

Awareness Among Women Towards Aspects of Family Planning in Kullu District of Himachal Pradesh

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ABSTRACT The present study was undertaken to know the extent of awareness among married women towards aspects of family planning. A total of 150 married women were randomly selected from two blocks of Kullu district of Himachal Pradesh. Data was collected through self-structured interview schedule. It was found that majority of respondents had knowledge and awareness about various aspects of family planning. Women were the major users of contraceptives as contrary to men. Oral pills were the most used family planning method followed by use of loops.

INTRODUCTION

Women remains one of the most under-served segments of the Indian population. An alarmed number of women who want to space or limit their families currently do not have access to or cannot afford or use appropriate means to do so.

Although India was the first country to adopt family planning as a National programme during 1951-52, the demographic situation in the country is still a matter of grave concern. The low use of spacing methods is reflected in early child bearing and short birth intervals. Wherever, services exist, women are constrained for using the family planning methods by cultural mores or pressure to rebuild the population. A close association between family planning knowledge, attitude and behaviour was observed by Pandey and Singh (2001) which indicated that proper awareness of adequate means of family planning, its effectiveness and adequate source of information exercised positive impact on developing favourable attitude which motivated females to adopt family planning behaviour.

However, the recent changes in the institution of family, education and economic independence of women have affected the traditional system and brought some structural changes in the status and role of women as a housewife in the family. The present study was conducted with an objective to study the extent of awareness of women with regard to family planning methods.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A total of 150 respondents (of age 18 to 30

years), i.e. married women with first child upto the age of five years were randomly selected from two blocks, Naggar and Kullu, of district Kullu of Himachal Pradesh. A self-structured questionnaire was used to know about general information and awareness and knowledge regarding family planning methods. The data was collected through personal interview method by visiting each household. Means and percentages were used for analysis of data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The institution of marriage defines and circumscribes the life of a woman as wife, a mother and a house maker. Thus it is fairly common for both men and women to discuss family planning. Lack of time, education and awareness are deep-rooted constraints for women to perform their multi-dimensional role.

As observed from Table 1, maximum number (67.3%) of women were in the age group of 18 to 25 years and majority of them were literate, housewives and belonged to nuclear families. Most of them (74%) were married at the age between 18 to 25 years and had their first child at the same age range. A study by Kaur and Pattanaik (1999) indicated that literacy in general and female literacy in particular exerted a strong influence on contraceptive use. Higher literacy promoted declines in fertility and child mortality.

Awareness plays an important role in motivating females to have a favourable attitude towards family planning and to adopt family planning behaviour. In the present study majority of women knew about birth control measures and

were using different types of contraceptives methods. Majority of the respondents were aware about the mechanical method of family planning (loop and condoms) followed by chemical method (oral pills). The reason might be that the respondents were influenced by the effect of mass media (Television and Radio). Awareness about the natural method was low which might be attributed to the fact that there were no open discussions about these matters at home. Jain and Nag (1999) found that the knowledge about one or more contraceptive and current contraceptive use were found to be in proportion of 78.8 and 24.2 percent, respectively.

The use of contraceptives is regarded as being the wife's responsibility. Ringheim (1993) reported that globally, men have not shared equally with women the responsibility of fertility regulation. While family planning efforts have been directed almost exclusively towards women, the lack of male involvement also reflects the limited options available for women. A study by Sinha et al. (2001) revealed that husband's willingness for contraception and improper use of condoms were responsible for one third of all unwanted pregnancies. Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents according to their use of contraceptives and reasons for using the

Table 1: Personal characteristics of respondents

Variables	Number of respondents (N = 150)	%
1. Age Group (years)		
18 to 25	101	67.3
26 to 30	49	32.7
2. Education Level		
Illiterate	11	7.3
Educated upto primary level	20	13.3
Educated upto middle level	19	12.7
Educated upto high school	22	14.7
Under Graduate	36	24
Graduate and above	42	28
3. Occupation		
Housewife	109	72.7
Labourer	22	14.7
4. Family Type		
Nuclear	66	44
Joint	84	56
5. Age at Marriage (in years)		
Below 18	21	14
18 to 25	111	74
26 to 30	18	12
6. Age at Birth of First Child (in years)		
Below 18	7	4.7
18 to 25	144	76
26 to 30	26	19.3

same. The findings suggested that women were the main adaptors of contraceptives whereas men played fewer roles. Oral pills were the most well known and most used among 33 percent of women followed by use of loops by 30 percent of women. Apart from vasectomy and usage of condoms, both of which are unacceptable to most men, all the contraceptive methods are for use by women (Rizwana, 1992). The findings of the present study were compared with the data available from National Family Health Survey (NFHS, 1998) and it was found that although the all India figures for use of any family planning method was 48.2 percent, a higher figure of 67.7 percent was reported from Himachal Pradesh for people using any of the family planning method. Exposure to the electronic mass media (radio and television) has a large and positive effect on the current contraceptive use and intended future use of contraception (Retherford and Misra, 1997).

Table 2: Knowledge and awareness of birth control measures

Variables	Number of respondents (N = 150)	%
Knowledge of birth control measures	139	92.7
Awareness regarding birth control methods		
Mechanical (Loops, Condoms)	98	65.3
Chemical (Oral pills)	88	58.6
Sterilization	72	48
Natural (Withdrawal, Rhythm)	64	42.6
Usage of birth control methods		
Use of condoms	34	29.3
Use of pills	38	32.8
Use of loops	35	30.1
Use of withdrawal method	24	34.7
Vasectomy	4	3.5
Tubectomy	5	4.3

CONCLUSION

The study throws light upon the awareness of women regarding family planning aspects. Thus the successful limitation of family size by the couples depends not only on their small family norms but also on their psychological acceptance of family limitation, knowledge of birth control methods, availability of contraceptives, psychological and economic costs and more importantly an environment favourable to the practice of birth control.

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