

Family Planning Knowledge of and Contraceptive Attributes Desired by Postpartum Women in Northern Haiti

Background: Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, with a maternal mortality ratio of 670/100,000. Increasing access to services that help avoid pregnancy are closely related to lower maternal mortality, thus demonstrating family planning as a method of primary prevention of maternal mortality. In Haiti, 25% of sexually active women are using a method of contraception, 60% not using contraception expressed a desire to do so.

The immediate postpartum period is focused on largely because this is a cohort of women who are likely interested in spacing or limiting future pregnancies. Household data from Haiti demonstrated women surveyed had a strong desire for birth spacing of at least 2 years, yet only 23 % had used a contraceptive method in the first 12 months postpartum and a large number of women delivered a subsequent child in less than 2 years, indicating a substantial unmet need for effective postpartum contraception. Of the contraceptive methods used in the first year postpartum, less than 1% were long-acting, reversible methods, such as the IUD and the contraceptive implant.

Hypothesis: This study hypothesizes that women in the immediate postpartum period have unmet family planning needs and are likely interested in contraceptive methods with characteristics of long-acting reversible methods. One of our study aims was to evaluate the baseline family planning knowledge of postpartum women who have delivered at a large public hospital in Haiti, as well as their desired contraceptive attributes. We also aimed to determine the level of knowledge and practices of the providers in the realm of long-acting methods.

Methodology: As part of a larger post partum family planning study, we conducted 6 focus groups with postpartum women ($n=33$), 3 focus groups with service providers ($n=22$), and administered a questionnaire to postpartum women ($n=250$). This study took place at the Justinian University Hospital in Cap Haitien, Haiti.

Results:

Key patient focus group findings:

- Most women expressed a desire to either space or limit their pregnancies, including women who had only one child
- Most women had not heard of an IUD and if that had, had negative associations with its use

Key provider focus group findings:

- Most providers stating that PP FP has traditionally been set as a low priority on a service focusing on emergency obstetrical and surgical care
- None of the resident physicians or nurses had placed an IUD, but they did have limited experience with implants
- Most report long acting and permanent methods not offered unless the patient has had many children

Key patient survey results:

- 72% surveyed expressed a desire for greater than 3 years spacing between births, yet 55% of those who'd had a previous birth stated they had not achieved desired spacing. 50% of current pregnancies were reported as unplanned, and 73% of women surveyed stated they do not want more children. 80% of women desired to choose a method of contraception prior to hospital exit.
- Nearly 70% of women surveyed reported previous use of some sort of family planning, including traditional methods. The majority were aware of combined hormonal contraceptive pills, the progestin injection and male condoms, 44% were aware of the progestin implant and only 1.2 % reported awareness of the IUD as a family planning method. 1.6% had used the progestin implant, and none of the participants had used an IUD.
- When asked about desired attributes in a contraceptive method, the majority of women expressed a desire for a long-lasting, reversible family planning method (64%), with a rapid return to fertility at discontinuation (51.2%) high efficacy (92.62%), and continued monthly periods during use (80.33%). 84% would prefer a method that is safe for the user, safe during breastfeeding and imparts no increased infection or infertility risk

Knowledge Contribution: Unmet need for family planning remains high in Haiti, and in the population studied, awareness of and use of the most effective reversible methods of contraception remains low. Women studied expressed desire for substantial spacing between pregnancies as well as for contraceptives with many of the attributes of the long acting reversible methods. Efforts to increase awareness of the progestin implant and copper IUD, both of which are available in Haiti through the Ministry of Health system, and to expand provider knowledge and provision of these methods could help women reach their reproductive goals and providers deliver comprehensive family planning care. Given that women desired to choose a method prior to hospital exit and that maintaining monthly periods was an important attribute for most women, expanding access to copper

IUDs to include provision in the immediate postpartum period may be a feasible and logical next step.