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# POLICY BRIEF

YOUNG ECONOMISTS' PERSPECTIVE

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## THE ACCESSIBILITY OF BIRTH CONTROL METHODS: ASSESSING THE HOUSEHOLD DEMOGRAPHICS & SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS ON THE DEMAND FOR CONTRACEPTIVES IN THE PHILIPPINES

### INTRODUCTION

**The Reproductive Health Bill No. 5043 (RH Bill) is a controversial issue in the Philippines. It has been a topic of debates by public and private groups. The RH Bill will allow citizens universal access to medically safe, affordable, and effective reproductive health care services and information. It encourages the use of contraceptives, like condoms, birth-control pills. It aims to reduce the rapid increase in the Philippine population. Hence, preventing it from reaching a hundred million in five years as estimated by the Department of Health.**

**This study highlights the most controversial issue of the bill: Making contraceptives readily available to everyone. Prime focus is given to accessibility of contraceptives and its relationship to the behavior of Filipinos with respect to changes in household characteristics, religion, economic status, and other related variables.**

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### MAIN POINTS OF THE STUDY

- The increase in the number of each household would decrease its initial probability to use natural and internal contraceptives. An increase in the probability of using contraceptives is predicted using binomial logistics. This inverse relationship is evident, when a household would continue to increase the family size, believing that the cost of bearing a child would be insignificant when those kids earn income in the future.
- This explains why illegal child labor is present. Risks of child-bearing and costs associated with it, prompts Females to use contraceptives. However, the positive relationship is brought about by the Filipino mentality of increasing family income with every additional family member.
- The probability of using contraceptives increases when an individual has attained tertiary education. This shows that as individuals attain higher education, more knowledge is gained, hence wiser choices are made.

- Moreover, individuals gain more exposure and information on various methods of birth control when they attain higher education.
- Regardless of the economic status an individual belongs to, each of them would have an increased tendency to use contraceptives. The poorer class would prefer such, to avoid costs of raising a child while the middle and higher classes would take into consideration the opportunity cost related to assuring the child's future.
  - Results show each religion indicated has a positive relationship with the usage of contraceptives with Islam as an exception. Hence, affiliation to any religious group, including Roman Catholicism would increase the probability of using contraceptives. This research found that various religious groups do not prohibit the use of different birth control methods. The Iglesia Ni Cristo recently announced their support for the RH Bill and the Philippine Independent Church has several operating family planning clinics in the country (Bernales, 1980).
  - The usage of contraceptives is non-dependent on the sexual activity of an individual. Regardless if he or she was active within the last four weeks, the respondent will still stick to his or her decision. This was proven in the study using Binomial and Multinomial Logit where the results were insignificant.
  - Giving out free contraceptives is significant in all auxiliary regressions. Therefore, the project initiated by POP-COM to give out free contraceptives, will affect household usage of contraceptives. However, effectiveness of its implementation to decrease population rate via a decrease in fertility rate is not certain. This is because its marginal effect has varying signs throughout the regressions.
  - Giving out free contraceptives would increase the initial probability of using natural contraceptives by 53.9% from an infinitesimally small initial probability of zero. It would also increase the usage of internal contraceptives from its initial probability of 3.8% to 9.8% as shown in the study using Multinomial Logit. However, giving of free contraceptives would decrease the chance of using condom, patch, pills and other types of contraceptives since these mechanisms are known to be less efficient in reducing fertility.
  - The National Demographic Health Survey (NDHS), 2008, results show that pills are most commonly used, accounting to 13.8 percent of the sample population of 28,518 respondents. This is then followed by natural (6.3%), internal (3.9%), condom (1.9%), non-classified (0.63%) and patch (0.00007%) respectively. On the other hand 73% do not use contraceptives. This suggests that the Filipinos are reluctant in using contraceptives, may be not educated on these methods, or have no access to these mechanisms.

## HOUSEHOLD'S VIEW ON CONTRACEPTIVES

Fertility is defined by Todaro & Smith (2009) through the Microeconomic Theory of Fertility. Here, the behavior of utility is measured with two models wherein both described the behavior of fertility and consumption. These theories show that on a per couple basis, there are different utilities and preferences towards certain issues concerning family size and behavior. Some studies focused on the behavior of couples toward contraception.

Becker (1992) discussed that family behavior builds on maximizing behavior, investments in human capital, allocation of time, and discrimination against women and other groups. He also concluded that the decision of a couple to marry and to have children is dependent on the utility of the couple. They weigh benefits and costs. Scholars believed that when societal issues regarding contraceptives arise, it is still dependent on the decision of the couple, regardless of the fact that it is free or not. However, preferences and behaviors of couples do not easily change, hence, sexual behavior and fertility rate will not change with the availability of contraceptives (Todaro & Smith, 2009). This is supported by the findings of Baird & Ruger (2010), Saha & Bairagi (2007), and Miller (2005).

## POLICY RECOMMENDATION

POPCOM is in continuous pursuit of making condoms free and available to the public. But results show that an individual's usage decreases when condoms are given for free. If POPCOM aims for an effective policy, internal contraceptives such as IUD, diaphragm and sterilization should be free as well. At zero prices, it shows that a positive relation with the usage of such types of contraceptive exists.

The assessment and deliberation of this study showed that religion is positively significant in affecting the changes in the use of contraceptives. The results also show that Filipinos would avail of free contraceptives regardless of religious affiliation. Thus, religion shouldn't be one of the main arguments why the RH bill shouldn't be passed. This study has a neutral stand on the implementation of the RH Bill, but suggests that the Catholic Church could heighten awareness for these contraceptives and guide its followers to abstain from using contraception when the implementation has taken its course.

Some people still does not opt to use any method of contraceptive because it does not give a 100% assurance of effectiveness. Other studies showed that the usage of contraceptives may cause medical side effects. An example is the pill. It allegedly causes high blood pressure, blood clots, stroke, heart attack, depression, weight gain, and migraines. The usage of the pill increases the probability of having breast, cervical and liver cancer (Kahlenborn & Mowell, n.d.).

We were able to investigate that providing free contraceptives would increase the initial probability of using natural and internal contraceptives but decrease the chance of using condom, patch, pills and other types of contraceptives. The decrease of the use of contraceptives is due to the perception of the consumers that what is free has low product or is simply ineffective. This was proven by Darke & Chung (2005) where consumers use price to directly judge the quality of the product, unless no additional assurance of quality are provided. This is described as the negative price-quality inferences. With this, the POPCOM should duly educate the citizens on the different birth control methods that are easily accessible to them and the advantages and disadvantages of each usage.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) disease has been increasing in the country for the past years. According to the Department of Health, in February 2012 alone, there were 274 new HIV positive individuals as per STD or AIDS Cooperative Central Library data. This is 72% higher compared to those declared positive of this disease last year. Majority of the people acquired this disease through sexual contact (Tubenza, 2012).

The US Department of Health and Human Services states that condoms can be used to prevent sexually transmitted diseases (STD). Such diseases are HIV, AIDS, Hepatitis B, syphilis and other STDs. The usage of contraceptives like condoms will lessen the probability of STDs. As reported by the DOH, majority of those STD positive, acquired the virus through sexual interaction. This study focuses on a portion of the POPCOM project. Hence, it is recommended that future related researches should be done on other activities that POPCOM is planning to implement.

The implementation of POPCOM activities would be beneficial in curtailing population growth. HIV-Aids could also be prevented by using the different methods of contraceptives stated in the study. However, there are still risks associated with the use of contraceptives. Hence, we are not 100% confident that the use of contraceptives would be effective in preventing unwanted pregnancies.

We recommend that POPCOM should implement its activities on a controlled area such as Manila (one of the most populated cities in the country). It could be a reasonable venue to prove that the accessibility of free contraceptives would decrease fertility rates through experiment. Likewise, together with the research institutes of the Philippines, POPCOM can modify the methods of contraceptives to address the issues of sexually transmitted disease to make its implementation more worth the risk.

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