.V.N.S., 32, Female, Hindu)

Along with many tangible facets of the parenthood/child-planning phenomenon listed above, there are numerous abstract considerations in the relationship between parents and child. These are deconstructed as being nurturing, respectful, supportive and loving roles that parents play in their child’s life. A participant also stressed the role of being physically present while parenting so that ideally, more time is spent with the child by the parent rather than by a nanny. A judicious parent who, as a child, might have felt a shortcoming in their parents’ practices ought to make the best possible arrangement so that a similar limitation does not manifest for their child. These comprise the psychological and social conceptualisation of the participants’ child rearing narratives.

“I think you have to be ready to be a parent before actually bringing up a child. Being a parent has to have a positive outlook towards nurturing a child because that has an effect on the growing offspring. You should be open to having a child, is my perspective.“(C.T., 28, Female. Hindu)

"...definitely respecting the individual and a child also because even a one-year-old or a two-year-old demands respect, even if the individual is small. So, I think mutual respect is something that would help nurture the child well."(C.T., 28, Female. Hindu)

"I think that it is very important because upbringing of your children is in your hands, you cannot just leave it to someone else. I mean, it's not that I'm looking down on a nanny or something-no, but the affection and the closeness with the child comes only when you're with them and when you spend time with them." (O.V.N.S., 32, Female, Hindu)

"See, to be precise all parents would love to give their children the quality life, right, maybe what they did not get from their parents. It's not that we are complaining about it but that's how the generations have been passed on, right? So, somewhere, there has been something which was not fulfilled from my parents, I would ensure that that doesn't happen to my children." (O.V.N.S., 32, Female, Hindu)

Conclusion

This study has proved that the phenomenon of parenthood shall not be understood as starting off as a spontaneous decision and navigated through with nonchalance. Fundamentally, it requires thorough planning and appraisals of self, the environment and finances in the interest of providing the best possible life to the child. Psychologists have classically and even contemporarily emphasized the influence of childhood events or shortcomings in the development of psychological disorders in the lifespan of an individual. How best or practically to deliver on parenting duties while keeping in mind said considerations and aspirations may bear the potential to prevent many said disorders, although further research is warranted for the same.

The primary determinants such as financial stability, presence or absence of biological issues, being mentally prepared to be a parent, being able to provide time to the child once it is born or familial obligations have the potential to cause the would-be parents to wait out while having a child. Interestingly, the Covid-19 pandemic has had effects that fell across a gradient from creating apprehension in the participants on one end, not having any effect at the midpoint to benefitting would-be mothers on the other end.

Parenting prerequisites were elaborated as the necessity of a harmonious relationship between would-be parents. Thereafter, visualisation of parenthood highlighted some important procedures to be kept in mind so that adequate love, mentoring and values such as morality, autonomy, a sense of boundaries can be imparted in the child. In case of more than one child, the age gap between them should be kept to a minimum so that bonding and emotional connection is encouraged.

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Appendix

Sociodemographic sheet

Initials	Age	Sex	Religion	Ethnicity	Occupation
J.S.	40	Male	Muslim	Khasi-Bengali	Census Department, Government of Meghalaya
C.T	28	Female	Hindu	Bengali	Clinical psychologist
O.V.N.S.	32	Female	Hindu	Telugu	M.N.C. employee
S.S.	32	Male	Hindu	Bengali	Marketing Professional

Interview schedule

The interview will be conducted on a video conferencing app of the interviewees' choice (Zoom, Google Meet, Teams) and consist of 10 open ended questions in a semi-structured format. The interview will be conducted for not more than 30 minutes in which the interviewee will be given enough time to elucidate their answers. At the commencement of the interview, the interviewee will be positively reassured by the interviewer that their responses will be kept strictly confidential and that there will not be any judgment of right or wrong with regard to their responses. The interviewee will be further given the right to refuse answering a question that they are not comfortable with. Furthermore, for the sake of obtaining a nuanced report, one-word answers will be discouraged and more detailed responses sought.

Aim of the interview: The interview is designed to seek the opinion and thereby extrapolate the attitudes of married, childless couples about the notion of childbearing and any delays in conception. In a nutshell, the interview is tailored to answer the research question: what are the factors which cause couples to wait out while having a child?

Questions: After rapport has been established with the interviewee, the following questions will be asked:

1. Have you and your spouse ever discussed a serious desire to have a child?

2. Could you help me understand what the notion of being a parent means to you?

3. According to you, what period of time is considered a delay when it comes to childbirth?

4. Before becoming parents, what are the things one should keep in mind?

5. After the child is born, raising him/her is an important venture. Would you help me understand how you have envisioned that?

6. Would you be comfortable in sharing any barriers to child bearing?

7. What consequences have you had to face by taking your time while having a child?

8. What are your reasons for waiting out while having a child?

9. Has the pandemic had any effect on your having a child?

10. Can you help me understand what you think about family planning from a country-wide perspective?

In the interest of having a semi-structured interview, the interviewer's questions will not be limited to the ones mentioned above but will be tailored to suit the discussion and explore other emerging themes.