

Module 1

Introduction: Population and Society

Lecture 1: Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

Social processes are closely linked with human population. Therefore, for students of society it is important to study characteristics of population. According to the latest estimates of United Nations Population Fund, the size of India's population is 1,198.0 millions. Imagine if the size of population of India were 120 million, i.e., one-tenth of the present population, what would be its impact on society. Would we have the same level of poverty and unemployment? Would we have the same level of conflicts and chaos? Would that affect the position of India in the international politics? Are there only good consequences of lower population or there are some harmful consequences too? Remember that today in India a city like Mumbai itself has more population than you are imagining for whole India. You will learn that the relationship between population and society is not one way. Not only population determines structure and processes of society but society also determines the population characteristics and dynamics. Is it not true that industrialization and development have reduced family size in all the Western countries? Is it not true that concern for children's education leads to use of contraception; and women's employment improves their decision making power in the family? It is hoped that after completing this course a student of sociology will be able to relate population trends and policies with society and social change.

This course aims at understanding of various linkages between population and society at various levels: national, regional, village, household and individual. An attempt has been made to present material in a manner that a graduate student of sociology can grasp the subject without difficulty. There is only one module that requires some familiarity with statistics and basic mathematics. This is Chapter 4 on models. All other chapters are devoted to substantive issues. Questions given at the end of each module would help the students in self evaluation.

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POPULATION STUDIES AS A BRANCH OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Population studies is a branch of social sciences. Social sciences include sociology, economics, psychology, political science and anthropology. Not only sociologists but economists, psychologists, political scientists, anthropologists, and social historians have also contributed to development of theory of population. Table 1.1, given in a following slide, shows some illustrative questions of interest to different social scientists working in the field of population studies.

Economists are interested in economic aspects of demographic phenomena. They may use cost-benefit approach to reproductive decision making or migration. Psychologists focus on individual differences. Political scientists explain everything in terms of power and forms of state. Anthropologists have been traditionally interested in culture of preliterate societies though these days they also study urban and industrial organizations and examine belief systems, symbolic communication, patterns of interaction and behaviour, and values. Social historians examine historical roots of population changes and rise and fall of death rate, migration and nuptiality (marriage). Sociologists claim that they study population variables in terms of social structure.

It may be said that in the field of population research sociologists are playing an increasing role. The reasons are:

- While other disciplines focus on one specific aspect of reality sociologists attempt to explain things in a holistic perspective.
- Sociologists have the advantage of freely borrowing concepts and methodologies from all other branches of social sciences.
- Sociologists are the first to venture into new areas as they are less constrained by disciplinary limitations.
- Sociologists who take whole society as the level of analysis are in a better position to explain differences between different societies and cultures.

However, the entry of sociologists in the field of population is relatively new.

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In the beginning population research was dominated by statisticians and economists. The stress was on estimation of rates and ratios from incomplete data. With improved data and survey as the main method of research sociologists are playing a more important role than others in confronting the challenging issues of our times.

BASIC CONCEPTS IN POPULATION STUDIES

In population studies scholars study size and composition of population. They also study various processes through which size and composition of population change. The processes are: nuptiality or marriages; reproduction or births; mortality or deaths; migration of people from one place to another (both within a country and between different countries); and social mobility leading to changes in social stratification (primarily caused by changes in education, work and occupation). Size, composition and processes of population affect society and social institutions directly or through economic and environmental factors.

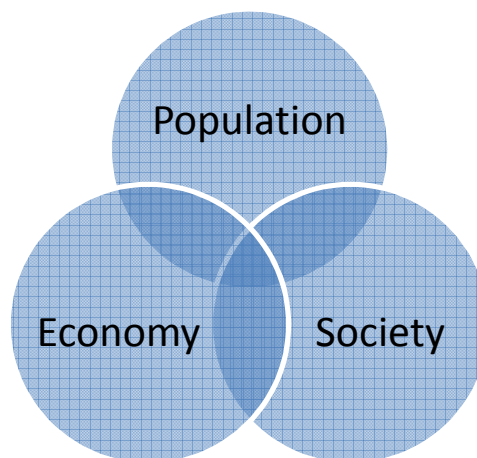


FIGURE 1.1: LINKAGE BETWEEN POPULATION, ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

The term size refers to the total number of people inhabiting an area. Composition refers to classification of population according to characteristics like age, sex and marital status. Some specific characteristics of population such as urban-rural residence or geographical divisions are studied under the aegis of population distribution.

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TABLE 1.1: IMPORTANT QUESTIONS IN POPULATION STUDIES

Discipline	Important questions
Sociology	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Are there religious differentials in fertility in India? What are the causes behind them?2. How does social stratification affect health inequality and quality of life?3. What role did the industrial revolution play in promoting rural to urban migration?
Economics	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What are the short term and long term effects of population growth on productivity and national income2. What are costs and benefits of children in different types of societies3. Will the falling birth rate improve unemployment rate?4. How does one assess the impact of population growth in urban or rural areas?
Psychology	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What are all the values of children?2. What is the relationship between locus of control (i.e., attribution of successes and failures to oneself or environment) and fertility preferences?3. What are social representations of health and illness among the tribal communities?4. How does one measure stigma against HIV/AIDS?
Political scientists	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How does empowerment of women help in reducing maternal mortality ratio?2. Is there a relationship between political structures and demographic transition (i.e., changes in birth and death rates)?
Anthropologists	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Do cultural norms affect decision making regarding place of delivery?2. Did the kinship structure among primitive tribes affect their desire to migrate?

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QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE STUDIES OF POPULATION

Conventionally, population scientists make a difference between demography and population studies. **Demography deals with the quantitative study of size and processes of population; population studies deals with complex and qualitative relationships between socio-economic environment and population.** In practice there is no separation between the two. In this course we will use them interchangeably. Demographers make their models in the light of substantive theories developed by sociologists and economists; and sociologists and economists employ demographic measures, data and models to explain the various links between population and society.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SIZE, GROWTH, COMPOSITION AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION

Size, growth, composition and distribution of population are interrelated. In a territory of a given size population cannot increase indefinitely. Therefore, as we will see later, size of population determines at what rate the population would be growing. Composition of population also affects the rate of growth of population. In turn, rate of growth affects the composition of population. Most of the rapidly growing populations are younger than the declining populations or populations growing at a very slow pace. Rate of growth also affects distribution directly and indirectly. One reason behind this is that all the regions and groups in a country do not grow at the same rate: while some regions and groups may grow at a fast pace others may grow only at a slow pace or even decline, leading to spatial and social class differences in growth rate of population. In most countries, therefore, the governments are not only concerned about overall growth rate of population they also take cognizance of and intervene in population growth differentials. No wonder, in many countries, the social classes are themselves raising concerns about social class differences in fertility, mortality and migration.

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USES OF POPULATION STUDIES

Population studies is in great demand today. Poston et al. (2007) say that there are three specific demographic activities for which persons trained in population studies are employed:

- Demographers serve as advisors, witnesses, and technicians on matters of political apportionment and redistricting.
- They are frequently called to participate in multidisciplinary teams given the responsibility of developing a plan to halt the environmental damage.
- They are asked to provide the various types of forecasts in conjunction with community development.

In India, demography is taught in different university departments such as sociology, economics, geography and statistics. Preventive and social medicine departments of medical colleges too have demographers to teach demography and assist research students. Demographers, with their strong training in methodology, are recruited by non-government organizations (NGOs) and research organizations working in diverse areas: health, sexuality, gender issues and development. They are consulted by civic bodies and governments for providing projections of urban and rural populations and different types of services. Sociologists with training in demography can look for jobs in universities, NGOs and research and consultancy organizations. Of late, engineers and environmentalists have included demographic variables in studies of impact of development projects on people. Lastly, it is notable that in plural societies, having presence of multiple ethnic and religious groups, political parties cannot afford not to pay heed to population matters. Differences in growth rate of population have been a both political and emotive issues in India where people's groups have asked whether there are religious differences in practice of birth control methods, what are the causes of this, and what are the implications of this.