

How Family Planning Decisions Differ When Women Choose Alone vs. When they Choose Together with their Husbands

Introduction

The use and choice of family planning method is mainly considered a woman's responsibility, although literature suggests that husbands tend to dominate these decisions, particularly in developing countries and poor communities.^{1,2} Recent survey data suggest that husbands and wives make the majority of FP and fertility decisions jointly.³ Given the asymmetrical power dynamic in many poor households in Pakistan, we explored these joint decisions.

Method

RADS and AHK-F annually conduct household surveys for the Urban Impact Laboratory-Dhok Hassu, Rawalpindi. The data used in this analysis is from the annual survey conducted in 2017. The primary respondents were Married Women of Reproductive Age (MWRAs).

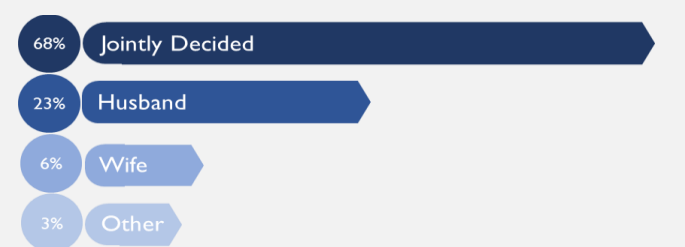
Findings

30% of married couples were using a modern method. This included condoms (53%), injections (17%), female sterilization (12%), pills (9%), and IUCDs (3%).

1. Making FP Decisions

Among FP users, 68% reported deciding which contraceptive to use jointly. Husband alone accounted for 23%, while the wife alone made the decision 6% of the time.

Figure 1: Main FP decision maker



2. The Method Choice Varies by Who Decides

Method choice changes based on whether the decision was made by the husband, wife, or jointly. When husband and wife jointly decide on family planning, a majority use condoms (53%), followed by female sterilization (17%) and injections (15%). When the husband alone decides on family planning majority of married couples use short-term contraceptive methods, i.e., condoms (69%), injections (14%), and pills (12%). Whereas, when the wives solely take FP decision, 44% use injections, and 37% use pills. These differences are statistically significant.

Interpretation

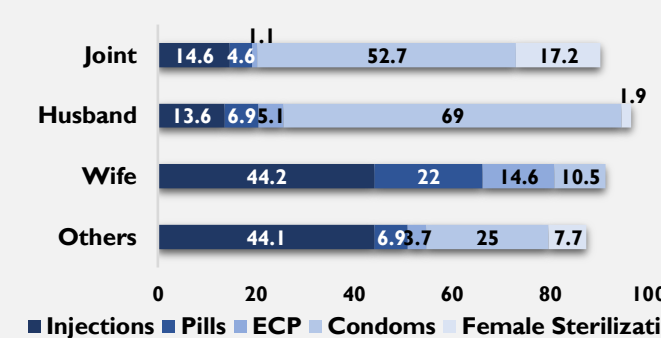
Data suggests that what is considered a joint decision mirrors the choices of husbands, perhaps reflecting patriarchal views in many low-income families that constituted our survey.³ When the husband is the sole decision maker, the choices are very male-centric (condom). Very few wives reported making decisions alone, and in such

Key Takeaways

- Most decisions are made jointly (68%) followed by husband alone (23%)
- When jointly decided or by the husband alone, condoms are the commonest method
- Wives deciding alone prefer injections and pills
- Patterns are similar when decisions are made jointly or by husband alone, and very different from when the wife decides alone
- Joint decisions may be disproportionately influenced by the husbands

cases they chose mostly woman-centric methods (injections and pills), perhaps reflecting confidence and privacy.⁴

Figure 2: Variation in the method used when decided by (Joint, Husband, Wife, and Others)



Recommendations

1. FP programs should better understand “mutual” decisions and focus more on identifying women’s choices.
2. An approach that promotes a woman’s choice would be rights-based and lead to a healthier (and better quality) method mix.

¹World Health Organization. "Ensuring human rights in the provision of contraceptive information and services: guidance and recommendations." (2014)
² Chandra-Mouli, Venkatraman, et al. "Contraception for adolescents in low- and middle-income countries: needs, barriers, and access." *Reprod Health* 11.1 (2014)
³ Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017-18
⁴ Kamran, et al. "Family Planning through the lens of men: Readiness, preferences, and challenges." (2015).
⁵ Khan, A. A. (2021). Family Planning Trends and Programming in Pakistan. *JPMA.*, 71(11),

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