

Research Article

Contraceptive Practices and the Reasons for Non-Utilization of Contraceptives among Married Women in an Urban Slum

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Abstract

Background: Despite the early institution of a family planning program, following its inception, Pakistan is still struggling to stabilize its fast-growing population.

Objectives: The objectives of the study were, to determine the contraceptive practices & related factors among married women in an urban slum and also to assess the reasons for non-utilization of contraceptives among these women.

Methods: The Cross-sectional study was conducted in an urban slum, Shah di Khui, in district Lahore following approval. A total of 300 eligible married females were selected through a systematic random sampling technique. After obtaining informed consent, information was solicited using a structured pretested questionnaire in privacy. Confidentiality of participants was maintained. SPSS version 24 was used for data analysis. The chi-square test was used to determine a statistically significant relationship between independent and dependent variables.

Results: It was found that 33.7% of married women were using contraceptives as compared to 66.3% of non-users. Among users, 76.2% were using Modern methods and 23.8% were using traditional methods. The duration of marriage ($p=0.000$), education standing of the respondent ($p=0.012$) and her spouse ($p=0.003$), and total number of alive children ($p=0.018$) were significantly related to contraceptive usage. The main reasons for non-utilization were a desire for more children (30.2%), fear of side effects (25.1%), objection by spouse/in-laws (21.1%), and Lack of knowledge (15.6%).

Conclusion: It was concluded that only 33.7% of slum dweller married women were using contraceptives. Contraceptive usage was found to be related significantly with the duration of marriage, Education status of husband and wife, and total number of living children. There is a need to make targeted efforts to address barriers and enhance uptake in this often-neglected segment of society.

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Keywords | Contraceptive usage, Pakistan, urban slum, Family Planning, Barriers, Unmet needs



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Introduction

Family planning is one of the most cost-effective and empowering interventions that can play a pivotal role in saving valuable lives.¹ It reduces morbidity

and mortality, adds to the sense of well-being, and leads to increased quality of life among females.² Pakistan was one of the pioneers among Asian countries for establishing a family planning program, however, it has not yet reaped the benefit of this endeavor despite the passage of more than five decades. The growth rate remains high at 2.4 % per annum and fertility decline has been very low in comparison with most neighboring Asian countries.^{3,4} Currently it is the 5th most populous country in the world and predictions are that it will cross the 295 million mark in 2050.^{1,5}

Although over 95% of Pakistani women know about contraception, a very small proportion is actually using these methods, referred to as the know-do gap.⁶ As a consequence the national contraceptive prevalence rate remains low at around 34.2%, as many Pakistanis believe that the country's family planning program has some hidden motives.³ It has been found that around 25% of couples were using induced abortion to “deal with” unwanted pregnancies rather than using contraceptives, resulting in many unsafe abortions.^{7,8}

This is a very alarming situation so it is imperative to study the reasons why females are hesitant to use modern family planning methods especially those residing in urban slums as limited research has been conducted on the contraceptive usage pattern among hard-to-reach slum dwellers. This large segment of the population is subject to high resident concentration, meager living conditions, and frail infrastructural provisions.³

The objective of conducting this study was to specifically determine the contraceptive practices of women residing in an urban slum, study the factors affecting utilization, and assess the reasons for non-utilization. The findings from this research were intended to provide important insight for improving contraceptive usage in the target population, leading to better implementation of family planning programs.

Methods

A cross-sectional study of 6 months duration was conducted in an urban slum Shah di Khui located in Lahore, after obtaining approval regarding the ethical and methodological aspects of the study. A sample size of 300 was calculated with a 95% confidence level, 3.5% margin of error, and taking an expected percentage of the duration of marriage i.e. 8.7% (least among all) factors affecting the utilization of contraceptives among married women.⁹ A total of 300 married females of reproductive age group, who met inclusion criteria were selected

by the systematic random sampling technique. Every 3rd house was reached. After informed consent, information was collected from the respondents by the principal researcher herself and recorded in a structured pre-tested questionnaire. All ethical considerations were adhered to and the confidentiality of the participants was maintained. The subjects were interviewed for regular contraceptive usage during the last calendar year till the survey time. The reasons for non-utilization were interrogated by non-users. Data was entered and analyzed using SPSS Ver.24. The qualitative variables were summarized as frequency percentages. The chi-square test was utilized to determine the relationship between various independent variables and contraceptive usage. The p-value <0.05 was taken as significant.

Results

The mean age of the study respondents was found to be 30.47 + 6.73 years. The sociodemographic characteristics of participants are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of study respondents residing in an urban slum (n = 300)

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage	
Age at marriage	< 18 years	96	32.0
	≥18 years	204	68.0
Duration of marriage	0-4 years	61	20.3
	≥5years	239	79.7
Education level Respondent	Illiterate	187	62.3
	Literate	113	37.7
Education level Spouse	Illiterate	149	49.7
	Literate	151	50.3
Working Status	Working	27	9.0
	Housewife	273	91.0
Total family Income/month	≤10,000 PKR	215	71.7
	>10,000 PKR	85	28.3
Total number of living children	0—3	171	57.0
	4 and above	129	43.0

Table 2: Contraceptive Practices among married women in an urban slum (n = 300)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage	
Contraceptive use	Yes	101	33.7 %
	No	199	66.3%
Total	300	100%	

Regarding contraceptive practices about 199(66.3%) married females were not using any contraceptive method while only 101(33.7%) of the interviewed females were using contraceptives. (Table 2)

Among the 101 contraceptive users, the majority 77 (76.2%) females were using Modern methods whereas 24 (23.8%) females were using Traditional methods

of family planning. The specific type of contraceptive being used is shown in figure 1.

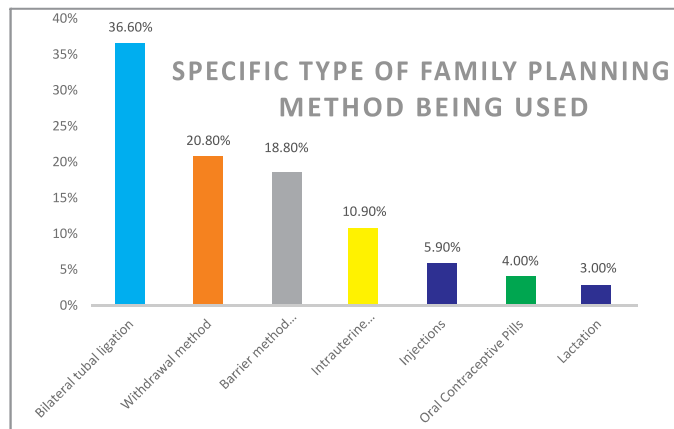


Figure 1: The specific type of family planning methods used by study respondents in urban slums.

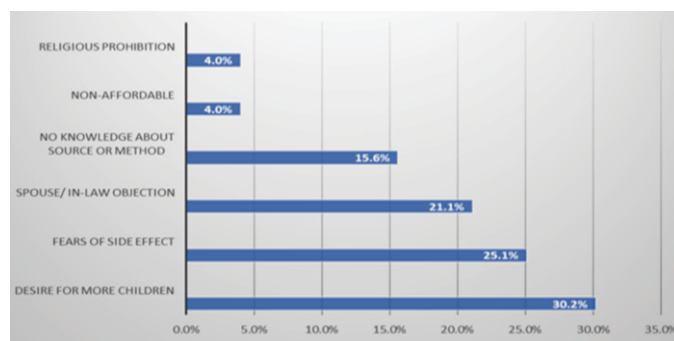


Figure 2: Reasons for non-utilization of contraceptives among non-users in an urban slum

The analysis of reasons for non-utilization of contraceptives showed that the majority 60 (30.2%) non-user females had a desire for more children. Other reasons stated are depicted in Figure 2.

The contraceptive usage was significantly related to the duration of the marriage, the education status of both

the respondent and spouse, and the total number of living children. However, no statistically significant relationship was found with age at marriage. (Table 3)

Discussion

Family planning primarily relies on the use of contraception. However, slum dwellers in low- and middle-income countries often face challenges in accessing family planning services. The contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) among slum dwellers in this study was 33.7%, which is comparable to the national CPR of 34.2% according to the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017-18.^{3,10} Whereas it is lower in comparison to Bangladesh, which is a neighboring Muslim majority country having CPR of 62.4%.¹¹ This can be largely due to differences in factors such as education, permission to seek healthcare services, increasing access to family planning information, and women's involvement in family decision-making processes.

Some other studies conducted in Pakistan including slum areas have reported a variable contraceptive prevalence, ranging from 27% to 49.7%.^{12,13} This may be due to regional differences in important determinants of contraceptive usage as well as variable permeation of community Health workers. An encouraging aspect observed in the current study was that the majority of the contraceptive users in the slum (76.2%) were practicing modern methods. The modern methods of family planning are considered to be more effective as compared to the traditional methods and the most frequently used contraceptive method in the current study was bilateral tubal ligation (36.6%). This is in accordance

Table 3: Comparison of baseline characteristics of contraceptive users and non-users in urban slums (n = 300)

Variables	Contraceptive usage				Total n = 300	P- value
	Yes n = 101		No n = 199			
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%		
Duration of marriage in years	0-4 years	8	13.1	53	86.9	0.000*
	Greater than or equal to 5 years	93	38.9	146	61.1	
Education status of respondents	Illiterate	53	28.3	134	71.7	0.012*
	Literate	48	42.5	65	57.5	
Education status of the husband	Illiterate	38	25.5	111	74.5	0.003*
	Literate	63	41.7	88	58.3	
Total number of living children	0 - 3	48	28.07	123	72.0	0.018*
	4 and above	53	41.1	76	58.9	
Age at marriage	Less than 18 years	25	26.3	70	73.7	0.067
	Greater than or equal to 18 years	76	37.0	129	63.0	

with two studies conducted in India,^{14,15} whereas some other studies in Pakistan have reported condoms to be the most utilized modern method for contraception as the users considered it a safe, appropriate, and inexpensive method.^{16,17} A possible explanation of the marked variation of contraceptive practices in Pakistan could be the difference in sociodemographic background as well as economic, cultural, and traditional factors which may vary from place to place.¹⁸

Despite efforts to promote contraception in Pakistan, the desired level of success in this area has not been achieved. High levels of unmet need for family planning and unintended pregnancies continue to persist, indicating the presence of barriers that hinder the effective use of contraception. The barriers identified by this study are in agreement with other studies that have cited similar reasons for the non-utilization of contraception.^{13-15,19}

The current study found a significant association between contraceptive usage and the education status of both females and their spouse substantiated by some previous studies done in Pakistan.^{16,17} This finding is also in agreement with findings from a study conducted in Nigeria.²⁰ This highlights the need to improve literacy rate and provide opportunities for higher education for both males and females, particularly improving female literacy has a multipronged effect. On one hand, it increases their autonomy and empowerment while on the other hand, it enhances their knowledge of the importance of birth spacing and the various family planning methods available for this purpose. Contraceptive usage was found to rise with an increase in the total number of living children. This is in accord with another study conducted in Pakistan.²¹ According to a current study, the duration of marriage was a significant factor in determining contraceptive usage. This is similar to a study from Oman.²² Thus family planning programs need to focus on behavior change to promote small family norms among women who have been recently married.

In short, the present study directs towards dismal literacy rate, poor socio-economic status of couples increased dominance of psychosocial barriers to utilization, and lack of adequate knowledge regarding family planning as the possible reasons for the low contraceptive usage observed among slum dwellers. All the barriers identified by the current study have to be addressed in order for

Pakistan to attain national and international targets and commitments.¹

A major strength of the study was that it included the slum population so that their practices and perspectives could be taken into account. The limitations of the study included the hurdle to establish a temporal relationship due to the cross-sectional design and inclusion of one representative slum area only. This study should be replicated in other slum areas of the country to see whether results are consistent for other geographical settings as well.

Conclusion

The study concluded that only 33.7% of slum dweller-married females of reproductive age were using contraceptives. The main factors influencing contraceptive usage were the duration of marriage, the education status of the husband and wife, and the total number of living children. The study also found that barriers to accessing family planning services are not solely related to the individual features of the woman, but also to those of her household and other members. These results emphasize the need for tailored interventions that take into account, the complex social and cultural factors that influence family planning behavior, particularly for underserved populations like slum dwellers. A comprehensive approach involving the entire household and community, including programs promoting education for men and women and engaging couples and in-laws in family planning cognizance, could help increase family planning acceptance and improve health service-seeking behavior. This approach will tackle unmet needs and address underlying factors contributing to low contraceptive prevalence rates among slum dwellers.

Ethical Approval: The Research evaluation unit of CPSP approved the study vide Ref No: CPSP/ REU/ COM-2009-064-176

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Authors' Contribution:

ZPB: Concept, design and execution of study, article writing, contribution to data analysis and interpretation

RAU: Supervised all activities of study, revising manuscript and final approval

MJK: Methodology and discussion writing

SH: Data analysis and interpretation, revised the manuscript critically

KURK: Review the article

FR: Proof reading and editing

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