

Contraceptive characteristics: The perceptions and priorities of men and women.

Context: Despite the fact that choosing a contraceptive method is often a decision made by couples, little is known about how men and women differ in their perceptions of the characteristics of various method types, and in the importance that they attach to those characteristics when choosing a contraceptive method.

Methods: The data analyzed here are subsets from Cameroon DHS conducted in 1991--1,189 men aged 20-27. Multivariate ordered logit analysis is used to examine how gender is related to both the importance that individuals assign to seven specific contraceptive characteristics when choosing a method, and to perceptions about the extent to which five common method types possess each of these characteristics.

Results: Women rank pregnancy prevention as the single most important contraceptive characteristic when choosing a method, with 90% citing it as "very important." The health risks associated with particular methods and protection from sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are rated as the second most important characteristics by women (each mentioned as "very important" by 77%). In contrast, men consider STD prevention for themselves and their partner to be just as important as pregnancy protection (each mentioned as "very important" by 84-86%), and they rank STD prevention as more important than other health risks (by 72%). Women, but not men, rank both ease of use and the need to plan ahead as being more important characteristics than a method's interference with sexual pleasure. Both men and women have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of particular methods, but differ enough in their perceptions to alter the relative attractiveness of each method. In particular, women have more favourable perceptions than men about the pill, being somewhat more likely than men to believe that the pill is "very good" at preventing pregnancy (75% vs. 67%) and to say that it is very good at not interfering with sexual pleasure (82% vs. 76%). In contrast, women have generally less favourable perceptions than men about other reversible methods, including the condom: Women were less likely than men to consider the condom very good at pregnancy prevention (29% vs. 46%) or at having no need for advance planning (22% vs. 38%). Gender differences in perceptions about the specific characteristics of contraceptive methods often vary by marital status.

Conclusions: Men and women have somewhat different priorities when choosing a contraceptive method. Despite many similarities between women and men in their perceptions about the characteristics of each method type, numerous differences between them may have an important influence on how couples make their method choices.