

Knowledge and Use of Contraception Among Racha Koyas of Andhra Pradesh

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ABSTRACT Government of India is following a non-coercive approach in promoting family planning methods. Despite its strenuous efforts through a vast network of functionaries, there appears a gap between the achievements and targets. Deciding upon the desired size of the family is influenced by a variety of factors such as socio-economic, cultural, attitudinal and behavioural. Scheduled Tribe population are categorized as a special group in the National Health Policy for extending the health care services. This paper attempts to study the extent of knowledge and use of contraception among Racha Koyas, a tribal population from Warangal district of Andhra Pradesh. It is noticed that the level of knowledge of contraceptive methods among the women interviewed is satisfactory and there is scope for improving the acceptance rate. Preferred methods are the permanent methods of sterilization while the spacing methods are not popular. The treatment seeking behaviour of these women with regard to the health problems due to contraceptives is encouraging as they are accepting and inclined towards modern health care services.

INTRODUCTION

Studies during the past few decades have established a close and significant relation between the contraceptive use and fertility preferences. Das and Deka (1982) have considered the cultural factors in fertility as there is evidence that the fertility behaviour changes with different cultural settings. The economic value ascribed to children enhances fertility among those who are economically poor. Narayan Das (1983) studied the socio-cultural determinants of fertility.

In several studies on modernity and fertility, education is found to be the prime influencing factor. Education may have a direct influence on fertility, since education affects the attitudinal and behavioural patterns of the individuals. Lactational amenorrhoea, which lasts for two to three years in some societies gives scope for longer birth intervals, thus affecting the fertility among such women (McNeilly, 1979).

As Anand (1968) and Chandrasekhar (1972) put it, the family welfare programmes, their reception, impact and utility have effected fertility in every society in this era of rapid population growth. Because of the government's policy on birth control, exhaustive efforts are made by the government to popularize the different family welfare methods. Results achieved so far, in this direction can be attributed to the programme inputs.

However, besides several cultural factors, non-availability and/or lack of knowledge, attitude towards desired family size, traditional beliefs and practices play an important role in family planning. A number of KAP studies have been taken up covering different population groups. Gautam and Seth (2001) in their study among rural Rajputs and SCs found out that raise in education besides providing knowledge and the contraceptive methods helps in improving acceptance of family control devices. There are other studies also in the similar lines taken up among tribal and rural populations (Meerambika Mahapatro et al., 1999; Sushmita and Bhasin, 1998 and Varma et al., 2002).

However, the national programme should have group specific and area specific interventions with regard to family planning. In this background, an attempt is made in this paper to study 'knowledge and practice of contraception' among Racha Koyas, a tribal population from Andhra Pradesh. In this connection, it is pertinent to note that in the 'National Health Policy', the tribal groups need special attention as they are considered 'a special group'.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The present study is based on data collected from 252 tribal women from 9 villages in Eturu Nagaram Mandal in Warangal district of Andhra

Pradesh. All the respondents were interviewed using a structured and pre-coded questionnaire. All the women covered in the study are currently married. Coverage of the sample from the 9 selected villages is given below:

Name of the Village	Number of women	
	Selected	Covered
1. Tupakulagudem	40	38
2. Rajannapet	24	24
3. Kannaigudem	20	20
4. Chelpak	44	40
5. Rampur Aghar	20	18
6. Kondai	30	28
7. Ilapur	30	30
8. Kantanpalli	32	28
9. Malyala	26	26
Total	266	252

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Background characteristics of the 252 women interviewed, such as current age, level of education, occupation, monthly income and number of living children at the time of survey are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Profile of the respondents

Characteristic	Number	Percent
<i>1. Present Age (in years):</i>		
15 – 19	34	13.5
20 – 24	56	22.2
25 – 29	122	48.4
30 – 34	40	15.9
<i>2. Level of Education:</i>		
Illiterate	188	74.6
Primary	44	17.5
Middle	14	5.5
Secondary	6	2.4
<i>3. Occupation:</i>		
Agriculture/House wife	58	23.0
Agricultural/Casual Labour	168	66.7
Employed	26	10.3
<i>4. Income (per month):</i>		
Rs. 1,000/- or less	60	23.8
More than Rs.1,000/-	192	76.2
<i>5. Number of Living Children:</i>		
1	34	13.5
2	72	28.6
3	68	27.0
4	58	23.0
5	20	7.9

Number of women interviewed = 252

It is noticed from the table that the present sample is rather young as the current age of the women ranged from 15 to 34 years. A majority of these women are in the age group of 25-29

years. About 14 percent are in the 15 -19 years age group. A majority of these women are illiterate (75 percent) and earn through agricultural or casual labour (67 percent). Nearly 24 percent of the women reported a monthly income of Rs.1,000/- or less. Regarding the number of children they had, it can be seen from the table that 29 percent are having 2 children, 27 percent are having 3 children and 31 percent are having 4 or more children, while the remaining 13 percent had a single child at the time of survey. The average number of children is found to be 2.82, indicating that, on an average, these women are having 3 children.

Knowledge of Contraceptive Methods:

Among the 252 Racha Koya women, 81 percent are having the knowledge of different contraceptive methods (Table 2). Such high levels of knowledge of contraceptive methods is reported from other studies on tribal groups. Despite the efforts of the government through its vast net working, 29 percent are still ignorant of the contraceptive methods. This is one point that should be alarming the programme managers in general.

An attempt is made to analyse this aspect by the background characteristics of the women. It is noticed that the knowledge levels are more

Table 2: Knowledge of contraceptive methods

	Number	Percent		
Number of women reporting knowledge of contraceptive methods	204	81.0		
<i>Differentials in the level of knowledge by background characteristics of the women:</i>				
(a) Age Group (year)		Sam- ple	Num- ber	Per- cent
15 – 24	90	72	80.0	
25 – 34	162	132	81.5	
(b) Education:				
Illiterate	188	152	80.9	
Literate	64	52	81.3	
(c) Occupation:				
Employed	26	22	84.6	
Agriculture/House wife	58	46	79.3	
Agricultural/Casual Labour	168	136	80.9	
(d) Monthly Income:				
Rs.1,000/- or less	60	48	80.0	
More than Rs.1,000/-	192	156	81.3	
(e) Number of Living Children:				
1	34	28	82.4	
2	72	58	80.6	
3+	146	118	80.8	

among the older women (25-34 years) than the younger women (15-24 years). It is also noticed that the knowledge of contraceptive methods is more among those who are employed compared to their counterparts. This knowledge is also found to be more among women having one child than those having 2 or more children. However, literacy and monthly income did not make any influence in this regard.

Type of Methods Known and Source of Knowledge: Female sterilization or tubectomy is more popular among the women who reported knowledge of the contraceptive methods (Table 3). Knowledge of tubectomy is nearly 75 percent and that of vasectomy is 67 percent. In general, knowledge of spacing methods is very low among the Racha Koya women interviewed in the present study. However, knowledge of oral pills is found to be nearly 23 percent, while 8 percent are aware of condom and 6 percent know about IUD/Loop. Nearly 14 percent reported knowledge of a herbal medicine (Goddu Mandu) given by their Shaman/traditional vaid as a contraceptive.

It is also interesting to note that the main source of knowledge, about different contraceptive methods known is 'friends/relatives' as reported by nearly 63 percent of the women. A similar observation is reported from Bhattara tribals of Orissa (Meerambika Mahapatra et al., 1999). Nearly 58 percent reported they came to know about these methods through their 'husbands'. 'Health Personnel' as a source of knowledge was reported by about 40 percent of the women only and it indicates the need for health staff to take greater role in educating these

Table 3: Type of methods known and source of knowledge

Number of women having knowledge of contraceptive methods	Number	Percent
	204	81.0
<i>Knowledge of Different Methods*:</i>		
Tubectomy	152	74.5
Vasectomy	136	66.7
IUD/Loop	12	5.9
Oral Pills	46	22.5
Condom	16	7.8
Traditional Methods	4	2.0
Others (Herbal Method)	28	13.7
<i>Source of Knowledge*:</i>		
Self	28	13.7
Husband	118	57.8
Friends/Relatives	128	62.7
Health Personnel	82	40.2
Others	24	11.8

* Percent add to more than 100 due to multiple responses.

illiterate people regarding various programmes besides family planning methods.

Extent of Contraceptive Use: In all, 41 percent i.e. 104 out of the 252 wo-men covered in the study have reported that they are using any contraceptive method at the time of survey (Table 4). Use of contraceptive methods in the present sample is found to be slightly more among the women aged 15-24 years, those reporting monthly income of Rs.1,000/- or more and among those who are engaged in agriculture, agricultural/casual labour compared to their counterparts. Education and the number of children does not seem to have much influence on the use of contraception among the Racha Koya women covered in this study.

Details of method used and Reasons for Non-Use: Only the permanent methods of sterilization seem to be more accepted among these respondents (Table 5). About 73 percent of the women reported use of sterilization (38 percent tubec-tomy and 35 percent vasectomy) while the use of modern spacing methods was reported by 19 percent of the women (oral pills by 13 percent and IUD/Loop by 6 percent). The remaining 8 percent of women reported use of herbal med-icine for contraception. The use of birth spacing methods was found to be less (13 percent) among rural populations of West

Table 4: Extent of contraceptive use.

Number of women who are currently using any contraceptive method	Number	Percent
	104	41.3
<i>Differentials in the extent of Contraceptive use by background characteristics of the women:</i>		
(a) Age Group (year):		
15 – 24	90	38
25 – 34	162	66
(b) Education:		
Illiterate	188	78
Literate	64	26
(c) Occupation:		
Employed	26	10
Agriculture/House wife	58	24
Agricultural/Casual Labour	166	70
(d) Monthly Income:		
Rs.1,000/- or less	60	24
More than Rs.1,000/-	192	80
(e) Number of Living Children:		
1	34	14
2	72	30
3+	146	60

Table 5: Details of method use and reasons for non-use.

Number of women currently using any contraceptive method	Number	Percent
<i>Knowledge of different methods*:</i>		
Tubectomy	40	38.5
Vasectomy	36	34.6
IUD/Loop	6	5.8
Oral Pills	14	13.5
Others (Herbal Method)	8	7.7
Number of Current Non-Users	148	58.7
<i>Reasons for current non-use of Contraceptive Methods*:</i>		
Lack of knowledge	96	64.9
Want to have more children	44	29.7
Fear of operation/side-effects	68	45.9
Inconvenience of the methods	32	21.6
Others	6	4.1

*Percent add to more than 100 due to multiple responses.

Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh (Varma et.al., 2002) and the same is reported to be around 18-19 percent among Bhotias of Uttar Pradesh (Sushmita and Bhasin, 1998).

As already mentioned, the proportion of current non-users is 59 percent. The major reasons for their non-use are lack of knowledge (65 percent), fear of operation/side effects (46 percent), inconvenience of the available methods (22 percent). Nearly 30 percent are not using any contraceptive method as they want to have more children.

Health Problems Due to Contraceptive Use and Treatment Sought: Out of the 104 women who reported contraceptive use, 44 women (42 percent) reported experience of some health problems due to the method use. Weakness and body ache are the main problems reported by 86 and 64 percent of women respectively among those who reported health problems (Table-6). Interestingly 32 out of the 44 women (73 percent) who reported health problems sought treatment for their problems. Nearly 55 percent resorted to modern health care while another 55 percent reported seeking treatment from local Registered Medical Practitioners (RMPs) or their traditional vaid/shaman.

CONCLUSION

In the present study on Racha Koyas, knowledge of contraceptive methods is fairly high (81 percent) and similar observations were made from earlier studies on tribal and rural populations. Effect of education and monthly income seem to have no influence on the knowledge of contraceptive methods, while the level of

Table 6 : Health problems due to contraceptive use and treatment sought.

	Number	Percent
Number of women who reported contraceptive use	104	41.3
Number of women who had any health problems due to contraceptive use	44	42.3
<i>Type of Problem Experienced*:</i>		
Weakness	38	86.4
Excessive bleeding	6	13.6
Body ache	28	63.6
Other problems	12	27.3
Number of women who sought treatment for the above problems	32	72.7
<i>Source of Treatment*:</i>		
A.N.M.	20	45.4
PHC/Sub-Centre	4	9.1
Local RMP/Traditional Vaid	24	54.5

*Percent add to more than 100 due to multiple responses.

knowledge is found to be more among mothers with one child (younger mothers) than those having 2 or more children. The observation that only 41 percent are actually using is a matter of concern for the programme managers. Interestingly, education and number of children seem to have no influence on the acceptance or use of contraceptive methods.

Other observations like lesser preference for spacing methods, lack of knowledge and fear of surgical operations as reasons for non-use indicate the need for educating these women about the need for family planning and use of the methods available.

Health problems reported due to method used implies lack of proper follow-up treatment and only half of those having problems seeking treatment at government sources are also issues to be taken care of by the health functionaries working in the area.

The Racha Koyas, being a tribal community, have come far away from their traditional beliefs and practices and started accepting the concept of limiting the family to their desired size by accepting modern contraceptive methods. They are also inclined to use modern medi-care services when needed.

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