

## **Extended Abstract: Characteristics of Women Who Lack Contraceptive Knowledge in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Meredith Cavin, Minnesota Population Center

### **Introduction:**

My research will examine the characteristics of women who do not know about contraceptives in seven Sub-Saharan African countries. The question of whether women - and which women - know about contraceptives falls under the debate between the "desired children" view, that women will find a way to have the number to children they want, and the "family planning gap" view, that women consider the many costs of contraception when deciding their preferred number of children (Pritchett 1994; Bongaarts 2011). Preliminary research using the Minnesota Population Center's Integrated Demographic and Health Series (IDHS) data shows great variation in contraceptive knowledge across African countries: 35.34% of married women in Nigeria had heard of no contraceptive method (in 2008), compared to only 0.60% in Zimbabwe (in 2010-11). The IDHS data also reveals a lack of contraceptive knowledge among married women who wish to limit their fertility, most notably in Nigeria and Mali. In Nigeria in 2008, 20.66% of married women who did not want another child had never heard of any contraceptive method, which suggests an unmet need for family planning. The existence of this population challenges the notion that women who want to limit their fertility will actively seek family planning information (Pritchett 1994). I will explore the characteristics of these women, who may have a "latent demand" for contraceptives rather than a demonstrably active demand (Freedman 1997).

### **Methodology:**

I will use the three most recent Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) from seven African countries for which the IDHS project has released integrated data. This will allow for comparisons of contraceptive knowledge across countries and within countries over time, which is important in the context of persistently high fertility in Africa.

| <b>Samples for Analysis</b> |      |      |        |  |                 |        |        |         |
|-----------------------------|------|------|--------|--|-----------------|--------|--------|---------|
| <b>Ethiopia</b>             | 2000 | 2005 | 2011   |  | <b>Mali</b>     | 1995-6 | 2001   | 2006    |
| <b>Ghana</b>                | 1998 | 2003 | 2008   |  | <b>Nigeria</b>  | 1999   | 2003   | 2008    |
| <b>Kenya</b>                | 1998 | 2003 | 2008-9 |  | <b>Zimbabwe</b> | 1999   | 2005-6 | 2010-11 |
| <b>Malawi</b>               | 2000 | 2004 | 2010   |  |                 |        |        |         |

Table 1. Samples for Analysis

I will use the IDHS variable that asks women whether they have heard of only a folkloric method of family planning, only a traditional method, or a modern method. I will also use more detailed IDHS variables that specify whether a woman has heard of particular traditional methods such as the rhythm method, withdrawal, and abstinence, and particular modern methods such as birth control pills, intrauterine devices, injectable contraceptives, diaphragms, male condoms, female condoms, male sterilization, female sterilization, and implants.

I will do cross-tabulations and look for correlations between whether women have heard of family planning methods and their personal characteristics. These personal characteristics will include age, knowledge about HIV/AIDS, self-reported ability to refuse sex, education level, socioeconomic status, the number of children a woman already has, religion, rural/urban status, and possibly specific locations. I will also explore the associations between a woman's contraceptive knowledge and her own fertility preferences as well as those of her husband.

### **Preliminary Results:**

As shown in Table 2, preliminary research shows great variation in contraceptive knowledge across African countries: 35.34% of married women in Nigeria had heard of no contraceptive method (in 2008), compared to only 0.60% in Zimbabwe (in 2010-11).

| Sample                   | Knowledge of Any Type of Contraceptive Method |                             |                               |                       | Total   |
|--------------------------|---|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|---------|
|                          | Knows no method                               | Knows only folkloric method | Knows only traditional method | Knows a modern method |         |
| <b>Ethiopia, 2011</b>    | 5.70%   | 0.01%                       | 0.37%                         | 93.92%                | 100.00% |
| <b>Ghana, 2008</b>       | 3.35%   | 0.00%                       | 0.13%                         | 96.53%                | 100.00% |
| <b>Kenya, 2008-9</b>     | 7.28%   | 0.06%                       | 0.09%                         | 92.57%                | 100.00% |
| <b>Malawi, 2010</b>      | 0.35%   | 0.01%                       | 0.01%                         | 99.63%                | 100.00% |
| <b>Mali, 2006</b>        | 28.58%  | 0.80%                       | 0.32%                         | 70.30%                | 100.00% |
| <b>Nigeria, 2008</b>     | 35.34%  | 1.13%                       | 0.35%                         | 63.18%                | 100.00% |
| <b>Zimbabwe, 2010-11</b> | 0.60%   | 0.02%                       | 0.02%                         | 99.36%                | 100.00% |

Table 2. Contraceptive Knowledge in the Most Recent Samples

Many of the women in the IDHS data do not want to have more children but do not know how to prevent pregnancy. As shown in Table 3, in Nigeria in 2008, one in five women who wanted no more children had not heard of any method of contraception. Married women in this sample who know no family method are also disproportionately likely to be undecided about whether or not they would like to have more children.

| Nigeria 2008          |                 |                             |                               |                       |         |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|---------|
| Fertility Preferences | Knows no method | Knows only folkloric method | Knows only traditional method | Knows a modern method | Total   |
| Have another          | 36.32%          | 0.91%                       | 0.29%                         | 62.49%                | 100.00% |
| Undecided             | 49.14%          | 2.24%                       | 0.48%                         | 48.14%                | 100.00% |
| No more               | 20.66%          | 1.08%                       | 0.50%                         | 77.76%                | 100.00% |
| Total                 | 35.34%          | 1.13%                       | 0.35%                         | 63.18%                | 100.00% |

Table 3: Knowledge of Any Contraceptive Method by Fertility Preference

As shown in Table 4, of the married women in this sample who know no family planning method, 63.72% report that they are not able to refuse sex with their husbands. According to this data, these women have no way to prevent pregnancy.

| Nigeria 2008                                  |  |        |            |         |         |
|---|--|--------|------------|---------|---------|
| Knowledge of Any Type of Contraceptive Method | Can the Woman Refuse Sex with Her Husband? |        |            |         | Total   |
|   | No   | Yes    | Don't Know | Missing |         |
| No method                                     | 63.72%                                     | 28.96% | 6.94%      | 0.39%   | 100.00% |
| Only folkloric method                         | 57.68%                                     | 38.54% | 2.70%      | 1.08%   | 100.00% |
| Only traditional method                       | 51.18%                                     | 42.35% | 6.45%      | 0.00%   | 100.00% |
| Modern method                                 | 36.43%                                     | 60.49% | 2.86%      | 0.21%   | 100.00% |
| Total   | 41.37%                                     | 54.79% | 3.59%      | 0.25%   | 100.00% |

Table 4: Ability to Refuse Marital Sex by Contraceptive Knowledge

The seven countries I will study have had very different trends in contraceptive knowledge over time. Knowledge of modern contraceptives among married women in Ethiopia grew from 80.61% in 2005 to 93.92% in 2011. This growth in knowledge appears to have occurred across all age groups, while women aged 20-24 or 25-29 have consistently had the highest levels of knowledge of modern contraceptives. By contrast, knowledge of modern contraceptives in Kenya fell slightly from 1998 to 2008-9.

**Discussion:**

Women's lack of knowledge about family planning inherently prevents them from making fundamental decisions about their own fertility. Some countries like Ethiopia have seen a rapid increase in the last decade in the percentage of women who know about family planning, and it may be useful to explore what programs or policies have coincided with these changes. I believe that deeply exploring contraceptive knowledge and its relationship to fertility preferences and contraceptive use will have important policy implications that can empower women to make the reproductive choices that are right for them and that could help to bring down Sub-Saharan Africa's persistently high fertility rates.

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