Introduction

Family Planning Programs in Pakistan started in the mid-1960s and have tried many initiatives and policies. And yet the current contraceptive prevalence rates (CPR) stand at 30%, reflecting around 0.5% annual increase since the start of the family planning programs in 1964.

Approximately 30% of women report using some form of family planning. 22% use a modern and 8% use a traditional method. This means that of the nearly 24 million married women of reproductive age (MWRA)\(^1\), approximately 5 million women use a modern method and nearly 2 million women use a traditional means and a staggering 17 million do not use any family planning at all. These 17 million include around 6 million women who would want to use FP, but are not using it and therefore have an unmet need for family planning.

Trends over Time

The use of family planning has increased in Pakistan over the past 50 years from around 5% in the early 60s to around 30% in 2006-7 or around 0.5% annually. A comparison of DHS surveys from 1990 and 2006 shows an increase in the use of family planning by approximately 3.5 fold in the past 2 decades or around 1% annually – a much accelerated pace compared to the years before 1990. This increase has been for both traditional and modern methods and is more pronounced in rural locations as can be seen in the table below which depicts changes in both the CPR and actual number of women using family planning.

While family planning has improved all over, gains in rural locations far outpaced any progress in urban locations. Whereas urban contraception rates doubled, rural rates increased over 6-fold with traditional methods increasing nearly 10-fold. While its difficult to completely explain this phenomenon, its abundantly clear that there has been (and perhaps remains) a great unmet need for contraception in Pakistan, particularly in the rural locations. This is particularly exemplified by the corresponding increase in traditional methods along with modern ones. Additionally, the experiences with Lady Health Workers and some NGOs (particularly in the years following the DHS) have shown that there are a great number of women and couples in these locations who would adopt family planning if these services and commodities were made available to them. In other words there is a fairly large group of women/couples who would readily avail family planning services and family planning – public health programs and policy makers would do well to target this group more effectively with services.

Historical Trends in Programming: Supply versus Demand

There is a persistent and extensive debate on whether focus of programs should be on demand or supply side with predominant attention being paid to demand creation historically and even more so recently\(^2\). However, there is strong evidence that Supply Side

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\(^1\) In 2006-7, when the last Demographic Health Survey was conducted which served as the basis for these figures

Programming has worked well - perhaps even better than demand creation – in increasing CPR. In short when quality services are consistently available, women/couples will use them. To be fair, it is difficult to separate the impact of secular trends on knowledge and attitudes of women/couples and society about family planning from the results of active demand creation by programs. To date no formal evaluation of demand creation programs and its rigorous outcomes in Pakistan are available.

Method Mix

The overall method mix is diverse in Pakistan. Among women who use a modern method, most are sterilized (38%) followed by those who use a condom (31%). However, women seeking sterilization are 30 years or older (mean age: 39 years) and have around 6 children. Sterilization can be better promoted at an earlier age or number of children. Condom users are usually younger women – in their early 20s. They are both urban and rural and most obtain these from pharmacies, chemists or other shops through self-payment. Finally, a third of women receive pills, IUDs or injectable contraceptives. Male sterilization and implants – new to Pakistan – are rare.

As is described below in the section on services, the majority of the methods are those that are controlled by the women or couples. These include the 1.9 million traditional method users and the 1.6 million condom users, adding up to 3.5 million or about half of all contraception users. These constitute two-thirds of all non-permanent method users and likely reflects the quality of services provided and the faith that women/couples have in them.

### Changes in CPR and the Number of People Accessing Family Planning between 1990 and 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method Mix</th>
<th>CPR in %</th>
<th>Population in millions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Contraception</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern Contraception</td>
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<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Condom</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reversible Modern</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Sterilization</td>
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<td>Rural</td>
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<td>Condom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female Sterilization</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Urban</td>
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<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Modern Methods

- **Injectables**: 0.5 M (11%)
- **Female sterilization**: 1.6 M, 31%
- **IUD**: 0.5 M, 11%
- **Implant**: 0.02 M (<1%)
- **Pill**: 0.5 M, 10%
- **Male sterilization**: 0.02 M (<1%)

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Family Planning Services

Within all modern method users, 38% are those that have undergone female sterilization and 11% are using an IUD. Since not all women who received either of these methods did so in the past year, women who received family planning services within the past year is arrived at by counting only those women who received IUD or sterilization within the past year. The total number of women who received family planning services in any one given year is around 2.9 million, with condoms constituting the most favored method and self-procurement being the most common means of obtaining contraception.

Thus, the overall service delivery footprint is small with only around 12% of all MWRA being served in a given year by all service providers (public and private) combined with most services being procured by women/couples directly from shops, chemists or other outlets. This means that they procure these supplies without a formal health provider, obtain no counseling and therefore have nowhere to turn to when side effects – which may be frequent – arise. Public health planners and policy makers should revisit the structural aspects and outreach coverage of family planning services in order to reach and engage these women/couples to regularly use family planning.

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**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Women/couples with unmet need are a readily accessible group that needs to be targeted with family planning services as a priority.
- Public health planners should focus on enhancing outreach, continuity of supplies/commodities, and access of family planning services to reduce the large unmet need.
- Despite their ease and efficacy, IUDs are under-used (11%) and should be more widely promoted in family planning services.
- Sterilization (both female and male) needs to be promoted earlier on to women/couples as a safe and viable option for completed families.
- Strategies to expand access to women beyond the current 12% coverage must explore the role of NGOs, public-private partnerships, and other innovative models from the region.
- Public health planners should consider formal engagement of outlets, pharmacies, shops that stock family planning supplies with information on side effects and local area facilities (public or private sector) or providers to consult if the need arises.

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4 Proportional contribution of male sterilization is <1%

5 According to the PDHS 2006-7, only around 9% of the women who are currently sterilized, received this procedure in the past 12 months. Similarly, international data suggests that an IUD is retained for an average of 5.5 years.