Awareness, Access to, and Utilization of Family Planning Services in Yemen's Fragile Health System

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BACKGROUND

- Health service provision in Yemen faces geographic, demographic, economic, security, and social challenges that minimize the ability of health facilities to cover the populations in need.
- Since 2015, social services have collapsed and it is estimated that only half of the health facilities are fully functional and government health staff have not been paid regularly.
- The armed conflict and the political unrest exacerbated the health and nutrition situation resulting in increased morbidity and mortality rates, especially for women and children.
- This study aims to examine the gaps in knowledge, attitudes, practices, and factors affecting access to and utilization of family planning (FP) services.

METHODS

- A cross-sectional study was conducted in nine districts in Yemen. The study employed a household survey administered to 1,200 married women aged 18-49 years old with children aged under-five years.
- The study employed in-depth key informant interviews with health care professionals, local government and community leaders and held 18 focus group discussions (FGDs) with adult community members.
- We employed a descriptive analysis for the quantitative data to determine the level of awareness, attitudes, and FP service utilization and identify factors associated with service uptake.

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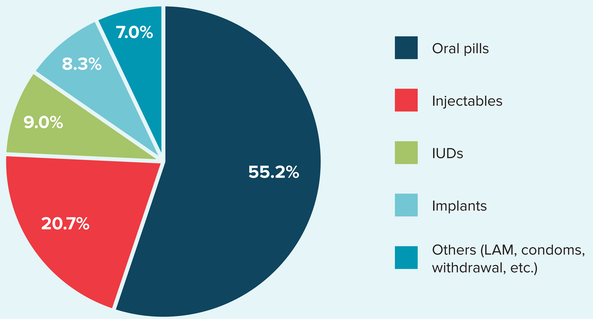
DISCLAIMER: This is a USAID-funded project.

FINDINGS

- There is a high level of awareness about FP methods (93% for oral contraception, 82.1% for injectables, and 81.3% for intrauterine devices (IUDs).
- Of all respondents, 73.3% had ever used oral pills, 28.6% injectables, and 14.7% IUDs.
- Only 49.0% and 46.8% (55.2% for oral pills, 20.7% for injectables, and 9.0% for IUDs) of the women were currently using any FP methods and modern FP methods, respectively.
- There is a belief among respondents that says it is best to have children as early as possible while one is still young to prove the fertility potential of the married couple and avoid rumors/gossip about the husband's potential infertility if the wife does not get pregnant.
- Most current FP users (65.2%) started using FP between 1-3 months after their last delivery, and 89.7% intend to use FP for the foreseeable future.
- The majority of women did not receive any counseling on FP (60.9%), but those who did, had received it from either a midwife (38.5%) or a community health volunteer (35.5%).

Types of contraceptive methods used (N=589)



- The logistic regression analysis showed that those who consider conflict as a threat in seeking health care were 37.7% (OR=0.62) less likely to seek FP services from health facilities. Women aged 25-34 and 35-49 years were 1.6 and 2.1 times more likely to use contraceptives compared to their younger (15-24) counterparts.
- The literate were also 2 times more likely to use contraceptives compared to the illiterate. The low contraceptive use of FP methods is also attributed to different traditional and system-level factors.
- According to the qualitative findings, a few of the FP clients stopped using them due to side effects such as bleeding and mood changes. In addition, some husbands prohibit their wives from using contraceptives.
- In the FGDs, women explained that their choice of method is influenced by the functionality of and access to health facilities and the limited options of contraceptive methods.

Variable	P-value	Adjusted Odds ratio	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
			Lower	Upper
Security/conflict				
No effect				
Has effect	.002	.623	.464	.838
COVID-19				
No effect				
Has effect	.511	1.132	.783	1.636
Age of respondent				
15-24	.000			
25-34	.000	2.053	1.510	2.792
35-49	.005	1.615	1.153	2.261
Place of residence				
Urban				
Rural	.053	.756	.569	1.004
Highest level of education				
No formal education	.319			
Primary	.646	.896	.562	1.429
Secondary	.291	.720	.392	1.325
Tertiary or higher	.787	1.102	.547	2.221
Can read a letter or newspaper				
Not at all	.064			
With difficulty	.214	1.353	.839	2.183
Easily	.021	1.936	1.105	3.393
Employment status				
Not employed				
Employed	.002	.418	.243	.722

CONCLUSION

- Despite the high level of awareness among women about FP, the current contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) is significantly lower with only less than half of respondents currently using any FP methods.
- The assessment shows that apart from traditional and religious factors, the disruption of the health system due to war and conflict has also affected FP service utilization.
- The high level of postpartum FP service use, and the intention to use FP services in the foreseeable future also indicate that family planning services can be provided and demand for such services can grow even during emergencies.
- These findings signify the need for more adaptable and innovative investments in FP that suits the ongoing conflict including capacity building, male/husband and religious leaders involvement, availing method choices, and counseling services to address unmet needs on FP.