



Original Article

A study of knowledge, attitude and practice of family planning among the women of reproductive age group in Sikkim

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Abstract

Objectives : To assess the knowledge and attitude regarding family planning and the practice of contraceptives among the women of reproductive age group in east Sikkim and to determine the barriers for contraceptive use among them. **Methods :** A cross sectional descriptive study was done in the Obstetrics and Gynaecology Department of the STNM Hospital and Central Referral Hospital, both attached to the Sikkim Manipal Institute of Medical Sciences. The study group included 443 women of reproductive age group (15-44 years) attending the two hospitals during the month of January 2004 to March 2005. Their knowledge, attitude and practice on contraceptives were evaluated with the help of a predesigned questionnaire. **Results :** It was found that 98% of the women had knowledge about family planning and 94.2% of them had knowledge about contraceptives. Over 50% had gained information from media. Majority (98%) thought that contraceptive use was beneficial but only 55.2% had used contraceptives and 84% of them were satisfied. Sixty-two percent were currently using contraceptives, 37.9% of them were using oral contraceptives, 37.9% of them were using oral contraceptive pills and 31% were using condoms. **Conclusion:** The study highlights that knowledge and awareness doesn't always lead to the use of contraceptives. There is still a need to educate and motivate the couples and improve family planning services to achieve more effective and appropriate use of contraceptives and to arrest the trend towards increase in population.

Key words : family planning, contraception, knowledge, attitude, practice

Introduction

Family planning is defined by WHO as "a way of thinking and living that is adopted voluntarily, upon the basis of knowledge, attitudes and responsible decisions by individuals and couples, in order to promote the health and welfare of family groups and

thus contribute effectively to the social development of a country".

India is the second most populous country of the world. The Govt of India launched a family welfare program in 1950's to accelerate the economic and social development by reducing the population growth. But this program has met with only marginal success. This is because people of India being multilingualistic, multireligious and multiethnic, have different levels of awareness and acceptance of methods of family planning. It is thus, necessary to develop special program to tackle the needs of different groups. But before launching a special program, a thorough understanding of the different

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levels of awareness and acceptance of methods of family planning. It is thus, necessary to develop special program to tackle the needs of different groups. But before launching a special program, a thorough understanding of the differentials and determinants of fertility and mortality is essential. In recent years, the need for such studies to understand the factors determining the fertility and family planning acceptance and practices by particular communities has been felt, so that more specific knowledge can be gained about factors determining family planning acceptance by particular communities, which can then be used for developing suitable program for them.

Our study was undertaken to find the reasons for these unmet needs and factors affecting the outcome of family planning program and to have a better understanding of the situation in order help government in formulation of policies and modify its approach in east Sikkim.

Methods

A cross sectional descriptive study was done in the Obstetrics and Gynaecology Department of the STNM Hospital and Central Referral hospital Gangtok. The study group included all the 443 women of reproductive age group (15-44 years) attending the two hospitals., from January 2004 to March 2005. The literacy rate and religious wise distribution of women attending the two hospitals is similar.

The inclusion criteria: women of reproductive age group, visiting STNM and Central Referral Hospital, who were willing to participate in our study. The exclusion criteria: women below or above reproductive age group and those who were, not willing to participate in our study. Purpose Sampling with snowball technique was used. A well-structured questionnaire was used for data collection on general information, knowledge and attitude regarding family planning methods, and contraceptive practices.

Permission for the study was obtained from the heads of both the hospitals. Data were collected through questionnaire by interview technique.

The dependent variables were knowledge, attitude, and practice of women regarding family planning. Independent variables were age of the women of reproductive age group, age at menarche, age at

marriage, duration of married life, consultation of family planning at marriage, and religion.

Descriptive statistics was used for data analysis. All the collected data were analyzed with regard to the information given by the subjects in the set questionnaire.

Results

Among the 443 women in the study group more than 80% were in the age group of 15 to 34. Majority were Hindus (76.7%) followed by Buddhist (14.3%). Muslims and Christians formed a minority. Eighty percent of females were literate. Almost all (95.7%) were married and majority (80.1%) of were housewives (Table 1).

Table 1. Sociodemographic correlates (n=443).

Characteristics	Number	Percentage
Age		
15-24 years	198	44.7
25-34 years	211	47.6
35-44years	34	7.7
Religion		
Hindu	340	76.7
Muslim	15	3.3
Christian	25	5.7
Buddhist	63	14.3
Literacy		
Literate	360	81.3
Illiterate	83	18.7
Occupation		
House wife	355	80.1
Unskilled / Skilled worker	52	11.7
Professional	36	8.1
Marital status		
Married	424	95.7
Single	19	4.3

Knowledge

Ninety eight percent of the women had heard about family planning methods and only very few (2%) were unaware. About 54.4% of women got information about contraceptives form mass media (Table 2)

According to most of the women family planning meant having small and happy family and only 29.8% said it was for birth spacing. Almost all (95.8%) of them had heard about oral contraceptive pills. 74.2% of the them had heard about condoms and 72% were aware about Copper-T, and over half (67%) of them had heard about tubectomy and nearly one third (34%) were aware about vasectomy. Most of them knew that contraceptive were available in Government Hospital (62.8%) and Medical shops (52.5%) (Table 2).

Table 2. Knowledge and awareness regarding contraception (n=443).

	Number	Percentage
Heard about family planning	434	98
Aware of contraceptives	417	94.2
Know where to get contraceptives from	413	93.3
Source		
T.V/Radio/Newspaper/Magazine	241	54.4
Friends/Relatives	167	37.7
Health personnel	35	7.9
Concept regarding small family norm * N=434		
Spacing/Avoiding unwanted pregnancy	84	19.4
Small and happy family	350	92.2
Methods of contraception* N=417		
Oral pill	399	95.8
Condom	309	74.2
Copper-T	300	72
Tubectomy	279	67
Vasectomy	142	34
Conventional	51	12.3
Others (Injection)	112	26.8
Source of availability * N=413		
Government hospital	1259	62.8
Health centers	128	30.9
Private health institute	68	16.4
Medical shop / Pharmacy	217	52.5
Reason for using contraceptive *N = 417		
Having a child when required	81	19.5
Spacing of birth	124	29.8
Prevention of unwanted births	348	83.5
Prevention of Sexually transmitted disease	34	8.2
Improvement of health	34	8.2

^a * Multiple responses

83.5% of women knew that contraceptives were used for preventing unwanted births and only 8.2% knew that condom can be used to prevent sexually transmitted diseases.

Attitude

44.6% women were not using contraception, but were willing to adopt family planning in future and over 98% women though that family planning was beneficial and 93.2% said hat they would like to encourage their friends and relatives to use family planning (Table 3).

Practice

Of 215 women who had used contraceptives, 85% were satisfied with contraceptives that they had used in the past and 62% were still using contraceptives and were satisfied with the contraceptives they were presently using. Among the user of contraceptives 37.9% of had oral pills and 31% the barrier method (condom). Twenty seven percent had undergone tubectomy and 24% had used Copper T

55.5% of the women chose the methods because they found it comfortable, and easy to use. In 41.6% of the women the choice of methods used was decided by their husbands (Table 4).

Barriers to using contraceptions

30.8% of women did not disclose the reason for not using contraceptives. 25.5% were not using any contraceptive because they were planning pregnancy, while 14.8% because they did not have knowledge about contraception. 10.6 were currently pregnant (Table 5).

Table 3. Attitude towards family planning (n=434).

Attitude	n=434	% age
Use of contraceptives is beneficial	425	98
Would practice-family planning, or encourage a friend to	404	93.2
If you have never adopted family planning	198	44.6
Willing to adopt family planning if not done earlier.		

Table 4. Contraceptives in the past used ** (n=215)

Oral Contraceptive used	Number	Percentage
Pill	81	37.9%
Condom	66	31%
Copper T	52	24.1%
Tubectomy	58	27%
Others (Injection)	18	8.6%
Reason for using them ^a		
Easily available	78	36.1%
Comfortable and easy to use	119	55.5%
Inexpensive	66	30.5%
Husband's choice	89	41.6%
Other	30	13.8%
Multiple responses by some patients.		

Table 5. Barriers to using contraceptives * (n=198)

Barrier of contraceptive method	Number	Percentage
Currently Pregnant	21	10.6
Desire to have a child	50	25.5
Currently in puerperium period	8	4.2
Lack of knowledge regarding contraceptives	29	14.8
Against religious beliefs	8	4.2
Opposition of partner	4	2.1
Fear of side effects	17	8.5
Husband vasectomised	25	12.7
Respondent tubectomised	15	7.6
No response/not willing to disclose	51	30.8
Multiple responses by some patients		

Discussion

During the course of literature review many books, newspapers, articles and journals were searched. The literature about family planning in the context of Sikkim was limited.

In the present study more than 80% were in the age group of 15 and 34 years and were literate. The age group characteristics were similar to the study conducted by Shrivastava et al in Ghorakhpur ¹ but in their study nearly half of the women were illiterate and from rural background. Mohanan et al ² in a study from Dakshina Kannada concluded that majority (52.4%) of the women using contraception were in the age group of 15-34 years.

A survey conducted in Manipur by Donati et al ³ concluded that the use of modern family planning methods increases with education, while female sterilization prevalence decline sharply with women's education level. Muslims had lower rates of contraceptive use (17%) than Hindu (62%) even after controlling for education. This is also corroborated by our study wherein majority of users were Hindus 76% compared to only 3% Muslims.

In our study 54.4% had gained information from T.V / Radio, Newspapers and Magazines, 37% from friends and relatives, and only 7.9% from health personnel, whereas in Srivastava et al's ¹ study 70% had gained knowledge of contraceptives from friends and family and 39% from television and radio.

95.8% of our subjects knew about the oral contraceptive pills, 74.2% about condoms, 72% about copper T, 67% about tubectomy and 34% about vasectomy while in Srivastava et al's ¹ study 82% were aware about female sterilization, 50% were aware of vasectomy, and IUCD was the most known (61%) temporary method followed by OC pills (60%) and condoms (50%). In their study 17% were not aware of any form of contraception as against 6% in our study.

In our study 44.6% had never used any contraceptive compared to 55% in Srivastava et al's ¹ study and 8% in Young et al's study done in New Zealand.

In our study among the users of contraceptives 37.9% had taken oral contraceptive pills and 31% had used condoms while in Srivastava et al's ¹ study 34% had used condoms, 26% natural methods and only 18% oral pills.

In a study done in fishermen in Tamil Nadu ⁴ almost two-fifths of the respondents had ever used some type of contraception during their married life and sterilization was the most accepted method. Singh ⁵

et al in a study from Manipur conclude that 70% of the couples had adopted permanent family planning methods. In our study 27% of the used had accepted tubectomy. India being multilinguistic, multireligious and multiethnic population, it is necessary to develop special program to tackle the needs of different groups.

Conclusion

Our study highlights that knowledge and awareness doesn't always lead to the use of contraceptives. One needs to understand the level of awareness and practices in the community before implementing the family planning program. There is a need to educate and motivate the couples along with improvement in family planning services to promote the contraceptives.

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