

Unmet Needs on Sexual and Reproductive Health among Women Aged 50-64 in Rural China

Xiaoming Sun, M.D.,M.S.(a), Xingyu Shu, Ph.D., M.P.H(a), Zhanhong Zong,Ph.D., M.P.H.(a),
Jingshu Mao, M.D.(a), Yu Sun,Ph.D., M.A.(b)

(a) School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nanjing Youdian University, 10 Suojincun, Nanjing
210042, China

(b) Institute for Environmental & Spatial Analysis, University of North Georgia, Oakwood, GA
30566, USA

Abstract:

Background:

China's family planning program mainly focused on married women aged 15-49, providing contraceptive services only. After reaching age 50, women in China are no longer eligible for free sexual and reproductive health services under this program, and many women, especially in rural areas, have limited access to health care from other sources. These circumstances result in two challenges for care of middle-aged women in China: serving a rapidly expanding segment of the population and integrating sexual and reproductive services into the existing health care system. Few studies have examined the demands and unmet sexual and reproductive health needs of these middle-aged women.

We therefore undertook this large, population-based survey in seven provinces of China to examine the demands and unmet needs related to sexual and reproductive health among women aged 50-64 in rural China. This study asked women about sexual and reproductive health issues, sources of information, current health status, service needs, access to health service and quality of services. The purpose was to identify unmet needs and provide information to improve services for this important and growing population segment.

Methods:

Data for this cross-sectional study were collected using an interviewer-administrated survey of 1652 rural women aged 50-64 in seven provinces of China: Jiangsu, Liaoning, Jiangxi, Chongqing, Hainan, Guizhou and Qinghai. These provinces were selected to represent different geographic and socioeconomic and cultural spectrums. Jiangsu and Liaoning are among the most economically progressive provinces located in the east coast of China, while Guizhou, Chongqing and Qinghai are among the least developed provinces located in western China; and Jiangxi and Hannan are among the developing provinces located in central China.

A 30-min 45-item questionnaire was designed for face-to-face interview administration and pre-tested by the research assistants and then revised. The

questionnaire was finalized after extensive pretesting.

We examined sexual and reproductive health status and service demands. In addition, among those who once used an IUD as contraception, we asked whether the IUD had ever been removed and used logistic regression to examine the association between IUD removal after menopause and the participants' education, migrant status, knowledge of menopause, abortion experience and awareness of the need for IUD removal.

The analysis was performed using SPSS version 17.0

Results:

Only 17.2% had completed junior high school. 87.8% were rural farmers or housewives, and 5.8% had experience as migrant workers. The average age of menopause was 48.9 years and 52.4% reported they experienced climacteric symptoms. The average sex frequency for the last month was 1.8 times. 47.4% received gynecological exam services during the past 2 years. The first treatment-seeking choice was a family planning clinic (31.2%) followed by a township hospital (28.4%). Identified service needs were women's health check-ups (56.5%), sexual health knowledge (54.4%), women's health knowledge (35.4%), menopause counseling (34.8%) and IUD removal after menopause (17.0%). Among 519 post-menopausal women who used an IUD for contraception, 19.1% had not had their IUD removed at the time of the survey. The proportion correctly answering the question about the correct time for IUD removal was 31.5% and 53.0% were unclear if an IUD should be removed after menopause. In multivariate regression, awareness of correct IUD removal time, Belief about sex after menopause and receiving formal health education were significantly associated with having IUD removal.

Conclusions: A large proportion of middle-aged women in rural China lack quality sexual and reproductive health services, particularly IUD removal for the postmenopausal women. A comprehensive program of sexual and reproductive health services should be provided for middle-aged women in rural China.

Keywords: unmet needs; sexual and reproductive health; middle-aged women; IUD; China