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## Father's role in family planning

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## **Father's role in family planning**

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### **Abstract**

When a married couple decides the optimum time to start a family, how many children they want, how long they want to wait between kids, and the type of contraception they want to use it is called family planning. In Asian countries like Pakistan, men are decision makers inside the families and dominantly take decisions about contraception, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (STI), finance distribution for antenatal care, childbirth, and nutrition requirements during pregnancy. Financial status, misconception, myths, and lack of knowledge about the use of contraception are a few factors apart from religion and culture which influence the father's role in family planning. Pakistan lags in almost all the developmental indicators, particularly in maternal and child health. The positive involvement of men in family planning will ultimately enhance the women's reproductive and sexual health, and family dynamic, and the couple will evolve as a supportive and caring parent.

**Keywords:** Family planning, Father, Pakistan, Contraception

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## **Case Study**

In December 2021, I was assigned to the obstetrics and gynecology ward of a tertiary care hospital, Pakistan as a student nurse where I tried to explore fathers regarding their role in family planning. Different perspectives were identified regarding the number of children they wanted, the use of contraception, and who was the decision maker in their family in regard to having children. The mean number of children they wanted was four. The use of contraception according to the fathers depends upon financial condition. There was a perception that as long as you can give good education to children you can have multiple children and there is no need for contraception. Also, they believe the use of contraception means you are interfering in God's work and that contraception should only be used if you have extramarital affairs. A diverse perception about the decision of having children should be mutual between the partners or the father is the sole person to decide was identified.

## **Background**

When a married couple decides when to have a child, how many children they want, how much the interval they want in between children, and which contraceptive method they want to use: it is called family planning. The role of a father is vital in augmenting the family's well-being. <sup>(1)</sup> Role of the male is influential in deciding when and how many children a couple wants but very few of the traditional males make efforts in child-raising as it is believed to be the role of women. According to Pakistan's demographic and health survey <sup>(2)</sup>, the contraceptive prevalence rate is only 34%. The lack of use of contraception can lead to multiple unwanted pregnancies and can lead to maternal and child morbidity and mortality. Pakistan lags in almost all the developmental indicators, particularly in maternal and child health. Maternal and child health are

both interlinked in a way that in Pakistan, 33% of neonates die due to maternal septicity and other pregnancy-linked complications. <sup>(3)</sup> Latest family planning approaches are effective in improving maternal health and subsequently fetal well-being. From 1991 to 2018 the use of condoms and withdrawal methods increased from 3.2% to 17.2%. <sup>(4)</sup> Yet a lot of work is required to be done and fathers have a huge role to play. Worldwide in many areas, men are decision-makers inside families and dominantly take decisions about contraception, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (STI), finance distribution for antenatal care, childbirth, and nutrition requirements during pregnancy. Further, if society efforts are made to engage men in contraceptive use, birth preparedness, spacing, and couple communication are made it will enhance knowledge and will bring a beneficial behavioral change. <sup>(5)</sup>

### **Feelings**

My view regarding this topic is quite different before and after the interview. The role of the father in family planning is important, and crucial and is influenced by religion and culture. Later I realized that financial status, misconception, myths, and lack of knowledge about the use of contraception are a few other factors too which influence the father's role in family planning.

### **Data Analysis**

#### ***1. Financial Status***

In research conducted in Pennsylvania, <sup>(6)</sup> 54 out of 58 participants recognized that economic permanency is a critical standard to attain preceding having children. Many reported that financial concerns are the reason to decide whether to have more kids despite wanting to have a child. Most males describe financial stability as a factor to decide the number of children they want yet they express that they have anxiety while holding their firstborn in their hands due to the financial responsibility they had to face. Similarly, during this study it was identified that fathers

feel, the more financially stable they would be, the more children they would wish to have. Thus, family planning and family planning methods for maternal wellbeing were not the direct factors behind the number of children wanted and the number of children they have. Yet the future of children has an impact on thoughts and behavior.

## **2. *Misconception and Myths***

Most men across the district of Pakistan aren't in favor of practicing family planning, birth spacing, or availing services regarding reproductive health based on religious reasons. <sup>(3)</sup> During this study believe among men was identified that doing family planning and using contraceptives means interfering in God's work. If God doesn't have a will a couple can't conceive and vice versa. Maternal health is not a consideration for men who have firm religious beliefs. Financial concerns don't affect these religiously influenced people's thoughts as they believe God has given them a child and He will take care of them. These people have a lack of acceptability towards seeking and approaching reproductive health knowledge and concerns due to their religion-cultural background. They have a will to have a maximum number of kids.

## **3. *Lack of knowledge***

Another major thing related to family planning is the lack of knowledge regarding the use of contraception and the lack of availing of the services related to it. The lack of knowledge is associated with the myths and fallacies regarding the use of contraceptives. The most common myth in Karachi, Pakistan is that both vasectomy and the use of a condom can cause impotence in males. Further, they thought condoms can cause infections, backache, and headaches in males; joint pain in both males and females, and vasectomy is only for prisoners penalized for rape charges. <sup>(7)</sup> The men involved in the study believed that birth control methods or any sort of contraception should only be used when having extramarital affairs and contraceptives are not

meant to be used by a married couple. There are two groups of people in Pakistan, one that has problems related to accessibility and affordability to reproductive health/family planning and the other who are not willing to avail.

### **Recommendations**

The positive involvement of men in family planning will ultimately enhance the women's reproductive and sexual health, a family dynamic and the couple will evolve as a supportive and caring parent. Internationally, there is great stress on involving boys in reproductive and sexual health programs as the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attitude will shape them for their future. Social publicizing, mass media, outreach through male motivators; peers; mentors, information and services in clinical setup, community discussion, theaters, and life skills-based education are proven and promising interventions to involve father or father to be in family planning. <sup>(4)</sup> Other evolving techniques which can be effectively used are hotlines and it should be ensured that the identity remains anonymous so this could help and encourage more males and also females to avail of services. Involvement and engaging religious leaders to promote reproductive health-seeking behavior could also be an effective technique. If these practices are applied family planning knowledge, behavior, attitudes, and practices could be evolved. Addressing the issue of affordability, accessibility, and availability at the governmental but also at an individual level will help a couple meet their reproductive health and family planning goals. <sup>(3)</sup> Increasing the availability of contraceptives is directly linked with an increase in their use. In the recent past, projects like FALAH (Family Advancement for life and Health) provide interventions to involve men in family planning and reverberates the desire in men to guard the health of their wife and children. More projects like this should be run and could help an optimum level of family and reproductive health.

## **Conclusion**

Father's involvement in family planning is crucial. Involvement of both the parents while deciding the method of family planning and the number of desired children is necessary. Also, the availability and accessibility of services should need to be ensured. Finance, religion, lack of knowledge, and myths are a few important factors that determine the use of family planning among Pakistani males. Awareness programs are required to be run to attain the desired outcome in favor of the family, especially from the perspective of maternal and fetal health, the country's well-being, and attaining developmental goals.

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## **Conflict of interest**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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