

Title: Understanding myths, misconceptions and barriers associated with modern contraceptive use in Cambodia

Background and Objectives:

The Cambodian Demographic and Health Survey (CDHS) conducted in both 2000 and 2005 show that while a substantial portion of women of reproductive age have a desire to delay or prevent a future birth, a relatively small proportion of these women utilize modern methods of contraception. Less than one third (27.2%) of married Cambodian women use modern contraceptive methods, though 23% want to delay the birth of their next child by two or more years and 56% do not want any more children. This gap between desire and use is especially wide in poor, rural areas, which suffer the highest levels of fertility-related health repercussions, such as high maternal and infant mortality.

The qualitative study addresses the barriers to use of modern contraceptive methods, in particular hormonal methods among Cambodian women. It aims to understand not only the personal reasons that may contribute to contraceptive use, but also the broader social influences that encourage or discourage the uptake and upkeep of hormonal methods. The purpose of this study is to provide information that can be used to develop a message or campaign personality for women of reproductive age.

Methods:

The qualitative study was conducted in rural and urban of Pursat province of Cambodia, using a snowball sampling method. Women between the age of 15 and 49 were selected

for inclusion into focus group discussions. To understand the complexity of factors contributing to and inhibiting use of contraceptive methods, participants from three types of user groups – Continuer, Discontinuer and Intender – were recruited. All women in the study reported a desire to prevent further births or delay future births by at least 2 years. A transcript-based analysis was used to analyze the content of the interviews.

Results:

Many of the women did not have proper knowledge of how an IUD works or the implant. The impressions associated with IUDs and implants may be due to lack of exposure. Social dynamics contributed substantially to a woman's initiation, use and discontinuation of contraceptive methods.

Rumors of myths and misconceptions were wide-spread among the women surveyed and seemed to be propagated through key players in their social networks: elders, family members and other women who may or may not have used methods themselves. Conversely, positive support from figures such as husbands and medical providers served to combat the trepidation associated with use and encouraged a woman to begin or continue a method.

The barriers to initiation and discontinuation of hormonal methods, while complex and intertwined, pertain mainly to the beliefs associated with real and perceived side effects.

Conclusions:

Husbands appear to be the single most important influencer on a woman's decision to both seek birth spacing services and to start using/continue using modern methods. The communication should target husbands to encourage their wives to seek birth spacing services from a trained health provider. Consultations with health providers are also a critical element to ensure women start and continue to use birth spacing methods. The communication should encourage women to seek the services of health providers. There is much confusion and worry surrounding real and perceived side effects; potential adverse effects; and myth and misconception surrounding the use of each modern method. Each modern method should be unpacked and communication developed which address method specific issues. The influence of positive women and elder characters within communication campaigns should be capitalized upon.