**INTER-SPOUSE COMMUNICATION AND CONTRACEPTIVE BEHAVIOR IN CAMEROON: A COUPLE-BASED ANALYSIS**

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**BACKGROUND**

Despite a decrease in the number of women dying due to complications during pregnancy and childbirth by nearly 50% from an estimated 523 000 in 1990 to 289 000 in 2013, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that nearly 800 women died every day from maternal causes in 2013, with almost all of these deaths (99%) occurring in developing countries (WHO, 2014). Family planning (FP), a key component of reproductive healthcare, can help to reduce maternal mortality by preventing unintended pregnancies and abortion-related deaths. However, in developing world FP remains out of reach for many couples and contraceptive prevalence is still at low rate. According to Population Reference Bureau (PRB), contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) among married women in least developed countries was about 34 % in 2013 while this proportion was around 72 % and 26 % in more developed countries and Sub Saharan countries respectively (PRB, 2013).

In Cameroon, the number of deaths due to maternal complications increased from 669 in 2004 to 782 per 100000 living births in 2011. The CPR among women living in couple has increased between 1991 and 2004 from 16% to 26%, but there is a contrast in 2011, with a decrease to 23% (DHS-MICS, 2011). In addition, 24 % of women in union had an unmet need for family planning in 2011 while this proportion was 22% 1991.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Inter-spouse communication on FP has been found in the literature to have a great influence in the decision making process of couples for adopting FP measures, especially in male dominated cultures, where, it is thought unnecessary for men to discuss family planning as child bearing and contraception are presumed to be female matters (Islam et al, 2010; Becker, 1996). In Cameroon, 53% of women in union (married or cohabiting) have never discussed about FP with their partner (DHS-MICS, 2011). This study tried to answer at two specific questions: **what is the effect of spouse communication about FP on contraceptive use of couples in Cameroon?** and **what is the effect of spouse communication about FP on couples future intention to use contraceptives in Cameroon?**

**DATA AND METHODS**

This study used the couple dataset derived from the 2011 Cameroon Demographic and Health Survey combined with the Multiple Indicator Clusters Survey (DHS-MICS, 2011) executed by the National Institute of Statistics of Cameroon. The DHS-MICS data is a national representative two-stage sampling survey covering all the ten administrative regions in addition to the two main towns Yaoundé and Douala considered like regions. The survey collected data on demography, access to social services, socio-economic status, family dynamics, and knowledge and practice of family planning. The couple dataset was generated by linking the spouses from the male dataset constituted of a sample of 3000 currently men in union (married or cohabiting) aged between 15-59 years and those from females which has a sample of 9805 ever married or cohabiting women aged 15-49 years. We matched within a household the man who is identified as the household head with the woman who is identified as the spouse of the head; this resulted in a maximum of one couple per household. Thus, our sample consists of 2973 couples.

The statistical analyses have been performed by the software SPSS v17 and Stata 12. Chi square tests and binary logistic models were used to examine associations between spousal discussion about family planning and dependent variables (contraceptive use and future intention of use contraceptives). We created four multivariate models: The first included only our main independent variable, the second added couple interaction variables, the third added individual-level characteristics and the fourth added community-level characteristics.

**RESULTS**

The percentage of couples currently used contraceptives is 19,34% and around 56% of couples never discussed on family planning. At bivariate level, results showed a strong association between inter-spousal communication on FP and using of contraceptives within couples; only 10.7% of couples which never discussed FP used contraceptives whereas this proportion is 33.7% within couples which discussed FP sometimes/often. Multivariate analyses suggest a strong positive influence of husband-wife communication about family planning on contraceptive use and future intention to use contraceptives. Spouses are less likely to use contraceptives when they never discussed on family planning than they discussed about it once or twice time (OR= 2,38; 99%), or sometimes/often (OR= 3,18; 99%). Furthermore, among couples currently not practicing contraception, couples which discussed once or twice about FP were more likely to intend to use contraceptive compared with those which never discussed about FP (OR= 2,17; 99%) and couples which discussed sometimes or often about FP were more likely to intend to use contraceptive than those couples in which discussion does not exist (OR= 2,23; 99%). This study also showed that other factors like women’s autonomy, couple’s desire for another child, number of living children (as reported by woman), religion and household wealth index influence positively current contraceptive use of couples, while couple’s desire for another child, number of living children (as reported by woman), religion, couple differential education level and household wealth index influence positively couple future intention to use contraceptives.

**KNOWLEDGE CONTRIBUTION**

Family Planning issues remain topical in developing countries which total fertility rates are still high. It has been found that FP can help to avoid maternal and child morbidity and mortality and then contribute to well-being of population and economic development. The knowledge of main determining factors explaining contraceptive behavior of couples is crucial for public policies of Low and Middle Income Countries like Cameroon where maternal health is globally alarming. In addition, understand factors influencing decision-making process of couples on FP is a significant contribution to FP programs which until now do not attend expected results in a country like Cameroon. Many studies in Cameroon have been conducted to find out the dynamic of family planning adoption, but these studies mostly focused on the determinants of women’s contraceptive use. Studies highlighting husband’s influence in decision making regarding family size and family planning adoption are few and not recent. In addition, until now no study in Cameroon has focused on the interaction between spouse communication on FP and contraceptive behavior of couples using a couple dataset. So this study contribute to the literature of FP in Cameroon. Results of this study could help policy makers to reshape FP programs by putting the emphasis on male involvement in communication with their spouse about FP. This issue seems necessary for the improvement of women health at household level as well as at national level.

**ANNEX**

| ***Table1. Percentage distribution of couples subsample, by selected characteristics, DHS-MICS Cameroon 2011*** |
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|  **Characteristics** | **%** |
| **Age groups** |
| Same age or wife is older | 6.7 |
| Husband is older by 1-5 years | 29.6 |
| Husband is older by 5-10years | 32.9 |
| Husband is older by more than 10 years | 30.8 |
| **Area of residence** |
| Urban | 39.5 |
| Rural | 60.5 |
| **Education level** |
| Both=None/Primary | 49.2 |
| Husband>=Secondary; Wife<=Primary | 19.2 |
| Husband<=Primary; Wife>=Secondary | 7.2 |
| Both>=Secondary | 24.4 |
| **Religion** |
| Both Christian | 50.3 |
| Both Muslim | 22.9 |
| Both Animist/Other | 2.1 |
| Different Religions | 24.7 |
| **Number of living children ǂ** |
| 0-1 | 24.5 |
| 2-3 | 32.5 |
| 4 and more | 43.1 |
| **Inter-spousal communication about FP** |
| Never | 55.8 |
| Once or twice | 24.3 |
| Sometimes/often | 19.9 |
| **Household Wealth index** |
| Poor | 33.4 |
| Intermediate | 33.3 |
| Rich | 33.3 |
| **Women's autonomy** |
| Low autonomy | 46.1 |
| Medium autonomy | 19.7 |
| High autonomy | 34.2 |
| **Couple's desire for another child** |
| Both want another | 59.4 |
|  Neither wants another | 13.4 |
| Discordant responses | 27.3 |
| *ǂ As reported by wife* |  |

| ***Table2. Percentage of couples currently using contraceptives and future intention of FP using. by selected characteristics. DHS-MICS Cameroon 2011*** |
| --- |
| **Characteristics** | **% Using contraceptives** | **% Future intention of FP using** |
| **Age groups** |  | **\*** |
| Same age or wife is older | 17.2 | 41.7 |
| Husband is older by 1-5 years | 19.1 | 44.3 |
| Husband is older by 5-10years | 20.1 | 42.7 |
| Husband is older by more than 10 years | 18.4 | 37.3 |
| **Area of residence** | **\*\*** | **\*\*** |
| Urban | 27.3 | 52.1 |
| Rural | 14.1 | 35.5 |
| **Education level** | **\*\*** | **\*\*** |
| Both=None/Primary | 11.9 | 31.0 |
| Husband>=Secondary; Wife<=Primary | 18.4 | 43.8 |
| Husband<=Primary; Wife>=Secondary | 26.5 | 62.4 |
| Both>=Secondary | 32.9 | 59.8 |
| **Religion** | **\*\*** | **\*\*** |
| Both Christian | 24.0 | 45.9 |
| Both Muslim | 5.6 | 31.9 |
| Both Animist/Other | 16.1 | 48.1 |
| Different Religions | 22.9 | 42.3 |
| **Number of living children ǂ** | **\*\*** | **\*\*** |
| 0-1 | 11.1 | 41.7 |
| 2-3 | 18.7 | 45.6 |
| 4 and more | 24.5 | 37.8 |
| **Inter-spousal communication about FP** | **\*\*** | **\*\*** |
| Never | 10.7 | 32.3 |
| Once or twice | 26.8 | 55.3 |
| Sometimes/often | 33.7 | 56.5 |
| **Household Wealth index** | **\*\*** | **\*\*** |
| Poor | 5.4 | 27.5 |
| Intermediate | 19.4 | 46.7 |
| Rich | 33.2 | 54.8 |
| **Women's autonomy** | **\*\*** | **\*\*** |
| Low autonomy | 11.9 | 36.8 |
| Medium autonomy | 25.2 | 47.2 |
| High autonomy | 25.5 | 45.3 |
| **Couple's desire for another child** | **\*\*** | **\*\*** |
| Both want another | 14.5 | 43.7 |
|  Neither wants another | 38.5 | 44.1 |
| Discordant responses | 20.2 | 36.8 |
| *\*p≤0.05. \*\*p≤0.01. ǂ As reported by wife* |

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| ***Table3. Odds ratios (and 95% confidence intervals) from logistic regression analyses assessing couples’ likelihood of current contraceptive use. by selected characteristics. DHS-MICS Cameroon 2011*** |
| **Characteristics** | **Model 0** | **Model 1** | **Model 2** | **Model 3** |
| **Inter-spousal communication about FP** |
| Never (Ref.) | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| Once or twice | **3.04 [2.43-3.83]\*\*** | **2.72 [2.14-3.45]\*\*** | **2.41 [1.88-3.08]\*\*** | **2.38 [1.85-3.07]\*\*** |
| Sometimes/often | **4.23 [3.36-5.34]\*\*** | **3.69 [2.89-4.71]\*\*** | **3.17 [2.47-4.08]\*\*** | **3.18 [2.46-4.11]\*\*** |
| **Women's autonomy** |
| Low autonomy (Ref.) | na | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| Medium autonomy | na | **2.12 [1.63-2.77]\*\*** | **1.70 [1.29-2.25]\*\*** | **1.52 [1.14-2.02]\*\*** |
| High autonomy | na | **1.95 [1.55-2.46]\*\*** | **1.52 [1.19-1.93]\*\*** | **1.29 [1.00-1.65]\*** |
| **Couple's desire for another child** |
| Both want another (Ref.) | na | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
|  Neither wants another | na | **3.28 [2.53-4.26]\*\*** | **2.13 [1.56-2.90]\*\*** | **1.66 [1.21-2.31]\*\*** |
| Discordant responses | na | **1.53 [1.22-1.93]\*\*** | **1.26 [0.98-1.63]\*** | 1.18 [0.90-1.54] |
| **Number of living children *ǂ*** |
| 0-1 (Ref.) | na | na | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| 2-3 | na | na | **1.86 [1.36-2.55]\*\*** | **1.92 [1.39-2.64]\*\*** |
| 4 and more | na | na | **2.39 [1.70-3.34]\*\*** | **2.86 [2.01-4.05]\*\*** |
| **Religion** |
| Both Christian (Ref.) | na | na | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| Both Muslim | na | na | **0.36 [0.24-0.53]\*\*** | **0.31 [0.21-0.47]\*\*** |
| Both Animist/Other | na | na | 0.70 [0.32-1.52] | 0.99 [0.45-2.21] |
| Different Religions | na | na | 1.07 [0.85-1.34] | 1.06 [0.83-1.34] |
| **Education level** |
| Both=None/Primary (Ref.) | na | na | 1.00 | 1.00  |
| Husband>=Secondary; Wife<=Primary | na | na | 1.30 [0.97-1.74] **┼** | 0.90 [0.66-1.22] |
| Husband<=Primary; Wife>=Secondary | na | na | **2.17 [1.48-3.19]\*\*** | 1.19 [0.80-1.80] |
| Both>=Secondary | na | na | **2.60 [2.00-3.37]\*\*** | 1.23 [0.92-1.66] |
| **Age groups** |
| Same age or wife is older | na | na | 0.65 [0.42-1.01]**┼** | 0.72 [0.46-1.12] |
| Husband is older by 1-5 years | na | na | 0.82 [0.64-1.06] | 0.87 [0.67-1.13] |
| Husband is older by 5-10years (Ref.) | na | na | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| Husband is older by more than 10 years | na | na | 1.05 [0.81-1.36] | 1.13 [0.87-1.48] |
| **Household Wealth index** |
| Poor (Ref.) | na | na | na | 1.00 |
| Intermediate | na | na | na | **3.37 [2.36-4.81]\*\*** |
| Rich | na | na | na | **7.86 [5.11-12.1]\*\*** |
| **Area of residence** |
| Urban | na | na | na | 0.78 [0.59-1.03]┼ |
| Rural (Ref.) | na | na | na | 1.00 |
| *\*p≤0.05. \*\*p≤0.01. ┼ p≤0.1. ǂ As reported by wife.* |

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| ***Table4. Odds ratios (and 95% confidence intervals) from logistic regression analyses assessing the likelihood that couples not currently using contraceptives intend to use, by selected characteristics. DHS-MICS Cameroon 2011*** |
| **Characteristics** | **Model 0** | **Model 1** | **Model 2** | **Model 3** |
| **Inter-spousal communication about FP** |
| Never (Ref.) | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| Once or twice | **2.59 [2.11-3.18]\*\*** | **2.42 [1.97-2.99]\*\*** | **2.21 [1.78-2.74]\*\*** | **2.17 [1.74-2.70]\*\*** |
| Sometimes/often | **2.72 [2.16-3.42]\*\*** | **2.65 [2.09-3.35]\*\*** | **2.27 [1.78-2.89]\*\*** | **2.23 [1.74-2.85]\*\*** |
| **Women's autonomy** |
| Low autonomy (Ref.) | na | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| Medium autonomy | na | **1.40 [1.11-1.76]\*\*** | 1.14 [0.89-1.45] | 1.07 [0.84-1.37] |
| High autonomy | na | **1.24 [1.02-1.51]\*** | 0.99 [0.81-1.23] | 0.91 [0.74-1.13] |
| **Couple's desire for another child** |
| Both want another (Ref.) | na | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
|  Neither wants another | na | **0.90 [0.68-1.20]** | 0.88 [0.64-1.22] | 0.76 [0.55-1.06]**┼** |
| Discordant responses | na | 0.76 [0.62-0.93]**┼** | **0.79 [0.64-0.99]\*** | **0.76 [0.61-0.96]\*\*** |
| **Number of living children *ǂ*** |
| 0-1 (Ref.) | na | na | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| 2-3 | na | na | **1.28 [1.02-1.62]\*** | **1.31 [1.04-1.66]\*\*** |
| 4 and more | na | na | 1.10 [0.85-1.41] | 1.17 [0.90-1.51] |
| **Religion** |
| Both Christian (Ref.) | na | na | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| Both Muslim | na | na | 0.85 [0.67-1.09] | 0.80 [0.62-1.02]┼ |
| Both Animist/Other | na | na | 1.54 [0.85-2.79] | 1.78 [0.97-3.27]**┼** |
| Different Religions | na | na | 0.92 [0.74-1.15] | 0.93 [0.74-1.16] |
| **Education level** |
| Both=None/Primary (Ref.) | na | na | 1.00 | 1.00  |
| Husband>=Secondary; Wife<=Primary | na | na | **1.61 [1.27-2.03]\*\*** | **1.33 [1.04-1.69]\*** |
| Husband<=Primary; Wife>=Secondary | na | na | **3.05 [2.10-4.43]\*\*** | **2.22 [1.51-3.27]\*\*** |
| Both>=Secondary | na | na | **2.78 [2.16-3.56]\*\*** | **1.91 [1.44-2.53]\*\*** |
| **Age groups** |
| Same age or wife is older | na | na | 0.87 [0.60-1.27] | 0.88 [0.61-1.28] |
| Husband is older by 1-5 years | na | na | 0.95 [0.76-1.19] | 0.98 [0.78-1.23] |
| Husband is older by 5-10years (Ref.) | na | na | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| Husband is older by more than 10 years | na | na | 0.91 [0.73-1.14] | 0.92 [0.73-1.14] |
| **Household Wealth index** |
| Poor (Ref.) | na | na | na | 1.00 |
| Intermediate | na | na | na | **1.88 [1.48-2.39]\*\*** |
| Rich | na | na | na | **2.10 [1.49-2.95]\*\*** |
| **Area of residence** |
| Urban | na | na | na | 1.05 [0.81-1.35] |
| Rural (Ref.) | na | na | na | 1.00 |
| *\*p≤0.05. \*\*p≤0.01. ┼ p≤0.1. ǂ As reported by wife.* |