



Original Research / Özgün Araştırma

What Women Think About Their Spouses' Participation to The Arrangement of Fertility?

Kadınlar Eşlerinin Doğurganlığın Düzenlenmesine Katılımı Konusunda Ne Düşünüyor?

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The study was conducted to determine the thoughts of the women about the participation of their spouses' into the matter of the arrangement of fertility. **Methods:** Study is a questionnaire –based descriptive and cross-sectional study. The sample hereby consists of 247 women patient who applied to family planning department and gynecology polyclinic of a State Hospital between June-November 2014 and who accepted to attend the research. Women took the survey, designed by researchers via reviewing the literature. **Results:** The rate of using method for arrangement fertility in the study of women was 58.3%. Of these women, 65.3% think that their husbands should also use relevant birth control method. Most of the participants believe that the women take responsibility for the arrangement of the fertility; in which 48.2% believe that this is due to unwillingness of males for using birth control method. 83.3% of the women thought that men should participate in arrangement of the fertility. **Conclusion:** Women believe that men should also take role in arrangement of fertility and their spouses do not take adequate responsibility in this issue. Despite the advantaged positions of men in the subject of arrangement of fertility in Turkey, their roles in family planning remains largely unutilised. Fertility programs should target participation of males.

Key words: Arrangement of fertility, male involvement, women's opinions, family planning.

ÖZET

Amaç: Araştırma doğurganlığın düzenlenmesine eşlerinin katılımı konusunda kadınların düşüncelerini belirlemek amacıyla yapıldı. **Yöntem:** Çalışma, ankete dayalı, tanımlayıcı ve kesitsel bir çalışmadır. Çalışmanın örneklemini Haziran-Kasım 2014 tarihleri arasında bir Devlet Hastanesinin aile planlaması bölümüne ve kadın doğum polikliniğine başvuran ve araştırmaya katılmayı kabul eden 247 evli kadın oluşturmuştur. Kadınlara araştırmacılar tarafından literatür doğrultusunda oluşturulan anket formu uygulanmıştır. **Bulgular:** Araştırmada doğurganlığın düzenlenmesi için kadınların yöntem kullanım oranı %58.3 olarak saptanmıştır. Bu kadınların %65,3'ü eşlerinin de yöntem kullanması gerektiğini düşünmektedir. Kadınların çoğu fertilitenin düzenlenmesinde kendilerinin sorumluluk aldığını, bunun sebebi olarak da %48.2 oranında kadın, erkeklerin yöntem kullanmak istememesinden kaynaklandığını düşünmektedir. Kadınların %83.3'ü erkeklerin doğurganlık düzenleme konusuna katılmaları gerektiğini düşünmektedir. **Sonuç:** Çalışmada kadınlar erkeklerinde doğurganlığın düzenlenmesine katılmaları gerektiğini ve doğurganlığın düzenlenmesinde eşlerinin yeterince sorumluluk almadıklarını düşünmektedirler. Türkiye'de fertilitenin düzenlenmesi konularında erkeklerin avantajlı konumlarına rağmen, aile planlamasındaki rolü büyük oranda kullanılmamaktadır. Fertilitite programlarına erkeklerin de katılmaları hedeflenmelidir. **Anahtar kelimeler:** Fertilitenin düzenlenmesi, erkek katılımı, kadınların görüşleri, aile planlaması

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of reproduction includes both the female and male. Today, instead of “Family Planning” (FP) the concept of “arrangement of fertility” is preferred. “Arrangement of fertility” is defined as “woman’s and man’s capability of having authority on fertility as they have been informed on the matter, and to arrange their fertility through effective, secure and payable, acceptable contraceptive methods which may be selected by themselves”.¹ Nevertheless, FP programs are women- oriented and in various developing countries the main factor that limits utilization of services and acceptability of the methods is non-awareness regarding FP services.²

Participation of men into the arrangement of fertility is sine qua non of the women reproductive health. The recent trend in this field is to target increasing men’s participation into the arrangement of the fertility and the reproductive health as well as developing their visions thereof, aiming that the women should support their spouses to participate in reproductive health issues and to meet their own reproductive health requirements.³

In developing countries, men generally accept that the arrangement of fertility is under the couples’ sharing, however they believe the contraception methods should be used by women. For this reason, information regarding using of FP methods by the men is considerably weak. Despite regional and national variations regarding the use of FP methods, contraceptive method use by men worldwide is steadily low with a rate of one fourth, within last 20 years.⁴ In Turkey, male contraceptive method utilization is not common yet today. Contraception is rather being considered as a responsibility of the woman. At the same time, due to its authoritarian and paternalistic structure, the law of domestic relations entails the man’s consent for the use of FP method, in just the same way as in any other issue.⁵ Therefore, instead of woman’s making a joint decision with his husband for the selection of a contraceptive method or for reproductive health decisions, the spouse’s decision seems to be effective. As a matter of fact, Turkish Population and Health Research (2013) results reveal an increase in the rate of use of contraceptive methods by women in case of their husbands’ consent for FP usage.⁶ Men generally do not have tendency to discuss family planning issues with their wives. When men display an affirmative approach on the arrangement of fertility and support their wives

in this regard and when they show a participatory approach instead of determinative one, this will assist couples to access and use methods, thus service availability and permanency will be enabled. It is considered that; determination of women’s thoughts on the matter may both change men’s approach towards the arrangement of fertility and may increase their susceptibility on their participation into the issue of the arrangement of fertility.

The purpose of the study is to determine the spouses’ thoughts on the participation of the men into the arrangement of fertility.

SUBJECT AND METHODS

This research was designed as a descriptive and cross-sectional study. On specified dates, were interviewed with 505 randomly selected women. The inclusion criteria were as follows: currently not being pregnant, being sexually active, living with her spouses, not having an infertility problem, not being in menopausal period, and having a spouse / partner currently using family planning method or who used it previously, being able to communicate in Turkish and agreeing to participate in the study. The sample of the research is comprised of 247 women who applied to the family planning department and gynecology department of a hospital between 30 June - 30 December 2014.

Ethical considerations

The study conformed to scientific and ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. The study was approved by Local ethics committee. Informed consent was obtained from all the women before data collection. All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Data collection

Data was collected via questionnaire, composed of socio-demographic variables and questions on the participation of their spouses into the issue of arrangement of fertility. Questions are prepared on the basis of relevant literature search. Questionnaire was applied face to face by the researcher.

Statistical analysis

Data was analyzed with SPSS (14.0) statistical software. Mean, standard deviation, percentage and “chi- square test” were done for the assessment and comparison of the distribution of the data. Statistical significance was accepted as $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

The mean age of the participants was 29.80 ± 7.01 (ranging from 17 to 51). 46.6% of the

participants were between the ages of 26 and 35, 53.4% of them are primary school graduate, 24.3% of them are currently employed, 70.0% of them were married between the ages of 18 and 25, 40.5% of the women are married for 6 to 15 years. When it comes to the spouses of the women who took the survey; 54.7% of them are between the ages of 26 and 35, 63.2% are high school graduate or have license degree and %89.5 are currently employed. Table 1 shows socio-demographic characteristics of women.

	n	%
Age		
25 years and under	76	30.8
26-35 years	115	46.6
36-45 years	52	21.1
46-50 years	4	1.6
Education		
None	7	2.8
Primary education	132	53.4
High school and over	108	43.7
Employment status		
Employed	60	24.3
Unemployed	187	75.7
Age group of the spouse		
25 years and under	29	11.7
26-35 years	135	54.7
36-45 years	65	26.3
46 years and over	18	7.3
Education of the spouse		
None	2	0.8
Primary education	89	36.0
High school and over	156	63.2
Working status of the spouse		
Working	221	89.5
Not working	26	10.5
Marriage age group		
17 years and under	50	20.2
18-25 years	173	70.0
26-33 years	21	8.5
34 years and over	3	1.2
Marriage year		
5 years and under	98	39.7
6-15 years	100	40.5
16-25 years	42	17.0
26 years and over	7	2.8
Total	247	100

From obstetric point of view; 81.8% of the women stated that they are happy for being a mom, 43.7 % of them have 3 or more pregnancies and 76.1% of them have elementary families. It was determined that 52.6% of the women wish to have 3 children or over. The rate of use of any contraceptive method for the arrangement of fertility was determined as 72.5%, with the most commonly used methods of “Intrauterin device (IUD)”, male condom and withdrawal. More than half of the participants were using a contraceptive method which is used by women (58.3%,

n=144). Only 30% of the women stated that they went to family planning center with their spouses. When the thoughts of the women on the participation of their spouses into the arrangement of fertile is examined, most of the women (80.6%) stated that they wish to go to family planning center with their spouses. Data about fertility arrangement of women is shown in Table 2. Almost whole of the women who are using contraceptive methods are happy with the methods they are using (Table 2), however 65.3% of them believe that their spouses should also apply relevant methods.

Table 2. Data about fertility arrangement of women (n= 247)		
	n	%
Number of children wanted		
1	10	4.0
2	107	43.4
3 and over	130	52.6
Ever use of contraceptive		
Yes	179	72.5
No	68	27.5
Currently used contraceptive		
Method in respect of the women	144	58.3
Method in respect of the men	103	41.7
Willingness of women for contraceptive use		
Yes	133	92.1
No	11	7.9
Person who accompany women when they go to the family planning center		
Relatives	43	17.4
Spouse	74	30.0
Alone	99	40.1
Does not go to family planning center	31	12.6
Wish for her spouse would come with her to family planning center (n=216)		
Yes	174	80.6
No	42	19.4
The reason why she does not want her spouse to come to the family planning center with her (n=42)		
Not need	28	66.7
He does not want himself, he is beware	14	33.3

Table 3 shows the thoughts of women about their spouses’ participation into the arrangement of fertility. When the reasons behind this opinion are queried, most frequent replies were as follows: “the use of method by men is easier” (46.2%), “the methods used by the men have less side effects” (20.9%), and “men should also take responsibility” (19.6%). It is particularly remarkable that the rate of women who stated that their husbands could use condom is 58.8% (Table 3). Most of the women (88.3%) believe that women should rather take responsibility for the arrangement of fertility

and this is because of that men generally do not want to apply relevant methods (48.2%). 83.8% of the women think that men should attend the arrangement of fertility and 77.3% stated that their spouses would not wish to apply vasectomy when they have desired number of children.

The average number of miscarriage of the women is 1.27 ± 0.61 , the average number of curettage is 1.19 ± 0.56 and the average number of living children is 2.68 ± 1.03 . 43.7% of women had three or more pregnancies.

It was found that; the age of the woman and her husband, the marriage period, number of maternity and miscarriage and the education level of the spouse affect, with a significance level of $p < .05$, the contraception positions of the women, the selection of contraception method, their pleasure of the method applied, voluntary contraception and selection of method which the spouse wishes to use.

DISCUSSION

In 1994, in International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), it was expressed that women and men should have authority on reproduction as they have been informed and are entitled to arrange their fertility as well as the participation of men into FP services should be increased.² Men's preference on fertility and their knowledge and attitude on various issues such as ideal family size and use of contraceptive methods are major

determinants for the perception of the importance of the family planning and the necessity of reproductive health services. Furthermore, it takes a determinative role on their spouses' behaviors of maternity. In our study, half of the participants stated that they wish to have 3 or more children as an ideal family size. As indicated above, it can be said that the thoughts of the husbands may have been effective in this decision.

At the same time, requested total fertility rate is 1.9 whereas the observed fertility rate is 2.9 in Turkey Demographic and Health Survey 2013 data⁶. In our study, half of the women stated that ideal number of children should be 3 or over, which made us think about that the social policies which are being applied in Turkey currently would be effective for the determination of the family size.

	n	%
<i>The approach of the women who use contraceptive methods by themselves about the issue of use of methods by their spouses (n=144)</i>		
Prefers	94	65.3
Do not prefer	50	34.7
<i>The reason for preferring the use of methods by their spouses (n=144)</i>		
The use of method by men is easier	67	46.2
Less side effects	30	20.9
Men should take responsibility as well	28	19.6
Safer	19	13.3
<i>The methods of contraception applicable by the men according to the preference of women who use contraceptive methods by themselves (n:144)</i>		
Condom	85	58.8
Withdrawal	50	34.8
Vasectomy	9	6.4
<i>Thoughts about who are taking the responsibility of using FP method</i>		
Male	29	11.7
Female	218	88.3
<i>Considerations about the reasons why the responsibility of using FP method is undertaken by women</i>		
Men do not want to apply method	119	48.2
There are more methods for women's convenience	56	22.7
Contraception is responsibility of the female	38	15.4
Men have no knowledge on the matter	19	7.7
Men have religious prejudices	10	4.0
Men do not believe the necessity of contraception	5	2.0
<i>Women's thoughts about the men's involvement with FP Services</i>		
Should attend	207	83.8
Not necessarily	40	16.2
<i>Women's thoughts about their spouse's considerations on preference of vasectomy</i>		
My husband approves this method	18	7.3
My husband does not approve this method	191	77.3
Can't rightly say	38	15.4

In our study, rate of use of any family planning method was determined as 72.5%. In Turkey

Demographic and Health Survey 2013 data, 74 percent of married women seems to be using

contraceptive methods.⁶ It seems that there is no important change in this rate within the four years' period and similar results were obtained.

In our study, IUD and condom were determined as the most preferred methods used. In terms of the frequency of the method being used, our finding is similar with various studies in the literature.⁷⁻¹⁰ The preference of condom by the couples among applicable methods may be considered as a positive situation in terms of men's sharing the responsibility of using contraceptive method with their wives. On the other hand, this is also important as it reveals the fact that men should utilize from reproductive health and family planning services more. Nevertheless, in our study, when the currently used method is queried, it is seen that more than half of the women participants are applying contraceptive methods by themselves. This result is supported by the women's statements indicating that the men still have not reached the desired level for using relevant methods and do not share the responsibility at all.

Recently, it was comprehended that men's participation and support is a basic factor for any reproductive health initiative. In order to provide their participation and support; knowledge, education and communication organizations should be formed.¹¹⁻¹³ However, men's role in family planning has been considerably ignored and women always have been targeted for reproduction health services, including Turkey.^{4,7,9,10} Thus, men's participation into family planning is not at satisfactory level in our country. As a matter of fact, in our study, only one third of the participant women stated that they applied to family planning services with their spouses but their husbands did not accompany them actively during the service. In our study, most of the women wished that they should have applied for the service along with their spouses and wished their spouses accompany them during the service, which is indeed an indication that women want their spouses' supports for the arrangement of fertility and for their decisions on reproductive health. For the accomplishment of reproductive health services, it is important that the men should also take place within the target group. Thus, men's affirmative approach on the arrangement of fertility and their support for their spouses will facilitate the women's access into family planning services and make women to use these services easier. Accordingly, the availability and permanency of the services will be provided.¹⁴⁻¹⁶

Starting from men's decision making process on using a contraceptive method; selection of the method, use of the method by the men, and men's companion during the follow up process, their support for their spouses to use relevant methods and more frequently giving preference to use men-specific methods such as condom and vasectomy, comprise the most important part of the men's participation into family planning procedure. As a matter of fact, in our study, more than half of the women were using women-specific contraceptive methods. 65.3% of the women stated that their husbands should also apply relevant methods. This finding hereby reveals that the spouses' participation level into family planning and arrangement of fertility still seems to be low. Results obtained from similar studies conducted in the literature are consistent with our findings as well.^{7,9,10,16}

Kaida et al (2005), in their study investigate men's participation into family planning in 2005, revealed that; men have inadequate information about family planning and services, family planning services are not capable of replying men's needs satisfactorily and there exists insufficient communication between the couples on FP issue.¹⁷ Yet, in order to enable a satisfactory level of family planning services; men should also take responsibility in family planning issue, they should be involved with the services and responsibility should be shared by the couples. These are the factors which would increase the satisfaction and success in FP services.^{11,18}

In our study, most of the participants indicate that women are taking responsibility for the arrangement of fertility and men should take responsibility as well, and added; methods used by men are easier to be used and have less side effects, thus their spouses may use these methods. In the similar studies made so far, women also expressed generally that responsibility of selection of FP method should be shared between the couples.^{7-10,16,19} In our study, despite the women's consideration about the necessity of sharing of the responsibility of using relevant methods between the couples, it is assessed as a positive finding which would affect the use of effective method. In our study it is a striking finding that women emphasized the withdrawal method (34.8%) as a secondary preference which can be used by their spouses whereas the use of condom is the primary preference (58.8%), which we believe that the reasons of this opinion should be researched.

CONCLUSION

In our study, most of the women desire to apply to family planning methods together with their spouses. They believe that women feel and take more responsibility for the arrangement of fertility, and men should also attend the arrangement of fertility and should take more responsibility in this issue. The most preferred method of contraception is the condom, whereas preference of withdrawal method seems to have a considerable rate. In this sense, it is obvious that there exists lack of knowledge. In order to extend the use of modern methods for the application of FP, it is considered that introduction of modern methods should be focused particularly and the communication between the health personnel and target group should be revised, furthermore FP services should be planned and informed in such a manner to promote men's participation in this respect. Support towards the use of modern methods by the men is an effective step for the sharing of responsibilities. Moreover, reasons for preferring withdrawal method should be investigated as well. Similar studies are also set forth to be applied on male participants.

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