Nurturing Choices: A Comprehensive Exploration of Family Planning Awareness among Women of Reproductive Age in District Chamba, Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract: Background: Family planning is integral to maternal and child health, women’s empowerment, and societal well-being. Despite its significance, understanding the awareness and adoption of family planning in diverse and complex population dynamics, especially in regions like District Chamba, Himachal Pradesh, remains a critical public health challenge. This study explores family planning awareness among women of reproductive age, considering the unique socio-cultural and geographical context of District Chamba. Material & Methods: A cross-sectional survey was conducted in District Chamba, Himachal Pradesh, from August 2023 to October 2023. The study included 400 women of reproductive age, residing in the district for at least 12 months. A Google form questionnaire, encompassing socio-demographic details and 20 structured questions assessing family planning knowledge, was used. The tool’s validity was ensured by field experts. Data collection employed online platforms, and analysis was performed using Epi Info V7 Software. Results: Of the 400 participants, 59.25% were from rural and 40.75% from urban areas. The study revealed encouraging awareness levels, with 82.25% correctly identifying the purpose of family planning. While 73.5% named three common contraceptive methods, knowledge gaps existed, especially in understanding hormonal contraception (38.75%). Positive aspects included high awareness of permanent methods (76.25%), though misconceptions existed about emergency contraception (42.25%). Sociocultural influences were acknowledged by 67.25%, and 77% recognized accessible locations for family planning services. Knowledge scores indicated 34% with very good, 39.75% with good, 21.25% with fair, and 6% with poor knowledge. Conclusion: This study highlights the commendable awareness about family planning in District Chamba, Himachal Pradesh, coupled with identified knowledge gaps. The findings underscore the need for targeted educational interventions, particularly focusing on hormonal contraception and dispelling misconceptions. The study’s implications extend to informing policymakers, healthcare providers, and community leaders to enhance family planning services and improve reproductive health outcomes in the region.

Keywords: Family planning, awareness, reproductive age, District Chamba, Himachal Pradesh, socio-cultural factors, knowledge levels, contraceptive methods, women’s health, public health interventions.
India, with its burgeoning population, has been at the forefront of global family planning discussions. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) reports have been instrumental in shedding light on the prevailing trends in family planning awareness, usage, and challenges. These reports provide a national perspective, but regional nuances often necessitate localized studies to tailor interventions effectively.5,6

Himachal Pradesh, characterized by its challenging terrain and scattered population, presents a microcosm of the broader Indian scenario. Understanding the dynamics of family planning awareness in a region like District Chamba is crucial, as it allows for targeted interventions that consider the specific challenges posed by geography, culture, and socio-economic factors.2,4

While numerous studies have explored family planning awareness at the national and state levels, there remains a paucity of research focusing on District Chamba. This study seeks to address this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of family planning awareness in a specific geographic and cultural context.

By delving into the awareness levels of family planning methods among women of reproductive age in District Chamba, this research aims to inform policymakers, healthcare providers, and community leaders. The findings will contribute valuable insights for designing targeted awareness campaigns, improving healthcare infrastructure, and tailoring family planning services to the unique needs of the region.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
To evaluate the awareness about family planning methods among women of reproductive age group in District Chamba, Himachal Pradesh.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- Research Approach: Descriptive
- Research Design: Cross-sectional survey design
- Study area: District Chamba, Himachal Pradesh
- Study duration: Between August 2023 to October 2023
- Study population: All women of reproductive age group who were staying in the District Chamba, Himachal Pradesh for 12 months or more.
- Sample size: 400 women of reproductive age group assuming 50% have adequate knowledge regarding family planning methods, 5% absolute error, 95% confidence level, and 5% non-response rate.
- Study tool: A google form questionnaire consisting of questions regarding socio-demography and family planning methods was created. The questionnaire was initially pre-tested on a small number of women of reproductive age group to identify any difficulty in understanding by the respondents.
- Description of Tool:
  a) Demographic data survey instrument: The demographic form elicited information on participants’ background: age, marital status, religion, employment, education and many more.
  b) Questionnaire: The questionnaire contains 20 structured questions regarding knowledge about family planning methods. One mark was given for each correct answer and zero for incorrect answer. The maximum score was 20 and minimum score was zero in each category. Scoring was done on the basis of marks as >80%(16-20)=very good, 60-79%(12-15)=Good, 41-59%(8-11)=Fair, <40% (< 8)=poor
- Validity of tool: by the experts in this field
- Data collection: Data was collected under the guidance of supervisors. The google form questionnaire was circulated via online modes like e-mail and social media platforms like Whatsapp groups, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn among women of reproductive age group in both rural and urban area of District Chamba, Himachal Pradesh till the 400 responses were collected.
- Data analysis: Data was collected and entered in Microsoft excel spread sheet, cleaned for errors and analyzed with Epi Info V7 Software with appropriate statistical test in terms of frequencies and percentage.
- Ethical Considerations: Participants confidentiality and anonymity was maintained.

RESULTS
The goal of the current study was to assess the awareness about family planning methods among women of reproductive age group in District Chamba, Himachal Pradesh through a non-experimental descriptive survey.

A total of 400 respondents including 163 (40.75%) were from urban area and 237 (59.25%) were from rural area were participated in the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Frequency of Correct Responses</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>What is the purpose of family planning?</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>82.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 1: Knowledge regarding Family Planning Methods among study participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category (Marks)</th>
<th>Frequency (n=400)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V. Good (16-20)</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good (12-15)</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>39.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair (8-11)</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>21.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor (&lt;8)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Maximum = 20 Minimum = 6

Table 2: Knowledge score regarding Family Planning Methods among study participants

DISCUSSION

The findings of our study shed light on the current status of family planning awareness among women of reproductive age in District Chamba, Himachal Pradesh. The assessment of knowledge levels regarding family planning methods is crucial for designing targeted interventions and improving reproductive health outcomes in the region.

The high awareness (82.25%) regarding the purpose of family planning is encouraging, suggesting a foundational understanding of its significance in promoting maternal and child health. This aligns with studies conducted in similar settings, emphasizing the overarching importance of family planning in achieving broader health goals.5,7

While a substantial proportion (73.5%) could name three common contraceptive methods, further efforts are warranted to enhance awareness about the diverse range of contraceptive options available. This finding resonates with studies highlighting the need for comprehensive education on contraceptive choices to empower individuals in making informed decisions.8,9

Notably, a considerable percentage (70.5%) demonstrated knowledge about the effectiveness of male condoms in preventing pregnancy. However, there is room for improvement in understanding hormonal contraception, with only 38.75% correctly identifying its working mechanism. This underscores the necessity for targeted education on the different contraceptive modalities to ensure informed decision-making.8,10
A positive aspect of our findings is the high awareness (76.25%) regarding permanent methods of family planning. However, there is a need for clarification on emergency contraception, as 42.25% believe it can be used as a regular form of contraception. This highlights the importance of dispelling misconceptions surrounding emergency contraceptive methods.10,11

The study also delved into the influence of religious and cultural beliefs on family planning, revealing that 67.25% acknowledged these factors. This emphasizes the necessity of culturally sensitive approaches in family planning interventions, recognizing the multifaceted nature of decision-making in this domain.9,10

The positive response (77%) regarding where women can access family planning services indicates a favorable perception of service availability in the community. However, ongoing efforts are needed to ensure accessibility aligns with the diverse needs of both urban and rural populations.11,12

The distribution of knowledge scores reveals a substantial proportion of participants with good to very good knowledge. However, the existence of a segment with fair to poor knowledge underscores the importance of targeted educational campaigns and interventions to bridge existing gaps.12,13

The study findings have direct implications for policymakers, healthcare providers, and community leaders. Strengthening family planning education, particularly focusing on hormonal contraception and emergency contraceptive methods, can contribute to more informed choices and improved reproductive health outcomes.

Limitations and Future Directions:
While the study provides valuable insights, it is not without limitations. The cross-sectional design restricts the establishment of causal relationships. Future research could employ longitudinal approaches to assess changes in knowledge levels over time. Additionally, qualitative investigations could provide a deeper understanding of cultural influences on family planning decisions.

CONCLUSION
In conclusion, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing a comprehensive exploration of family planning awareness in District Chamba, Himachal Pradesh. The identified gaps in knowledge emphasize the need for targeted interventions to enhance awareness, ultimately fostering a community where individuals can make informed choices about their reproductive health.

REFERENCES: