THE SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE PROJECT
FAMILY PLANNING

Sketches

A Research Publication of The Social Acceptance Project-Family Planning Vol. 1 No. 2 Series of 2003

What Does Family Planning Mean to Filipinos?

The Filipinos' attitude towards family planning may best be appreciated from four points of view, categorized as follows: the Risk Avoiders, the Pleasure Seekers, the Relationship Enhancers, and the Controllers.

The **Risk Avoiders** are those who see family planning as a way of avoiding the risk of another pregnancy. They usually see the need for family planning after their second or third child, and their motivation is usually economic:

> *"I have three children. That's enough for now. Life is hard."*
>
> — MARRIED FEMALE, PILL USER

The Risk Avoiders are mostly married and their methods of choice are usually the more effective ones, e.g., the pill, condom, IUD. For ensured effectiveness, they use a combination of methods such as condom and the pill (*"compil"*) or calendar and condom.

The **Pleasure Seekers** are usually males who see family planning as a way to have "sex without fear". Family planning allows them to have sex anytime without worrying about getting infected with a disease or getting their girlfriends pregnant. Condoms are usually their method of choice.

> *"If you have condoms [you don't have to worry if you get into] a situation with your girlfriend. For instance, you are alone with her in her house, maybe watching TV, and you start kissing, which could turn passionate, and which could lead to sex. You can [assure] her that it's safe."*
>
> — SINGLE MALE

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This paper is based on findings in "Project Dynasty," a qualitative research study carried out in January-February 2003 by AC Nielsen for The Social Acceptance Project-Family Planning (TSAP-FP). TSAP-FP is being implemented in the Philippines by the Academy for Educational Development (AED) with funding support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The study was conducted among 230 respondents composed of male and female, 15-34 years old, single and married, belonging to Class DE and Broad C, and residing in Metro Manila, Cebu and industrial areas in Cavite, Batangas and Laguna. Most of the respondents were working, while the youngest respondents (15-18 years old) were usually still studying. Married respondents had one to six children.

Combining focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, the study aimed to accomplish the following objectives:

a. Identify knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about family planning and related issues, including sex, pregnancy, and children

b. Determine constraints and barriers to acceptance and use of family planning methods in terms of myths, misconceptions, taboos, fears, and cultural norms

c. Understand perceptions of modern vs. traditional methods

d. Understand perceptions of modern vs. traditional method users

e. Identify channels of information/ influence that impact on the family planning decisions of the target segments

"I told my girlfriend this will happen again and again so we might as well use [contraception]."

— SINGLE MALE, 18 YEARS OLD, CONDOM USER

The **Controllers** are those who see family planning as a way of controlling their sexual relationship with their spouse. They are usually married males who always want to have the last word in the conjugal home as well as in bed. They do not believe in consulting their wives about how many children to have, and when to have them. Not surprisingly, their wives are submissive and their own sexual satisfaction always takes precedence over their wives'. They have little or no control of their sexual urges when intoxicated and, despite their wives' resistance, insist on having sex in this condition — more often than not without protection. Most, in fact, admitted to getting their wives pregnant when they were drunk.

"We had another child because I was drunk. I was not able to withdraw because I wanted full satisfaction. She got mad but I said I was drunk."

— MARRIED MALE, WITHDRAWAL USER

Men in this group use withdrawal or rely on the calendar method. They do not allow their wives to use the more modern family planning methods because they would lose control over their sexual relationship.

The **Sexual Enhancers** are those who see family planning as a means to enhance their sexual relationship. They may be married or single, male or female, who enjoy having sex with their partners and use it to express their love for them.

"We are like newlyweds, that is why our love becomes stronger … it's like we're always on our honeymoon."

— MARRIED FEMALE

They are sensitive to the needs of their partners in bed and decide jointly about what family planning method to use. Their method of choice is dictated by what is suitable to them.

Reasons for Practicing Family Planning

The strongest motivating factor cited by couples for practicing family planning is to space their children.

"The children are still small." — MARRIED FEMALE, PILL USER

"My husband thinks our children will have a hard time if we have them one after the other."

— MARRIED FEMALE, CALENDAR USER

The second strongest motivating factor is to limit the number of children. This applies to couples who feel they already have their desired number of children. They normally choose ligation, IUD and the pill.

TABLE 1: FAMILY PLANNING HISTORY
Married Males and Females (Withdrawal/Calendar Users)

	Reasons for Trial	Reasons for Continuance	Reasons for Discontinuance/ Shifting
First Method Adopted			
Pills	Recommended by friends, relatives	• To avoid pregnancy • Space children • To be able to work	Side effects (i.e., became fat, headaches)
Injectables	Recommendation of health centers	• To avoid pregnancy • Space children • To be able to work	Side effects (i.e., irregular menstruation, irritable)
Withdrawal	Initiated by husband	• Perceived effectiveness	Desire to have children
Later Method Adopted			
Rhythm	Usually a self-made decision	• Economic • Effective • No fear of side effects • No cash out	Cycle became irregular

Note: Some of the withdrawal/calendar users started out with modern methods, but dropped out due to perceived side effects. Worth noting is the absence of a counselor when they decided to adopt rhythm as their current method.

Newlyweds are motivated to practice family planning by their desire to postpone having kids right away. They want to focus first on stabilizing their income and career. Family planning is usually a conjugal decision, and their method of choice is the pill.

Single females who practice family planning say they do not want to get pregnant simply because they are not ready for motherhood. They usually have ambitions that they would like to fulfill. They usually decide on their own about what method to use.

Reasons for Choosing to Use and Discontinuing to Use a Family Planning Method

The tables show the reasons why users initially try a method, why they continue using it, and why they later opted to discontinue or switch to another method.

TABLE 2: FAMILY PLANNING HISTORY Married Males and Females (Pills/Injectable Users)			
	Reasons for Trial	Reasons for Continuance	Reasons for Discontinuance/ Shifting
First Method Adopted			
Withdrawal	Usual method when they were just courting	• Perceived effectiveness • Habit	• Occurrence of pregnancy • Desire to have a baby
Later Method Adopted			
Pills	Recommended by friends, relatives	• To avoid pregnancy • Space children • To be able to work	Side effects (i.e., became fat, headaches)
Injectable	Recommendation of health centers	• To avoid pregnancy • Space children • To be able to work	• Side effects (i.e., irregular menstruation, irritable) • Fear of developing cancer

Note: The serious repercussions experienced because of an unexpected pregnancy due to method failure pushed withdrawal users to switch to more effective methods.

TABLE 3: FAMILY PLANNING HISTORY Single Males and Females			
	Reasons for Trial	Reasons for Continuance	Reasons for Discontinuance/ Shifting
First Method Adopted			
Withdrawal	• Perceived effectiveness • Misgivings about going to the health center (because of single status)	• Perceived effectiveness • Habit	• Occurrence of pregnancy • Desire to have a baby
Later Method Adopted			
Pills	Recommended by OB (need for privacy)	• To avoid pregnancy	Side effects (i.e., became fat, headaches)
Condom	• Usually a self-made decision • Recommended by friends (especially among males)	• To avoid pregnancy • To avoid contracting sexually transmitted diseases (Note: For some males, especially those who have sex with women other than girlfriends)	Less pleasure in sexual encounters (i.e., "plastic," "barrier," not the real thing)

Note: As sexual relations increased in frequency between them and their partners, single respondents sought more effective methods than withdrawal even if the latter afforded them secrecy.

Key Characteristics Sought When Choosing a Family Planning Method

Users of modern family planning methods cite the following characteristics as those that they would like to find in a method.

- Convenient to use
- Effective
- No side effects
- Safe — not harmful to the mother ("*hiyang*") and baby (not cause deformities).

They said it would help, too, if the methods were affordable, accessible, will not get in the way of pleasurable lovemaking, and — to really clinch the deal — if it would "make their skin beautiful."

For users of the traditional methods, the key characteristics sought are:

- Safe
- No side effects, and
- Affordable.

As an added value, they would prefer a method that will not affect their mood or their sex life.

Working women are particularly concerned about comfort and convenience. They want a no-fuss, no-nonsense method that will not hamper their movement as they go about their activities, at work and at home.

This publication is brought to you by The Social Acceptance Project-Family Planning (TSAP-FP). This project aims to promote greater social acceptance of family planning as part of one's lifestyle.

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