

## ABSTRACT

A community based descriptive cross sectional study was carried out from August to September 2005 to study the decision making process related to planning the family and in the usage of family planning methods among Muslim couples in the Municipal Council area of Matala. A pretested structured questionnaire was used to interview the 445 subjects from the study area selected on random sampling basis, of which 99% participated.

The study revealed a high educational level within this Muslim community. The mean age of the wives was 33.2 years and their husband was 38.9 years. The majority of the females were house wives/home makers, while 38.0% of the husbands were businessmen. Most of the couples had been (45.4%) living together for more than 10 years. Extended families comprised 45.8% of the families. On an average, there were 3 living children per family, of which, 86.4% were planned pregnancies. Unplanned pregnancies significantly increased with increasing birth order and the reported induced abortions were 5.8%.

The majority of the respondents had heard of family planning, and the modern methods awareness such as the Pill (98.9%), the Injectables (98.7%), LRT (96.9%), IUCD (93.7%), and Condom (89.9%) was high. On the other hand, Male sterilization (63.1%) and Norplant (16.6%) were less known methods. PHMs were the first source of information for the Injection (67.9%), IUCD (64.7%), and the Pill (59.1%). Although the study documents the high awareness and moderate use of family planning in this community, it also points to serious insufficiencies and misconceptions in couples' knowledge of family planning methods.

Over half of the respondents approved the use of Rhythm (65.7%), Condom (61.3%), and Withdrawal (60.3%). Almost, half of the respondents (52.2%) and 38.1% of their husbands approved the use of LRT, and of those who disapproved the use of permanent methods, nearly one third (30.2%) of them was mainly due to fear of procedure, side

effects, health concerns, method related misconceptions. However, religious reasons accounted for nearly half of those who disapproved sterilization. The majority of those who disapproved the use of modern temporary methods were due to side effects, health concern, misconceptions, while those against religious belief were only a small proportion.

More than half (58.9%) of the study population were currently practicing some form of family planning. Modern temporary methods prevalence was high (39.3%) of which the condom (13.3%), the Injectables (12.4%), and the Traditional methods (10.6%) were the main methods used. Only 9.0% of them were sterilized. Most of the previous methods used were discontinued due to side effects (29.9%). Out of 183 non-users, more than half of them (55.2%) intended to use family planning in the future.

Male participation in family planning is favourable, nearly 13.3% of the husbands were using condoms, and they were the first source of information for nearly half of the respondents about traditional methods and condom. However, spouse communication regarding family planning is poor, and nearly a quarter (24.3%) of the husbands have opposed the family planning use by their wives. Although nearly half of them have opposed due to health concerns, over a quarter (27.9%) of them opposed due to religious reasons. It appears that both husband and wife play an important role in the family planning decision making process. Whereas the mothers and mothers-in-law have less opposition to family planning use and influence in deciding the family size. A small proportion of them were the first source of information for all methods. Health workers played a major role in the couple's family planning decision making by dissemination of information and supply of contraceptives.