

BARRIERS TO UTILIZATION OF MODERN METHODS OF FAMILY PLANNING AMONGST WOMEN IN A COMMUNITY SOUTH-SOUTH OF NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

Background: Access to safe, effective and affordable contraception is recognized by the world health organization (WHO) as a universal human right.

Objective: This study is aimed at determining awareness, acceptability and barriers to the utilization of modern methods of family planning amongst the women in south-south Nigeria.

Subjects and Methods: This was a cross-sectional study using structured interviewer administered questionnaires to 145 pregnant women at the antenatal booking clinic in Sacred Heart Hospital, Obudu, Cross-Rivers State, Nigeria from June to September 2010.

Results: Majority (98.6%) of the respondents knew at least one method of family planning. The commonest known methods included; Condom (35.2%), periodic abstinence (26.2%) and oral contraceptive pills (16.6%). Out of the 145 respondents, 118(81.4%) accepted family planning. Out of these number, 85(72.0%) have ever used any method while 33 (28%) had not. Barriers to usage of modern methods of family planning were: concern of safety to health (25.9%), Husband's opposition (24.2%), desire for more children (17.2%), Religious prohibition (13.8%), lack of money (10.3%) and fear of side effects (8.6%). There was a significant relationship between acceptability and utilization ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusion: The study finds numerous barriers to utilization of family planning methods despite high awareness and acceptability by the women. Strategies to improving access and utilization to family planning methods should therefore include; the involvement of male partners as well as traditional/religious leaders, economic empowerment of women and continuous research aimed at improving safety and reduction of side effects profile of the methods among others.

Key words: Family planning methods, awareness, acceptability, contraceptive pills, condom.

INTRODUCTION

Family planning is an important component of reproductive health that affects the lives of women, their family members and the nation as a whole. Through family planning, couples can plan the number and spacing of their children^{1,2}. Women can pursue good education, live economically independent lives, and contribute to community and national development by adopting effective family planning strategies³.

Studies have shown that high parity, short inter pregnancy intervals and extremes of age are associated with poor pregnancy outcomes². Furthermore, the use of contraceptive methods by the women in the reproductive age contributes to the prevention of unwanted pregnancies and subsequent induced abortion. Unsafe abortion in a country with restrictive abortion laws like Nigeria is a major contributor to maternal mortality⁴.

The development of more effective and acceptable

modern methods of contraceptives that have fewer side effects has resulted to the improvement in contraceptive prevalence rate worldwide. The story is however not very encouraging in Nigeria⁴. The proportion of Nigerian women using modern method of contraceptive rose from 4% in 1990 to 8% in 2003. The rates were 9% and 10% in 2007 and 2008 respectively^{4,5}. The statistics is even worse if regional data is to be considered.

Several women who use any method of family planning depend on natural and traditional methods which have high failure rates⁴. Studies done in

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different parts of Nigeria have enumerated several barriers to the utilization of modern methods of family planning. This study is aimed at determining awareness, acceptability and barriers to the utilization of modern methods of family planning amongst the women in a community south-south of Nigeria.

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

This was a cross-sectional study using structured interviewer administered questionnaires to 145 pregnant women at the antenatal booking clinic in Sacred Heart Hospital, Obudu, Cross-Rivers State, Nigeria from June to September 2010. The hospital is a secondary level health care facility. It is the largest and most equipped in the area and thus serves as a referral center to other health facilities. It offers health services to patients from neighboring Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Cross Rivers State. The hospital has facilities for performing ultrasonography, Obstetrics & Gynaecological surgeries and basic hospital investigations. The maternity section is a 33 bed unit manned by an Obstetrician and Gynaecologist, eight trained nurses/midwives and four medical officers. The antenatal booking clinic for new attendees is held twice in a week. Approximately forty clients are attended to per clinic visit. The maternity unit records more than 1000 deliveries annually.

The hospital management gave ethical clearance for the study. Consent was also obtained from the patients before they were involved in the study.

The sample size was estimated using the statistical formula of Fisher $N = Z^2 pq/d^2$.

Where:

N= minimum sample size for a statistically significant survey.

Z= Normal deviant at the portion of 95% confidence interval=1.96.

P= prevalence of modern method of contraception usage by the women in Nigeria (10%)⁵.

Q=1-p. d= Margin of error acceptable or measure of precision=0.05.

N= 138, However the sample size was adjusted to 145.

RESULTS

Of the 145 respondents, 38.8% were aged 21-25 years. Most (39.3%) had secondary and post-secondary (30.3%) level of education. Distribution

by occupation showed that civil servants constituted 22.8%, traders 22.1%, students 19.3% among others. Most (44.1%) were of parity 1 to 2. Majority (98.6%) of the respondents knew at least one method of family planning. Majority (62.2%) heard of the methods from medical personnel in the hospital. The commonest known methods included; Condom (35.2%), periodic abstinence (26.2%) and oral contraceptive pills (16.6%). Those who accepted the usage of family planning were 118(81.4%). Out of these number, 85(72.0%) have ever used any method while 33 (28%) had not. Barriers to usage of modern methods of family planning were: concern of safety to health (25.9%), Husband's opposition (24.2%), desire for more children (17.2%), Religious prohibition (13.8%), lack of money (10.3%) and fear of side effects (8.6%). There was a significant relationship between acceptability and utilization ($p < 0.05$).

DISCUSSION

Access to safe, effective and affordable contraception is recognized by the world health organization (WHO) as a universal human right⁷. The WHO strategic approach has not only facilitated improvement in the provision of family planning services in some African countries but also promoted contraceptive prevalence rate above 50% for married women⁸.

Most (33.8%) of the women in the study were aged 21-25 years. This makes the need for utilization of family planning methods even more eminent. Majority (98.6%) of the women knew at least one method of family planning. This finding is similar to several studies done in different parts of Nigeria^{2, 4, 6, 9, 10}. The intensity of family planning enlightenment campaigns as well as integration of family planning into the strategy of HIV/AIDS/STI prevention and control could have accounted for the high awareness⁸.

The commonest methods known were the condom, periodic abstinence and oral pills. The extensive marketing of the condom in response to the HIV pandemic might have been responsible for the increase awareness of the condom^{4, 9, 10}. The oral pills like the condom are readily available over the counter at patent medicine stores, Pharmacy shops, health facilities and as such are the second contraceptive method of choice for women of reproductive age, particularly young married or unmarried females and students alike⁴. Most of our

studied population was young and either had completed a tertiary level of education or was pursuing a post-secondary education as at the time of the study. The natural and traditional methods of family planning are popular most probably due to the concern of women about the safety of modern methods as well as the fear of side effects of such methods on their health and future fertility.

The finding of medical personnel in hospital been responsible for most of the information about family planning method is similar to findings in other studies in Nigeria^{6,9,11}. There is need to sustain efforts in training and retraining of all cadre of health personnel towards building their capacity in offering family planning enlightenment and services to the communities.

The acceptability of family planning methods in this study was high ((81.4%). This finding is similar to that of other studies in the country^{1,6}. The high level of education of the respondents could have accounted for this. Studies have shown that well educated African couples are most likely to accept modern methods of contraceptives than less educated couples living in remote areas¹.

The myth that Family planning methods are not good for health of users needs to be corrected through client education and enlightenment. Similarly, the fear of side effects has become a persistent challenge to the utilization of modern family planning methods. Safety and side effects of contraception may be tackled by adequate screening of clients for pre existing health risk factors before the choice of contraceptive method is made. This is the reason why couples who intend to use contraception should consult qualified health personnel at a health care facility to be screened by the use of history, physical examination and simple tests¹².

The opposition of male partners to the use of family planning methods by the women again makes male involvement inevitable. Patriarchy which is the dominance of men over women which implies that the latter has to depend almost entirely on the former for every decision in the family can not be overlooked especially in the African setting¹³. Men's

dominance in decision making and policy formulation as well as implementation cuts across all levels of human endeavour.

Improving access to family planning services can not be tackled successfully without poverty reduction and empowerment of women. This is the focus of the first millennium development goal (MDG). The efforts of international donor agencies from developed nations and Non governmental organizations (NGOs) towards increasing contraceptive prevalence rates in developing countries as specified by the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) should be sustained⁷.

Advocacy to religious leaders and faith-based organizations towards improving acceptability and allay fears by couples in using family planning methods due to religious prohibition is a crucial necessity. Health risks related to age and parity have been summarized as the four too's- too young, too old, too many too close together³. Thus the benefits of child spacing through the effective use of family planning methods on the health of the women, family and nation should be the focus during counseling. Also, family planning counseling aimed at promoting reproductive health of the woman as well as extending services beyond family planning clinics, antenatal care clinics and VCT centres to involving postnatal /child ware fare clinics is recommended.

CONCLUSION

The study finds numerous barriers to utilization of family planning methods despite high awareness and acceptability by the women. These barriers were; concerns of the safety of the methods to health, husband's opposition, religious prohibition, lack of money, desire for more children and fear of side effects. Overcoming these barriers should be the concern of all stakeholders. Strategies to improving access to family planning methods should therefore include; the involvement of male partners as well as traditional/religious leaders, economic empowerment of women and continuous research aimed at improving safety and reducing side effect profile of the methods among others.

TABLES

Table 1: Socio-demographic features of respondents.

Age group	N(145)	100%
=15	3	2.1
16-20	25	17.2
21-25	49	33.8
26-30	45	31.0
31-35	19	13.1
36-40	3	2.1
41-45	1	0.7
Education		
None	19	13.1
Primary	25	17.2
Secondary	57	39.3
Post-secondary	44	30.3
Occupation		
Applicant	3	2.1
Farmers	23	15.9
Housewife	26	17.9
Students	28	19.2
Traders	32	22.1
Civil servants	33	22.8
Parity		
0	32	22.1
1-2	64	44.1
3-4	35	24.1
=5	14	9.7

Table 2: Family planning methods known by the respondents.

Methods	N(145)	100%
Condom	51	35.2
Periodic abstinence	38	26.2
Oral pills	24	16.6
Injectables	19	13.1
Foaming tablets	4	2.7
IUCD	3	2.0
Implants	2	1.4
BTL	2	1.4
None	2	1.4

Table 3: Source of information.

Source	N(143)	100%
Hospital	89	62.2
Friends	19	13.3
Radio/TV	17	11.9
Newspaper	12	8.4
Church	6	4.2

Table 4: Acceptability of family planning methods among the respondents.

Acceptability	N(145)	100%
Yes	118	81.4
No	25	17.2
Undecided	2	1.4

Table 5: Relationship between acceptability and utilization of family planning methods.

Acceptability	Utilization		Total Statistics
	No	Yes	
Yes	33(28.0%)	85(72.0%)	118(100.0%) X ² 39.87
No	24(96.0%)	1(4.0%)	25(100.0%) p=0.000
Undecided	1(50.0%)	1(50.0%)	2(100.0%)
Total	58(40.0%)	87(60.0%)	145(100.0%)

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