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Vol.40, No.2, 1994

- Husband-wife communication and contraceptive behaviour in Sri Lanka** 1
Dr. W.I. De Silva
- The Indian woman: Some observations** 14
Ms. Anees Jung
- Acceptance of family planning and linkages with development variables:
Evidence from a study of 80 villages in Orissa** 18
Dr. R.K. Sinha and Dr. Tara Kanitkar
- Contraceptive behaviour in women carrying an unwanted pregnancy** 26
Dr. Rashmi Asif, Dr. S.N.Sinha, Dr. M. Yunus, Prof. M. Zaheer
and Dr. S. Mohsin
- Differential acceptance of family planning methods in a high
performance district in Karnataka** 31
Dr. K.N.M. Raju, Dr. T.N. Bhat, Dr. K.S. Umamani and
Dr. M. Lingaraju
- Effect of seasonality on waiting time to conception: An Indian experience** 40
Dr. Dilip C. Nath
- The possibility of India's population crossing that of China** 47
Mr. P.N. Kapoor
- Regional variations in contraceptive choice in Andhra Pradesh** 51
Dr. P. Satya Sekhar and Dr. C.P. Nagi Reddy
- Impact of infant and child mortality on the fertility and
family size of white-collar workers** 61
Dr. J.N. Srivastava

Husband-wife communication and contraceptive behaviour in Sri Lanka

Dr. W. Indralal De Silva

Introduction

Although husband-wife communication has been identified as an important factor in the process of decision making about family size and the adoption of family planning practices^{1,2}, few fertility surveys have included the responses of both husbands and wives. Usually, responses are collected only from the wife, partly on the assumption that husbands and wives have the same view and, moreover, that the husband's values can be ascertained by asking the wife to respond in the way she thinks her husband would. Coombs and Chang³, however, provide evidence that neither the husband nor the wife should be accepted as a surrogate respondent. The extent to which husbands and wives agree in their attitudes towards a number of key issues that may affect fertility behaviour shows that although the aggregate views of men and women are remarkably similar, those of married couples are frequently in disagreement.

Spouses who communicate on matters related to sex have favourable attitudes to family planning. Therefore, they exhibit a

somewhat lower fertility than those who either do not communicate with each other about their sex life, or seldom get an opportunity to do so^{4,6}. Since Sri Lankan fertility is in transition and targeted to reach replacement level by the year 2001, there has been an increasing recognition of the importance of communication between spouses in successful family planning. Even though there are very few Sri Lankan studies on husband-wife communication with regard to contraceptive behaviour⁷, there is sufficient evidence from studies conducted in other countries to substantiate the dominance relations and segregation roles which may affect the possibility of the husband and wife jointly deciding to practice family planning. Therefore, this study examines the level of husband-wife communication on family planning, and the factors associated with communication such as initiation of discussion of family planning, time reference of the first discussion, and decision making in Sri Lanka. Agreement between the husband and wife reporting on their contraceptive use is also examined.

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To disseminate knowledge and education about, and to promote the adoption of, the practice of family planning for the advancement of basic human rights, family and community welfare, the achievement of a balance between population, resources and the environment, and the attainment of a higher standard and quality of life.

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