

Modern Birth Control Measures: Attitude and Perception of Rural Indian Women

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Abstract

Population control has become the biggest challenge for Indian Government. The government is making serious endeavors to spread the awareness about birth control measures in rural India. However, the level of awareness is very low in the rural parts of India. Rural women are using unsafe measures of birth control, which are affecting their health in different ways. The Government is spending lot of money on advertisements in order to spread awareness about birth control measures. Unsafe birth control measures are bringing down the productivity and leaving behind a number of long term effects. Therefore, this study will find out the level of awareness among rural Indian women about modern birth control measures. It will analyze the opinion of rural women about birth control measures and their attitude towards them. It will also measure the effectiveness of advertisement in bringing awareness among Indian rural women about birth control measures. The study will provide measures to promote modern birth control measures in a more effective manner.

Keywords: Birth Control Measures, Rural Indian Women, Awareness

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INTRODUCTION

India is aiming to become a superpower by the end of 2020. It is focusing on technological advancement and transference in administration. Though the government is investing a huge amount for the development of masses, it is not able to get the expected outcome. The population explosion is the foremost problem, which is acting as an obstacle to the development. As per the 2011 census, 1.34 billion people are living in India making it the second populous country in the world. It means India has over 17.85% of world population. In a few years, India is all set to grab the top position as the most populous country in the world by 2030. China has the highest population in the world with 1.41 billion people. Since 1952, the Government of India has introduced health policies underlining the importance of checking the population growth. India has vast rural population constituting over 72.2%, which still lives in over 6.38 lakh villages whereas 27.8% live in urban towns and cities. The population of some of the states in India is perhaps more than population of many countries. Uttar Pradesh

in India has a population of 190 million with a growth rate of 16.16 % is said to be equal to the population of Brazil. However, there is decline in Total Fertility Rate (TFR) from 3.3 in 1991 to 2.3 in 2013 but still a long way to reach replacement level of 2.1 TFR. This higher level of fertility is contributing the rapid growth of population. National Population Policy 2000 assumes importance as it was implemented in the same year when India's billionth baby was born. The policy has suggested constructive proposals and approaches to strike a balance between growth of population and the growth of economy.

The population policy of India has brought in qualitative change in the intervention of variety of integrated programmes to control population growth. It has introduced a variety of birth control measures under the Family Planning Programmes now rechristened as Family Welfare. However, nothing has prevented the high growth of population illustrating the poor influence of government's family welfare programmes. Though there is marginal decline in both birth rate and death rate, it has not achieved the accepted level. Birth rate is 22.22 that means number of children born per thousand persons in a year whereas death rate is 6.4, showing number of persons dying per thousand.

In India, family planning was dominated by sterilization programmes that was believed to be a programme meant more for women than for men. In a traditional society like India, women more than men became the target of sterilization programme and was branded as government programme especially in rural areas. Therefore, the other birth control measures were relegated to the background and suffered due to lack of aggressive programme to promote them. Statistics reveal that over 50 percent of the population uses some form of birth control or the other illustrating increased level of awareness among public. Today, due to decentralization of birth control products in the market, people can afford wide range of contraceptives. However, rural women are not giving much importance to birth control measures owing to ignorance, exploitation, and superstition in traditional families. The women have become the biggest victims of increasing population explosion. In rural India, a large number of women are illiterate (rural literacy rate 71% and urban 86%) and female literacy in rural area is very low at 58.8% and face gender inequality. They do not have the right to decide their family life. Superstitious beliefs in villages have affected the adoption of birth control measures. Many a time, women try unsafe non- medical means to terminate the pregnancy, which either becomes fatal or permanently damages their reproductive health. The perception of women towards birth control measures depends on their cultural background, education, economic status and the number of living children. This study will analyze the attitude of rural Indian women on the modern birth control measures.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives are framed in accordance with the need of the researcher to analyze the attitude and perception of rural Indian women on the modern birth control measures;

- To study the rural women's awareness about modern birth control measures

- To find out the reasons, which are preventing women from using modern birth control measures
- To study the approaches to create awareness about modern birth control measures

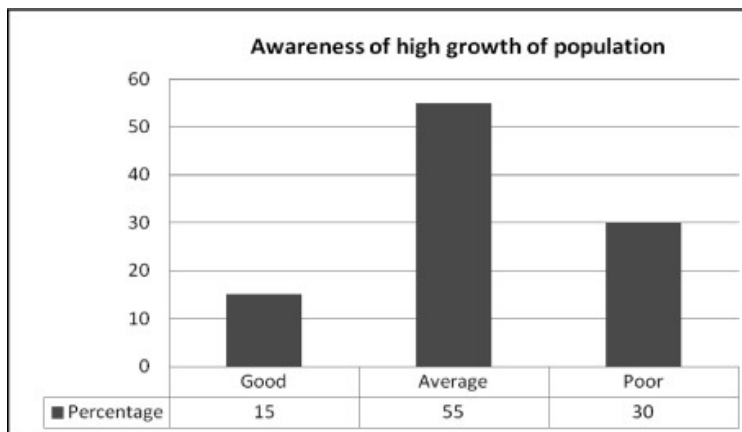
METHODOLOGY

Since the study is wholly based on audience perspective, survey research method was found appropriate. The study was conducted between July and September 2016. The data was collected through survey using questionnaire. Sample was selected using simple random sampling method. A sample of 50 rural women were selected from 3 villages of Sullia taluk in Dakshina Kannada district in Karnataka state. The respondents were between the age group of 20-28 years. Dakshina Kannada district comes under Mysore revenue division and is the coastal belt of Karnataka. It has high literacy, GDP and media penetration in the state. Rural people practice agriculture in this region and speak Kannada and Tulu languages. It shares border with Kerala integrating culture, social norms and economic prosperity of two regions.

Most of the young girls surveyed have completed their metric level education. Majority of them support their husbands in agriculture related works. They are also the members of self-help groups. Equal number of sample was collected from three villages. Questionnaire consisting both open ended and closed ended questions were distributed to the respondents with prior instructions.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

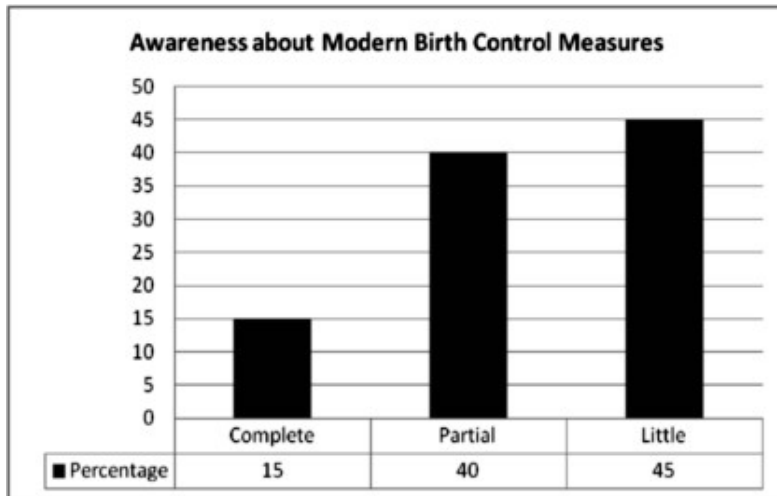
Graph 1 Awareness about high growth of population



It is clear that rural Indian women are aware of population explosion. They know that high population is a problem in the society. Among the respondents, 15% are completely aware of the negative impact of population growth. They regularly hear about the negative impact of population on India’s development. However, the awareness level is low at 30% among rural women. As far as majority of women surveyed is considered, (55%)

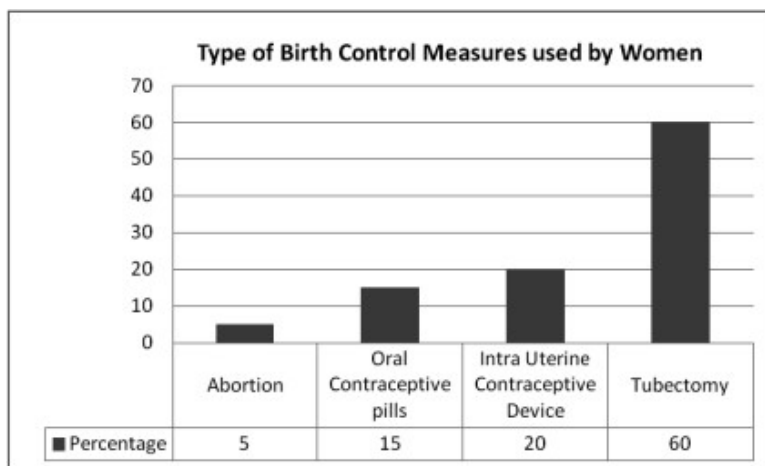
their level of awareness about the high growth of population is average. 55% of the respondents are partially aware of population growth and they do not know how it is affecting the country. They also feel that it is a long time problem. The remaining 30% are completely unaware about population growth.

Graph 2 Awareness about modern birth control measures



More than half of the respondents are aware of modern birth control measures. Only 15% are having the complete knowledge about modern birth control measures. 40 % of respondents say they have heard about few modern measures which are highly popular. 45% say that they have little knowledge about birth control measures. They recall the advertisements on birth control on television. However, they never attempted to know more about birth control.

Graph 3 Type of birth control measures used by respondents



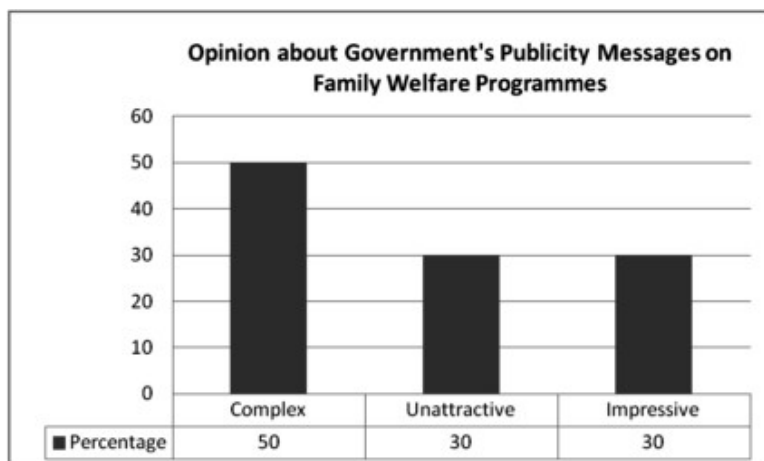
Only 5% of the respondents say that they have opted for abortion to terminate the unwanted pregnancy. The deformity of fetus is cited as the reason for abortion in all these cases. 15% of the respondents have used

oral contraceptive pills. 20% respondents have used Intra Uterine Contraceptive Device (IUCD), which is the temporary solution. Around 60% of the respondents have accepted permanent female sterilization called Tubectomy. In India less than 1% of males have undergone vasectomy increasing the burden of women in prevention of pregnancy. In Karnataka only 0.2% of men have opted for vasectomy against 57.4% of women opting for Tubectomy. The gender divide in preventing pregnancy is a big challenge to policy makers.

When probed about reasons for not adopting birth control measures, 40% of respondents cited fear of side effects denoting misconceptions about the modern birth control measures. They believe that they will encounter a number of health problems after adopting modern birth control measures. Most of them are depending on agriculture. In their opinion, they may not be able to work in the farm after the medical procedure. Other contraceptive measures like pills are expensive for them. Few women have shared that trying birth control measures will affect the health of the baby, which they conceive in future denoting myths surrounding these scientific preventive measures.

Majority of the women desires to have at least one male child. The study reveals that 30% of respondents say that they could not try any contraceptive methods. Because they and their families strongly believe that a male child is necessary for a family. Using contraceptive will reduce chances of having a male child as producing a male offspring in Indian family is not only mandatory but also a great responsibility. Aspiring for male child is part of Indian social norm as it is linked with continuation of family. This attitude is supported by their religious beliefs too and family with male offspring is considered as fortunate. It is the desire for a male child that keeps increasing the size of the family and produces more daughters. Interestingly 20% of the respondents say that their husbands do not feel comfortable to have sex when they use a birth control measure. However, 10% of respondents do not have any particular reason for not using any of them and do not feel great about modern birth control measures.

Graph 5 Opinion about Government's efforts in creating Awareness about modern birth control measures



Interestingly, 30% of the respondents feel that governments' initiative to create awareness about modern birth control measures is impressive. However, 50% of the respondents say that the information disseminated is complex. They are not comprehensive. Only 20% of respondents feel that they are unattractive. Nevertheless, they also feel that the publicity tools used by the Government are reaching the rural mass.

- Most of the women are aware of birth control measures. However, the number of women using birth control measures is very less.
- Religion has a dominant role in keeping the birth control measures away from the women community. Women believe that preventing birth of a child is a sin committed against God.
- Even though no respondent has publicly admitted choosing abortion to kill the female fetus, they are in favor of male child.
- Women are not able to take independent decision. Family members especially husband and mother-in-law decide the number of children in a family.
- Men have a negative attitude towards modern birth control measures. Therefore, always women are forced to take care of preventive methods.
- Women have many misconceptions about the impact of birth control measures.
- Women also feel that some of the birth control measures are expensive.
- Public service advertisements about modern birth control measures are not highly effective.
- Women rarely discuss about birth control measures. Most of them feel that it is not a topic, which can be discussed in public.

CONCLUSION

The present study analyzed the attitude of rural Indian women on the modern birth control measures. No doubt, modern birth control measures are helping control the population growth. However, the pace is very slow and there is no rapid decline in growth rate, which hovers around 22. Nevertheless, according to reports, between 1965-2009 period, the percentage of married women accepting birth control measures increased from 13 % to 48% illustrating change in the attitude of women. The Government has to focus on creating awareness about modern birth control measures. The message of family planning must be reached in an effective manner. The fear about the effects of birth control measures can be removed only by enhancing the awareness. The creative advertising campaigns with simple messages can make difference. The collaboration of government and nongovernmental organizations can strengthen the family planning program. Those women who are accepting birth control measures like tubectomy must be able to receive proper medical care. More men should

be encouraged to accept vasectomy to protect the health of women who naturally suffers from biological weakness after childbirth. The financial incentives to those families who accept the modern birth control measures can encourage others to choose the same path.

Today more and more girls are going to school. However, the formal schooling is not able to touch the sensitive issues like birth control due to conventional education system. Providing special education to women about family planning can change their perspective and attitude towards the modern birth control measures. The rural women must be able to discuss about birth Control measures without any fear or awkwardness. To create such environment for women, Government, NGOs and Civil Society must work hand in hand and run aggressive integrated family welfare programmes.

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