

SIZE AND COMPOSITION OF RURAL FAMILIES

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Introduction :

1. The main purpose of this article is to describe, in broad terms, the size and composition of families in rural areas. The results presented below are based on data collected in the course of a programme of socio-economic surveys of the villages liable to drought and famine, carried out by the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics during 1947-51. The sample selected for the inquiry consisted of 12,030 families selected from about 74 villages of the Poona, Ahmednagar, Satara, Sholapur and Bijapur districts.

2. The size of the family has been studied in terms of the number of members staying in the family. In analysing the composition of the family, the fact of the institution of the joint family system which is believed to prevail particularly in the rural community has to be taken into account. A joint family is usually constituted by two or more couples, closely related to each other. The description of the composition of the family has, therefore, been made chiefly in the context of the number of couples living together in the family. Normally, the size of the family would vary directly with the number of couples contained in the family. The discussion on the two aspects of the family is thus closely interrelated.

The size and type of family :

3. We may begin by noting the distribution of the families by size. *Table 1* presents the relevant data.

From the figures, it will be seen that about 27 per cent. of the families were relatively of small size (containing between 1 to 3 members), about 44 per cent. were of medium size (4-6 members) and nearly 30 per cent. were of large (7-9 members) or very large size (more than 9 members). It may be noted that the number of single-member families appeared to be considerable and formed 5.79 per cent. of the total.

4. As said earlier, the composition of the family can be meaningfully studied by observing whether a given family is a unitary or a joint family. A convenient criterion to classify the families from this standpoint is the number of couples found living together in a family. We may make the following five classes on this basis : (i) Families with no couple,¹ (ii) one couple, (iii) two couples, (iv) three couples and (v) more than three

¹ No-couple families do not mean single-member families; they mean families among whose members there are no two persons related as husband and wife. This does not also mean that all the members of such families are necessarily unmarried or widowed, though a majority of them will be found to be so.