

Attitudes and Roles in Fertility and Family Planning Decision Making among Men and Women from Uttar Pradesh, India: A Focus on the Urban Poor

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Abstract

The scope of research on family planning knowledge and decision-making has expanded over recent decades from a nearly exclusive focus on women's knowledge, attitudes and intentions to a more comprehensive approach that emphasizes the importance of men's involvement. This study examines the determinants of fertility desires, contraceptive knowledge, attitudes, decision making and use among urban women and men in 4 urban cities in Uttar Pradesh, India. Data were collected from approximately 3,000 currently married women and 1,500 currently married men in each of the four cities. Our findings demonstrate similarities and differences between women's and men's fertility and family planning attitudes and their unmet need for modern contraception. The findings from this study that includes a large, representative sample of women and men from four major urban areas contributes to our understanding of how to better meet the family planning needs of urban poor and non-poor in Uttar Pradesh.

Literature Review

The scope of research on family planning knowledge and decision-making has expanded over recent decades from a nearly exclusive focus on women's knowledge, attitudes and fertility intentions to a more comprehensive approach that emphasizes the importance of men's involvement (Laslee and Becker, 1997; Bankole and Singh, 1998; Mason and Smith, 2000; Singh, et al, 1998). This wider lens has allowed researchers to see more clearly how men and women differ – and often agree – in their preferences for family size, knowledge of contraceptive methods, and attitudes toward family planning.

The findings from one of the most comprehensive analyses of male contraceptive knowledge and use and fertility preferences show that women were also more likely than men to express an interest in limiting family size (Ezeh, et al., 1996). With data on the knowledge and preferences of both sexes, researchers are better able to understand influences on fertility and contraceptive use.

Interventions that target couples are more effective than those that target only one sex (Becker, 1996). Moreover promoting male involvement in family planning is associated with more positive family planning attitudes and greater joint decision-making. Multiple studies show that when a husband has favorable views of contraception, the couple is more likely to use a method (Salway, 1994; Lasee and Becker, 1997). Research in India shows that in most families, men are recognized as heads of households and therefore influence the desired family size and actual contraceptive use. Ensuring greater male participation in family planning has been one of the major areas of emphasis in the Government of India's Reproductive and Child Health program.

A better understanding of the correlation between gender and fertility intentions, contraceptive use and knowledge of and attitudes toward family planning methods is crucial to better develop interventions that lead to decreased unmet need for family planning. To appropriately and effectively address the needs of both men and women, program designers must first understand how men and women view family planning and what differences exist between the sexes.

Despite near-universal knowledge of at least one method of family planning among both men and women in Uttar Pradesh, actual fertility exceeds desired family size at the state level and state-wide unmet need for family planning is among the highest in the country (NFHS-III, 2007). Though analyses comparing urban and rural differences exist at the national level, little research has been done specifically on gender differences in contraceptive knowledge and attitudes and fertility intentions in urban Uttar Pradesh. To understand if patterns of high fertility and unmet need extend to urban Uttar Pradesh, and what role differing gender preferences might play on fertility outcomes, it is important to identify the effects of gender on fertility desires, contraceptive knowledge, attitudes, decision making and use in various urban sites throughout the state. Moreover a greater understanding of differences in these patterns between poor and non-poor in urban areas is needed to inform program design.

Study design

This study examines the determinants of fertility intentions and contraceptive use among urban women and men in Uttar Pradesh. The data were collected in early 2010 as part of a baseline survey for The Measurement, Learning, and Evaluation (MLE) Project. The MLE project is an impact evaluation of the Urban Reproductive Health Initiative (Urban RH Initiative), an initiative to increase access to high-quality family planning services for the urban poor in developing countries. The Urban RH Initiative is expected to increase modern contraceptive use in select urban areas of four countries: Senegal, Nigeria, Kenya, and India (Uttar Pradesh).

Baseline data for the MLE project was collected at both the individual level and at service delivery points. At the individual level, information was collected from a representative sample of households and all currently married women ages 15-49 (or men ages 18-54) in selected households were approached for an interview. The selected households were different for the women and men samples. Data were collected from approximately 3,000 currently married women and 1,500 currently married men in each of the four intervention cities (Allahabad, Agra, Aligarh, and Gorakhpur) for a total sample size of 12,000 women and 6,000 men. The data are unique since they provide a recent, large, representative sample of men and women for each study city in Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state in India. The multi level analysis will examine the determinants of use of contraceptive services amongst the urban poor in each city and also using pooled data across all the four cities. The analysis will also examine the gender differences between men and women in fertility preferences and use of family planning services.

Results

Using data from one of the cities to demonstrate the preliminary findings, the current modern contraceptive prevalence rate in Allahabad city is 48% with minimal variation across wealth quintiles. The CPR is 46% among the lowest wealth quintile and 51% among the highest, though greater variation is observed in the other cities. In terms of the method mix, sterilization accounts for half of the CPR followed by condoms at 35%. Pills and IUDs are 7% share each. Knowledge of at least one contraceptive method among men and women is universal in Allahabad. For the majority of women (86%), TV was the first source of information on any contraceptive method, followed by their spouses (27%) and friends (24%). Approximately two-thirds of men reported friends (64%) and TV (63%) as the first source of information followed by health providers (38%).

It is interesting to note the difference in attitudes of women and men towards contraceptive methods. A higher proportion of men (80%) considered condoms to be an effective contraceptive method as compared to women (63%). However, a higher proportion of men (35%) suggested that condoms reduce sexual pleasure compared to women (15%). Almost 70% of the women reported an ideal number of children to be two, and 21% suggested more than two children. In comparison, 62% of the men reported two as their ideal number of children, while 28% preferred more than two children.

Data on fertility preference indicates that a large proportion of women desire to delay or limit childbearing. Moreover, there is a large mismatch between desire to delay or limit childbearing and actual use of contraceptives. In Allahabad, 17% of women with two living children are sterilized. Notably, 62% of the women with two children do not want any more children; this is indicative of a high unmet need for limiting methods. Data on the future intentions to use family planning suggest that while 25% of men and 34% women are current non-users, 75% of men do not intend to use contraception in next twelve months compared to 30% of women.

Further multivariate analyses will be performed to look at gender differences in fertility preferences, use of contraceptives and decision making for family planning. Particular emphasis will be on understanding the differential determinants of contraceptive use between men and women, the role of decision making, knowledge and attitudes as well as the relationship between unmet need and use of modern methods.

Discussion/Conclusion

The preliminary findings from this new study that includes a large, representative sample of women and men from four major urban areas contributes to our understanding of how to better meet the family planning needs of urban poor and non-poor in Uttar Pradesh. Our findings demonstrate similarities and differences between women's and men's fertility and family planning attitudes and their unmet need for modern contraception. Moreover, there is an inherent desire among women to shift from non-use of family planning to becoming users. However there is also a need to build higher awareness among men to use family planning to meet their and their partner's fertility desires. These types of awareness programs can be undertaken through the mass media or community mobilization events that engage men and women and lead to increased male involvement in family planning use.

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