

ATTITUDES OF 110 MARRIED MEN TOWARDS FAMILY PLANNING

JOHN T. AROKIASAMY

SUMMARY

This is a study of 110 married men as to their attitudes to family planning. Most of the respondents approved of family planning. There is a reluctance to plan families before the first child, more among the Malays than among the Indians. Majority of the respondents [81%] have discussed family planning with their wives, and are also willing to allow their wives to practise family planning. Induced abortion is not favoured by the respondents especially the Malays. Only half the respondents are practising family planning and it appears that the better educated approve as well as practise family planning more than those with less education. A large proportion [89%] of respondents are interested in learning more about family planning.

INTRODUCTION

FAMILY planning programmes around the world have met with differing degrees of success and in most instances, almost all family planning motivation efforts are mainly directed at the women, the situation being no difference here in Malaysia. It is a well known fact that in many parts of the world the woman lives in a male dominated society according to the customs and traditions of the different countries. In most societies having children is "proof" of virility for men who also feel that the sexual sphere belongs exclusively to them and that contraception robs them of their rightful authority (Stycos, 1955). In Puerto Rico a woman is very reluctant to suggest to her

husband that she uses contraceptive methods lest he suspects her of wanting to engage in extramarital sexual activity (Syycos, 1955).

A study done by the National Family Planning Board (N.F.P.B. hereafter) in Malaysia in 1970 showed that attitudes and knowledge pertaining to family planning between male and female respondents do not often move in the same direction, nor do they have the same magnitude, with awareness among male respondents being generally lower than that of their female counterparts. Thus the exclusive concentration on women with emphasis on female contraception in a male dominated society may be some what misplaced (Sandosham, 1967). Male dominance and the traditional emphasis on female chastity can be an impediment to acceptance of the more effective modern family planning methods (Olusanya, 1969). For any family planning programme to succeed it is important that the attitudes for family planning are positive among both men and women with adequate attention to the male.

METHODS

The study was carried out at the Army Garrison Hospital at Port Dickson during the period 24th November 1975 to 6th December 1975. The army garrison at Port Dickson sited in Peninsular Malaysia in the west coast state of Negri Sembilan lying 25 miles southwest of Seremban, the state capital. Within the garrison grounds is sited a hospital which serves the army personnel, their families, and civilians working there. This hospital is visited once a week by the Family Planning Association.

The study group consists of a sample of 110 married men composed of 80 Malays and 30 Indians who are army personnel attending the hospital either for medical treatment, or for a

John T. Arokiasamy

M.B.,B.S. (Madras), M.P.H. (Malaya),

S.M. in Epidemiology (Harvard)

Department of Social and Preventive Medicine

Faculty of Medicine,

University of Malaya.

check up. The study instrument was a pre-tested questionnaire used by two male nurses trained as interviewers for the study. A continuous monitoring of the progress and completeness of the questionnaires was carried out throughout the study.

As the sample size was small, data handling was kept simple and tallying was done using the "cross-five" technique. The frequencies were entered into pre-prepared tables and expressed as percentages where necessary. Cross tabulation of suitable variables was carried out and appropriate statistical techniques were used where relevant. As the sample is a self-selected sample, generalisation of findings to other army unit in the country or to other communities in the general population is not possible. Interviewer bias was undoubtedly present though the interviewers were advised on this, with the likelihood that a higher than true favourable response was given to certain questions.

FINDINGS

The sample of 110 respondents consists of 80 (73%) Malays and 30 (27%) Indians, who have a mean age of 32 years with a standard deviation of 6.4 years. Seventy six (69.1%) of the respondents were found to be between 20 to 34 years of age (Table I). Eighty one (74%) of the respondents

TABLE I

AGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE 110 RESPONDENTS

Age (years)	Number	Percentage
20-24	15	13.6
25-29	31	28.2
30-34	30	27.3
35-39	21	19.1
40-44	11	10.0
45-54	2	1.8
All Ages	110	100.0

had been married a duration of up to 11 years, the median length of marriage being 7.2 years (Table II). A breakdown by religion showed that 80 (73%) were Muslims, 25 (23%) were Hindus and five (4%) were Christians, the latter being all Roman Catholics.

TABLE II

LENGTH OF MARRIAGE OF THE 110 RESPONDENTS

Duration of Marriage (years)	Number	Percentage
0-2	19	17.3
3-5	29	26.4
6-8	19	17.3
9-11	14	12.7
12-14	8	7.3
15-17	12	10.9
18 and above	9	8.2
Total	110	100.1

TABLE III

MONTHLY INCOME OF THE 110 RESPONDENTS

Income*	Number	Percentage
100-199	26	23.6
200-299	41	37.3
300-399	26	23.6
400-499	14	12.7
500 and above	3	2.7
Total	110	99.9

* In Malaysian Ringgit

TABLE IV

**DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY APPROVAL OF FAMILY PLANNING BEFORE
THE FIRST CHILD**

Race	Approval of f.p. * before 1st child		Total
	Approve	Disapprove	
Malays	7 (8.8%)	73 (91.3%)	80 (100%)
Indians	16 (53.3%)	14 (46.7%)	30 (100%)
Total	23 (20.9%)	87 (79.1%)	110 (100%)

* family planning $\chi^2 = 26.207$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$

All the respondents were able to read and write in at least one language. Thirty six (32.7%) respondents had had schooling varying from standard one to six, 40 (36.4%) had had schooling varying between Form one to Form three, and 34 (30.9%) had had schooling varying from Form four to either Malaysian Certificate of Education Level (M.C.E.) or Higher School Certificate Level (H.S.C.). The median income of the sample is \$236 with 93 (84.5%) respondents having income less than \$400/= (Table III). The respondents had an average of 2.6 children, 80 (72.7%) of whom had three children or less each. The desired family size in this sample was 3.9 children.

The observations show that 103 (93.6%) respondents approve of family planning and of these 103, 63 (61.2%) had always felt this way in the past, while another six (5.8%) respondents said that they had not thought about family planning in the past. Eighty seven (79.1%) respondents did not approve of the practice of family planning before having the first child, this being significantly different ($p < 0.001$) between the Malays and Indians as shown by Table IV. Only seven out of 80 (8.8%) Malay respondents approved of practice of family planning before the first child.

A high proportion of respondents in the sample (89 out of 110 or 80.9%) had discussed family

TABLE V

**DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY THEIR
ATTITUDES TO INDUCED ABORTION**

Approval of Induced Abortion	Race		Total
	Malays	Indians	
Approve	3 (3.3%)	14 (46.7%)	17 (15.5%)
Disapprove	77 (96.8%)	16 (53.3%)	93 (84.5%)
Total	80 (100%)	30 (100%)	110 (100%)

$\chi^2 = 30.736$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$

planning with their wives while the remaining 21 (19.1%) respondents had not. A large number of respondents (93 or 84.5%) disapproved of induced abortion while only 17 (15.5%) approved of it, an observation that was significantly different between the two races (Table V). Against three out of 80 Malay respondents who approved induced abortion, there were 14 out of 30 Indian respondents who did so. Seventy seven Malays and sixteen Indians disapproved. Majority of the respondents (98 out of 110 or 89.1%) said that they were interested in learning more about family planning in the future. It was also observed that 96 (87.3%) respondents approved of the wife practising family planning while 14 (12.7%) respondents did not.

TABLE VI

LEVEL OF SCHOOLING ATTAINED BY PRACTICE OF FAMILY PLANNING AMONG RESPONDENTS APPROVING FAMILY PLANNING

Level of schooling attained	Practice of Family Planning		Total
	Practice	Do not Practice	
Std 1 - Std 6	10	21	31
Form 1 - LCE	20	20	40
Form 4 - MCE/HSC	26	6	32
Total	56	47	103

$$\chi^2 = 15.737, df = 2, p < 0.001$$

There were 56 (50.9%) respondents, practising family planning, while 54 (49.1%) were not. The 54 respondents who were not practising family planning were asked if they would do so in the future and it was observed that 20 (37.0%) said they would do so in the future, six (11.1%) said that they would not, while 28 (51.9%) of them were uncertain as to whether they would or would not practise family planning in the future. Table VI shows that of the 103 respondents who approved of the family planning, only 56 (54.3%) respondents comprising of 37 Malays and 28 Indians practised family planning, while 47 (45.7%) respondents comprising of 38 Malays and nine Indians did not. Age, length of marriage, income and the number of children did not influence the respondents, who approved of family planning, into practising or not practising it. On the other hand the level of schooling attained had an effect that those who had had form four and M.C.E. or H.S.C. level of schooling approved and practised family planning more than those who had had primary education.

DISCUSSION

Family planning has now been accepted in most countries all around the world. Research in family planning has grown rapidly in recent years. However this has been done largely on women especially with respect to birth control. A review of literature showed that few studies have been done on men, and even much less on married men. Hall (1968) states that "even if the

wife is knowledgeable, ignorance on the part of the man is likely to lead to non co-operation at best, and opposition at worst". In Malaysia, the male is in a position of greater authority in the home and in the community than in the western countries (Sandosham, 1967). In his study, Peel (1969) found that the effective introduction of any method of birth control to couples with low motivation to family limitation depends on contact with both husband and wife. Advice to the wife, say at a post-natal clinic may be nullified by her inability or unwillingness to discuss such matters with her husband and to seek his co-operation. Mukherjee (1974) says that husbands play a more important role than wives in deciding whether to practise contraception or not.

This study has a sample of 110 respondents comprising of 80 Malays and 30 Indians. They belong to different religions, being either Muslims, Hindus or Christians. Each ethnic group has its own culture and traditional beliefs, and religion is a dominant aspect of any culture. There is no major religion that forbids family planning. Though little is written on Hinduism and family planning, Hinduism along with Buddhism, Judaism, Sikhism and Taoism have nothing against it (IPPF, 1970). Islam too does not forbid family planning, for even in the time of the Prophet Mohammed, as written in the Hadith, "azl" or coitus interruptus was being practised and the Prophet was aware of this but did not object. Haque (1958) says that there

appears to be no objection in matters of procreation by Islam. The spacing of childbirth appears to be quite justified and according to the spirit of Islam. Roman Catholics do not object to the principle of planned parenthood but only to the method used. Active family planning programmes are going on in Catholic countries such as Phillipines, Latin America, Italy and France despite a Papal ban.

Approval of family planning was high in this study (103 respondents or 93.6%). The NFPB (1971) found that 73% of males in the country approved of family planning. In another study, Morgan and Stratmann (1971) found that of about 4000 Jamaican men interviewed 75% approved while in a study in Turkey by Berelson (1964) revealed that 47% of the male respondents approved of family planning. Despite the high proportion of men approving of family planning in this study only 56 out of the 103 approving were actually practising family planning at the time of this study.

Economic considerations have been found to be an important factor in desiring a small family, followed by personal and family welfare and security consciousness next in importance (NFPB, 1970). This may account for the 28 out of 103 respondents (27.2%) who approve of family planning, approving it more now than in the past in this study, indicating increased consciousness of family planning and its benefits in terms of family health, and economics. It is common in this part of Asia that a couple like to or are expected to have their first child within the first year or second year of marriage at the latest. This unwritten norm of the society is often exerted indirectly in the form of comments or gossip. While the arrival of the first born child within a year or two of the marriage satisfies this norm, it also gives satisfaction to the couple that they are able to procreate. This may account for 93% of the respondents not approving of family planning before the first child in this study. However it cannot be denied that in recent years with more and more people becoming aware of family planning, it is not uncommon for couples to start planning their family from the start. It is

possible that the 23 respondents who approve of family planning before the first child belong to this category.

This study shows that 81% of respondents discussed family planning with their wives. It is encouraging to note that such a high proportion of couples discuss family planning as this involves a pooling of knowledge and encourages rational thinking on the benefits to be derived from family planning. Havemann (1967) observes that the decision to limit the family size and the method to be used to achieve this, lie with the couple, depending on how the methods meet their tastes, physical requirements, moral standards and religious values.

Induced abortion was disapproved of by 96.8% of the Malay respondents. Religion could be a possible reason for this response as the Islamic faith is not in favour of Muslims practising, and therefore approving of induced abortion. Khan (1960) says that to destroy the ovum after fertilisation would be iniquity and this iniquity would be more shameful after the foetus is formed. Sharabassi (1973) says that contraception is permitted when there is a valid reason for it, whereas abortion is considered sinful, especially after the fourth month, when the foetus moves and shows signs of life, unless, if without it greater harm would ensue such as the death of the mother. As for the Indians, Hinduism basically does not approve of induced abortion unless it is of benefit for the mother. All the five Christians who are Roman Catholics objected to induced abortion in keeping with the teachings of their religion.

In this study of the 110 respondents only 51% are practising family planning. This corresponds fairly closely to findings in other studies. Morgan and Stratmann in their study of 4000 Jamaican males found that only 40% were practising family planning. Berelson (1964) who studied men and women together in Turkey found that 57% of the respondents said that they would allow their wives to practise family planning. In their study of Jamaican males, Morgan and Stratmann (1971) report that 85.7% of the respondents

approve of their partners using family planning. Morgan and Stratmann (1971) also observed that while 75% of their respondents approved of family planning, only 40% practised it. In this study while 94% approved of family planning, only 56 (54%) respondents practise it and 47 (46%) respondents do not. A detailed analysis indicated that the better educated tend to approve and practise family planning more than the less educated. It is possible that economic considerations (NFPB, 1971) may motivate the better educated into practising family planning. A strong majority of the respondents (89%) expressed interest in learning more about family planning. In a national survey in Turkey by Barelson (1964) 65% of men were found to be interested in learning more about family planning. Such a strong interest shown in the present study indicates that non-practising individuals could be motivated easily to practise family planning in the future.

In the light of these findings, it can be said that the attitudes of the married men in this study are favourable towards family planning though only about half of them (51%) practise it. It would not be out of place to state that men should also be educated and motivated on family planning for the national programme to be more effective. Contact with both the husband as well as the wife will be essential if family planning is to be successful among those who most need to prevent a further increase in the size of their families or among those who would like to space out the births of their children.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to Professor Paul C.Y. Chen, Head of Department of Social and Preventive Medicine, University of Malaya for his continuous guidance and advice, Mr. M. Arokiasamy and Mrs. Chee for assistance received in the preparation of this paper.

REFERENCES

- Barelson, B. (1964) Turkey: National Survey on Population, *Studies Family Planning*, 5, 1 - 5.
- Hall, F. (1970) Male Use of Contraception and Attitudes Toward Abortion, Santiago, Chile, 1968, *Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly*, 48, 145 - 166.
- Havemann, E. (1967) Birth Control, in *Time-Life International*, Netherlands.
- Haque, Z. (1958) Family Planning and Islam, in Schieffelin, O. (ed.) *Muslim attitudes toward family planning*. The Population Council, New York, 4th printing 1973, U.S.A., pp. 58 - 59.
- I.P.P.F. (1970) Misconceptions in family planning; education and information section, International Planned Parenthood Federation, South East Asia and Oceania Region Headquarters.
- Khan, A.H. (1960) Islamic opinions on conception in Schieffelin, O. (ed.) *Muslim attitudes toward family planning*. The Population Council, New York, 4th printing 1973, USA, pp. 62 - 71.
- Malaysia (1971) Interim report on family survey - A KAP study on family planning 1970, Kuala Lumpur, Department of Statistics, Malaysia.
- Morgan, B.I. and Stratmann, C.J. (1971) The Jamaican male and family planning, *W.I. Med. J.*, 20, 5 - 11.
- Mukerjee, B.N. (1974) A comparison of the results of family planning KAP surveys in Haryana and Tamil Nadu, India, *Studies Family Planning*, 7, 224 - 231.
- Olusanya, P.O. (1969) Nigeria: Cultural barriers to family planning among the Yorubas, *Studies Family Planning*, 37, 13 - 16.
- Peel, J. (1969) A male oriented fertility control experiment, *Practitioner*, 202, 677 - 681.
- Sandosham, A.A. (1967) Family Planning, *Med. J. Malaya*, 22, 27 - 28.
- Sharabassi, A.E. (1973) Islam and family planning, in Schieffelin, O. (ed.) *Muslim attitudes toward family planning*. The Population Council, New York, 4th printing 1973, USA, pp. 110 - 127.
- Stycos, J.M. (1955) Birth control clinics in crowded Puerto Rico, in Paul, B.D. (ed.) *Health, culture and community-case studies of public reactions to health programs*, Russel Sage Foundation, New York, pp. 189-204.