

UNDERSTANDING FEMALE STERILIZATION IN PAKISTAN

Introduction

Female sterilization is the commonest method for family planning used in Pakistan and accounts for 38% of the modern method mix. This means that nearly 2 million Married Women of Reproductive Age (MWRA) are currently sterilized and around 175,000 undergo the procedure annually and sterilization constitutes 7% of all FP services provided. Most (73%) of all female sterilization procedure are conducted in government facilities. While the number of sterilizations has increased over the years, the total contribution of sterilization to the family planning method mix has remained unchanged at 38% and these appear to happen too late for most women to affect the size or the well being of the family. Female sterilizations are the most common in Sindh and Punjab where approximately 9% of all MWRA are sterilized and the least common in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where only 3% are sterilized.

Who Undergoes Sterilization

Sterilizations are uncommon below the age of 25 years and their use steadily increases thereafter. Women who undergo sterilization are on average 39 years old (compared to 32 years on average for MWRA) and have 6 children (compared to less than 4 for all other MWRA). Interestingly, they form a distinct population group as they tend to have more children than their age-matched peers. They are also slightly more likely to be rural residents. The chances of a woman undergoing sterilization increase with increasing number of daughters, if she came from a large household or had children that have died. Her chances of undergoing sterilization decrease if she had previously used family planning, was from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa or from the wealthiest quintile.

Where is the Need

In Pakistan around over 6 million women or twice as many as those availing family planning services have an unmet need for family planning. Of these 2/3rd or around 3.3 million have a need to limit families and would benefit from access to sterilization. However, current system only serves 175,000 with sterilizations or around

SALIENT POINTS

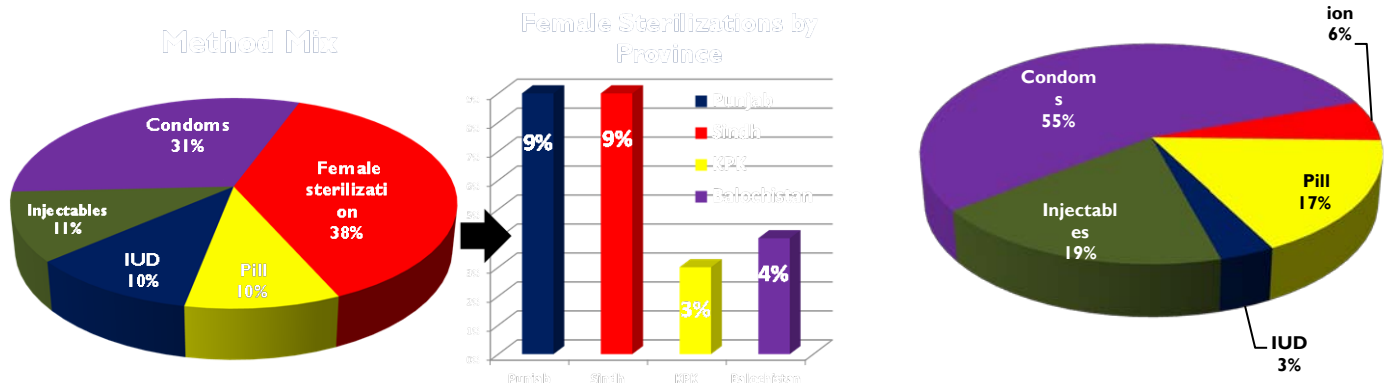
- Sterilizations may constitute 38% of the method mix but they only form 7% of all FP services.
- The 175,000 sterilization procedures that happen every year nationwide, contrast with an Unmet Need for limiting families among 3.3 million couples
- Those who avail sterilization in Pakistan do after 6 children and around age 39, in other words, too late to limit families
- Women availing sterilization are poorer and have more limited access to family planning service during their lives

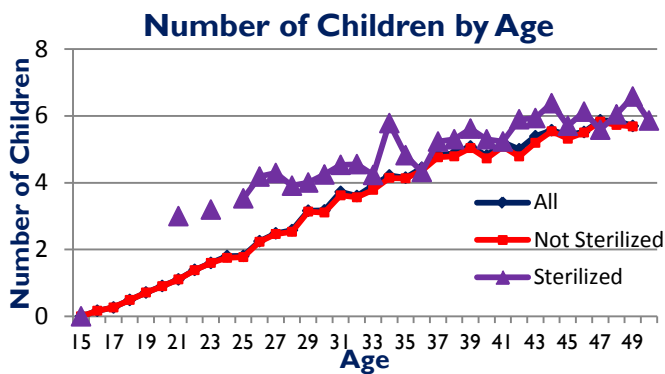
5% of those with a need for limiting. A massive scale up in services will be needed to meet current need for limiting families. Although the private sector only performs a quarter of sterilizations today, private NGOs will have to be recruited into the provider mix to achieve these goals.

Who provides Sterilization?

Most (73%) of sterilization procedures are conducted in facilities of the Population Welfare Departments (PWD). In total around 175,000 sterilization procedures are conducted nationwide and of these PWD facilities are responsible for 127,000 and NGO/ private clinics for 40,000. This comes to around 40 procedures per PWD facility per year or fewer than one a week. This situation reflects the lack of referrals to PWD facilities from other sources such as lady health workers or health facilities.

Service Mix





What does it mean

Worldwide, female sterilization constitutes around 40% of the method mix and higher use of sterilization is usually associated with limited availability of family planning choices. This is also true for Pakistan, where however, sterilizations happen too late – after the 6th child and when a woman is nearly 40 years old - compared with India and some South American countries where sterilizations happen before age 30 years and with 3-4 children. Thus this expensive procedure fails to reduce fertility or increase well being of families in Pakistan.

Recommendations

Going forward, there is a need to improve access and reliability of family planning services and the methods that are available to communities. Sterilization is an important component of this repertoire but to be effective it must happen earlier and more strategically.

Since the bulk of sterilizations happen in facilities run by the Population Welfare Departments, these facilities must be linked with the lady health workers and health facilities of the Health Departments which then refer patients directly to these facilities. Currently virtually no referrals happen between the two and this must change.

One way to promote this would be to have checklists for health providers and councilors such as lady health workers to actively discuss family planning and to refer anyone wishing to limit their family for sterilization or a suitable long term method.

Government and non-government actors should expand choices, access and quality of family planning services that are available in Pakistan so that couples can control the timing of their children better and limit their families when they want to.

Several large NGOs now operate quality clinics that are able to provide sterilizations and IUD insertions. These must also become part of the referral system of Health Department facilities and the Lady Health Workers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Family Planning methods, choices and services must increase in public and private sector
- Lady Health Workers and Health Facilities must use checklists to ask about FP needs and refer clients with needs to either Population Welfare or private/ NGO facilities for sterilizations or IUD insertion
- Role of private sector including NGOs must be expanded in FP in general and for sterilizations or IUDs in specific

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