

Extended Abstract

Testing Communication Variables among Married Couples and Contraceptive Use in Nigeria

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Short Abstract

In most cultures, men have a focal role in decision-making regarding sexual relations and contraceptive use. The study examined the effect of some communication variables among married couples and contraceptive use in Nigeria. A sample of 800 women were taken and four communication variables were tested: whether couples had ever discussed family planning (FP), whether they had discussed it in the past 12 months; whether they intended to use FP; and whether women believed their spouse has prior knowledge of FP. Findings showed that women with intention to use FP has a significant odds of discussing FP with their spouse (95%, OR= 1.6–2.2) and those who communicated with their spouse had high odds of using FP (95%, OR= 7.2-9.3). Women who believed their spouse has a prior knowledge of FP have significant odds of discussing it (95%, OR=5.4-7.1) than women who does not believe their spouse has knowledge of FP. The study also evidenced that spousal communication was associated with subsequent FP use. Our findings have implications for family planning communication programs.

Keywords: Contraceptive, Communication, Couples

Background

In most cultures, men have a focal role in decision-making regarding sexual relations, family size and contraceptive use. Previous studies have shown that men's power and their preferences regarding family planning have a significant role in the adoption of contraception, as well as women's general reproductive health. Research suggests that male involvement can increase uptake and continuation of family planning methods by improving spousal communication through pathways of increased knowledge or decreased male opposition [1-3]. Yet, despite growing evidence on the benefits of engaging men in reproductive health decision-making, fertility rates and unmet need for family planning remain high in many sub-Saharan African countries. While there are many influential factors, low contraceptive prevalence has been attributed in part to men's opposition to or non- involvement in family planning [4-6].

Male engagement has historically been depicted as obstructive by impeding women's decision-making on use of family planning, or non-existent among male partners who are absent altogether due to lack of interest in matters related to reproductive health [7]. However, at the same time, men dominate decision-making regarding family size and their partner's use of contraceptive methods in many traditionally patriarchal settings [8,9]. Women point to their male partner's resistance to family planning as a significant barrier to uptake and continuation, resulting in decisions to use contraceptive methods covertly or not at all [10,11]. Fear of spousal retaliation due to disagreements about whether to use contraception has also been shown to be a significant barrier among women [12].

In Nigeria, the National Policy on Population recognizes men as a special group that needs to be sensitized on their roles in family life. Since men are the dominant decision-makers within the family and their reproductive preference and motivation influence the decision to reproduce, there is need to know the factors that influence men's desire for more children. More importantly, the active participation of men in fertility regulation is vital since they constitute an appreciable proportion of policy makers, administrators, politicians, religious and community leaders [13-15].

Research Question

The study examined the effect of some communication variables among married couples and contraceptive use in Nigeria.

Methodology

Data were obtained from the Nigerian Urban Reproductive Health (NURHI). The survey was conducted among a sample of 800 women respondents in Ilorin South Local Government Area, Nigeria. Four spousal communication variables were tested: whether couples had ever discussed family planning, whether they had discussed it in the past 12 months; whether they intended to use FP; and whether women believed their spouse has prior knowledge of FP. The variables have 0.76 cronbach alpha coefficient. We employed multivariate techniques to determine whether these variables were associated with contraceptive use. Analyses were done using STATA® Statistics and Data Analysis.

Results

It was evidenced from the results that husbands and wives reported joint spousal decision-making. The marginal frequencies however show that men are less likely

than their wives to report joint decision-making and are more likely to report that they alone usually take decision. Findings show that women with intention to use FP has a significant odds of discussing FP with their spouse (95%, OR= 1.6–2.2) and those who communicated with their spouse had high odds of using FP (95%, OR= 7.2-9.3). Women who believed their spouse has a prior knowledge of FP have significant odds of discussing it (95%, OR=5.4-7.1) than women who does not believe their spouse has knowledge of FP. The study findings also indicated that spousal communication was associated with subsequent family planning use and among couples that had not being discussing family planning, exposure led to communication, which in turn led to family planning use.

Discussions and Conclusion

The effects of some communication variables were tested in this study. Variables such as whether couples had ever discussed family planning, whether they had discussed it in the past 12 months and whether they intended to use FP; and whether women believed their spouse approved of family all have significant impact on the adoption of contraceptives. This study revealed that married spouses who discuss and take joint decisions are more likely to use contraceptives than spouses who are not discussing. The finding that both wives' and husbands' perceptions of communication play a role in the adoption of contraception suggests that policies aimed at reducing high population growth rates should integrate men into family planning programs. Wives have been found to be the principal source of information for husbands about fertility limitation. Programs may be more effective in reducing fertility if they recognize the importance of wives as transmitters of information about male methods to their husbands.

Our findings also have implications for family planning communication programs and research. Future research efforts can be strengthened by data that provide better insights into the predictors of spousal communication and family planning use.

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