



POLICY Project Briefing Paper

Perspectives on Unmet Need for Family Planning in West Africa: Côte d'Ivoire

Conference on Repositioning Family Planning in West Africa

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Introduction

The countries of West Africa have some of the highest levels of unmet need for family planning in the world. During the six-year period (1995–2000) following the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, there were an estimated 12 million unintended pregnancies in the 18 West Africa Regional Program (WARP) countries.¹ Yet family planning programs are currently low on most national agendas and there is no concerted effort to address the expressed need for family planning. To reduce the health and development consequences of unintended fertility in West Africa, policymakers and planners need to study the characteristics of women with a demonstrated unmet need for family planning and use that information to improve policies and programs. This series of briefing papers is designed to contribute to that effort by offering some perspectives on the nature and dimensions of unmet need based on the findings of Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) in 11 West African countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Togo. This brief focuses on Côte d'Ivoire.

What is unmet need for family planning?

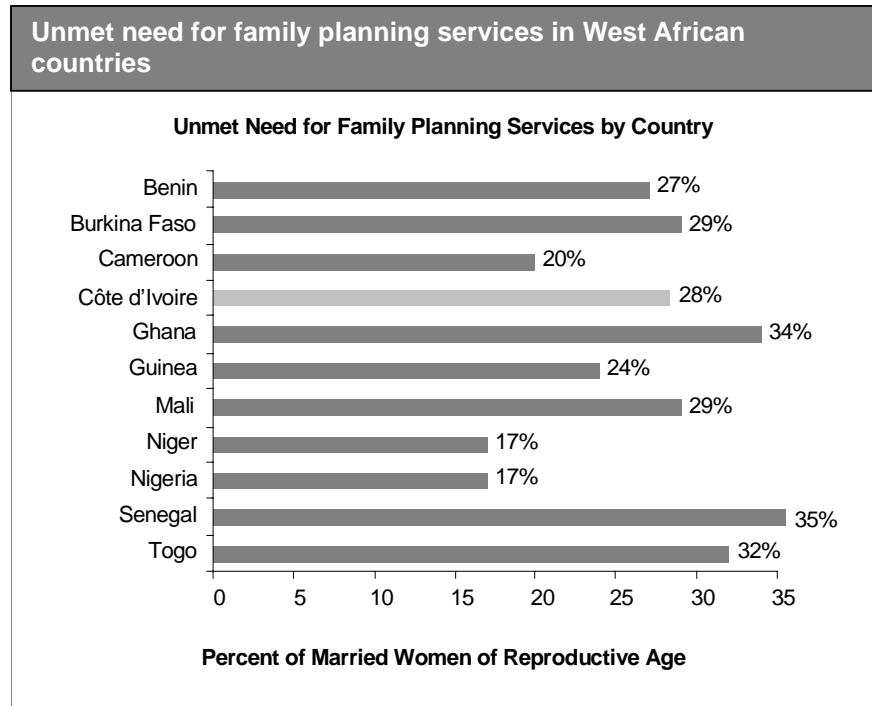
According to the DHS definition used in this series of briefs, a woman has an unmet need for contraception if she is fecund, sexually active, not using any contraceptive methods, and does not want a child for at least two years (“spacers”) or wants no more children (“limiters”). This definition produces a conservative estimate because it excludes groups who are arguably “in need.” For example, many traditional method users, who are motivated and at risk of unintended pregnancies, are using traditional contraception for lack of access to more effective methods.

¹ WARP is a USAID-funded regional program. The 18 countries are Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

Amenorrheic women who say they wanted their last birth are omitted even if they wish to delay their next pregnancy. One study illustrating the impact of including this group in sub-Saharan Africa shows that the proportion of married women with unmet need would have increased from 26 percent to 43 percent.

Why should policymakers and program managers be concerned about unmet need?

Policymakers in all sectors should be greatly concerned about the consequences of failing to meet unmet need. The reproductive health status of women and girls in West Africa is extremely poor compared with other regions and is further undermined by unintended pregnancies, which often result in deaths and injuries from abortions provided in unsafe conditions. Closely spaced and ill-timed pregnancies and births contribute to some of the world's highest infant mortality rates, and infants of mothers who die as a result of giving birth have a greater risk of mortality and poor health status.



Unintended fertility fuels a rate of population growth that is outpacing the region's efforts to meet the social needs of its citizens and achieve national development goals. By the mid-1990s, according to one source, population increase had outpaced economic gains and food production, leaving the average African 22 percent poorer than in 1975. Helping people to prevent unintended pregnancies and births also reduces the need for household and government expenditures on such services as treatment of postabortion complications and care for maternal orphans while contributing to healthier families who can earn more and save more—a primary goal of poverty eradication plans and essential to economic development.

West African countries are signatories to international agreements that commit them to the improved status of girls and women and to assuring the right of couples to freely determine the size and spacing of their families while providing them the means to do so. Unintended fertility locks girls and women into a cycle of early childbearing and poverty, and governments' failure to address family planning needs ignores individual rights.

Addressing unmet need for family planning provides an opportunity for policymakers in all sectors to respond to the expressed fertility preferences of their populations while simultaneously

improving health, slowing the rate of population growth, and contributing to achievement of national goals.

The reproductive revolution and unmet need for family planning

In the early 1960s, women in developing countries had, on average, between six and seven children apiece. Now, just 40 years later, they average about three children each. In the early 1960s, only about 6 percent of women in developing countries were using modern contraception; currently, more than 50 percent use some form of modern contraception. This astonishing change in behavior in a relatively short period of time is sometimes referred to as the reproductive revolution.

Despite these changes, some countries have lagged behind the reproductive revolution. In these countries, fertility remains high and contraceptive use is still low. It is in these countries that we find the highest levels of unmet need for family planning. And the urgency of rapidly expanding family planning information and services to respond to the particular conditions that create that need.

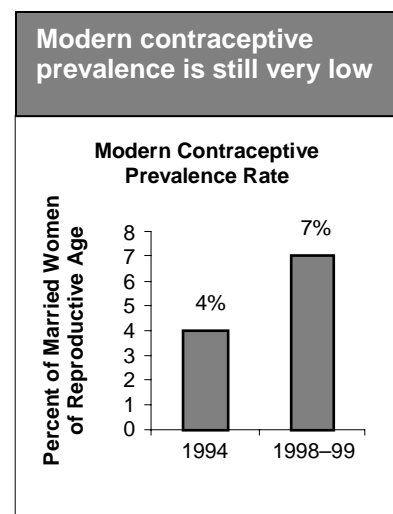
One of the important lessons of the reproductive revolution is that successful family planning programs can be developed and expanded even in challenging social and economic environments. Once the consequences of high levels of unmet family planning need for health and development are well understood across all branches of government and in the private sector, there will be greater support for resource mobilization.

What is the situation in West Africa?

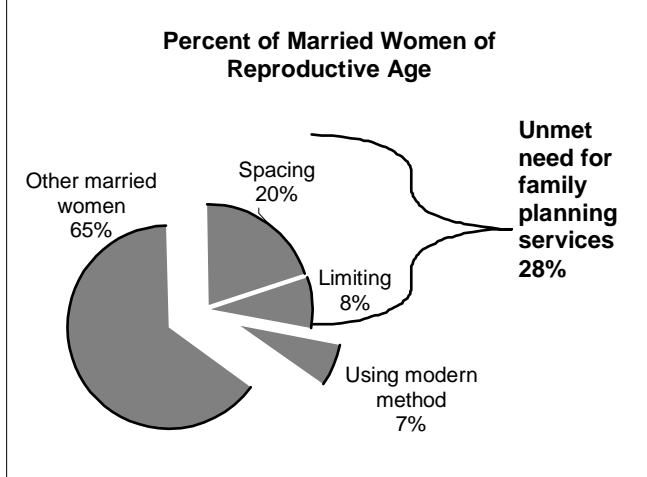
West Africa has lagged well behind the reproductive revolution. Modern contraceptive prevalence is low for most of the region, except for Cape Verde. The highest modern contraceptive prevalence rate is in Ghana at 19 percent. This is well ahead of the rest of the region but low compared to other regions. Unmet need for family planning services to space and limit births is high in West Africa. Considerable opportunity exists to respond to this need by strengthening family planning programs, that is, once the factors that prevent the use of services are better understood. The most recent Demographic and Health Surveys show that more than 30 percent of women of reproductive age in three countries—Ghana, Senegal, and Togo—report an unmet need. In six other countries, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, and Mali, 20 to 30 percent of married women of reproductive age report an unmet need for family planning. Unmet need is 17 percent in both Nigeria and Niger.

Fertility, contraceptive use, and unmet need in Côte d’Ivoire

Côte d’Ivoire had two demographic and health surveys (Enquêtes Démographiques et de Santé [EDSCI]), in 1994 and 1998–99. Between the 1994 and 1998–99 surveys, the reported fertility rate, or the average number of children per woman, dropped from 5.7 to 5.2. At the same time, modern contraceptive use among married women of reproductive age remained very low, only rising from 4 to 7 percent.



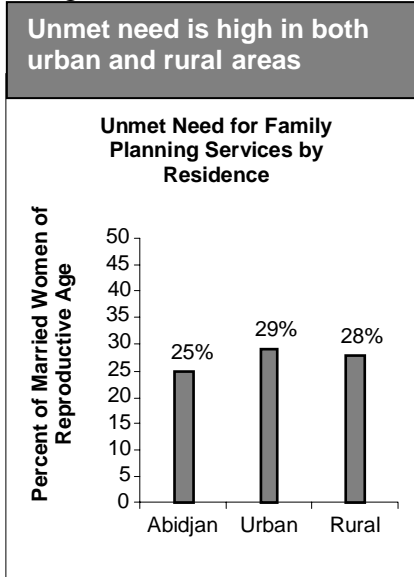
Côte d'Ivoire has a very high level of unmet need for family planning



Côte d'Ivoire has a very high level of unmet need for family planning services. EDSCI 1998 reports that more than 28 percent of married women of reproductive age fits into the unmet need category. “Spacers” are more common than “limiters.” About 20 percent of women with an unmet need would like to space their next birth for at least two years, while 8 percent would prefer not to have any more children. If Côte d'Ivoire were better able to identify the characteristics, preferences, and intentions of these women, it could make significant strides in expanding and improving family planning services.

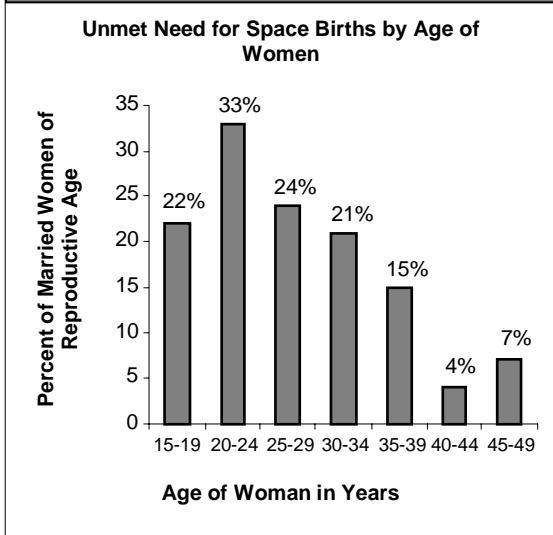
What are some of the characteristics of women with unmet need in Côte d'Ivoire?

Residence. When unmet need is so high, there is a demand for services throughout society. Unmet need in Abidjan is reported at 25 percent of married women of reproductive age, while it is 29 percent in other urban areas and 28 percent in rural parts of the country.

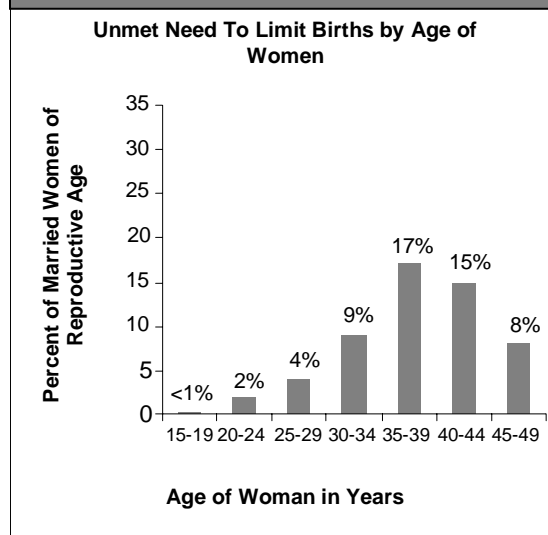


Age. The relationship between unmet need and age depends on whether the need is for family planning to space or to limit births. The unmet need to space births is highest among women ages 15–34 and lower among women in their late 30s and 40s. By contrast, the unmet need for limiting is low among

Unmet need to space births is highest among younger women



Unmet need to limit births is highest among older women

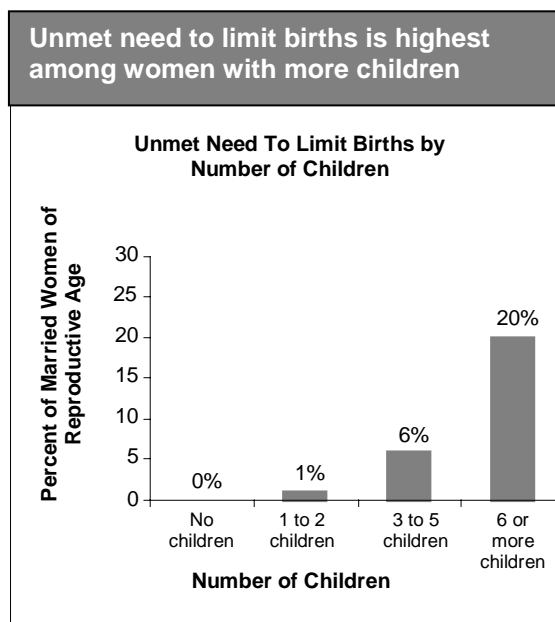
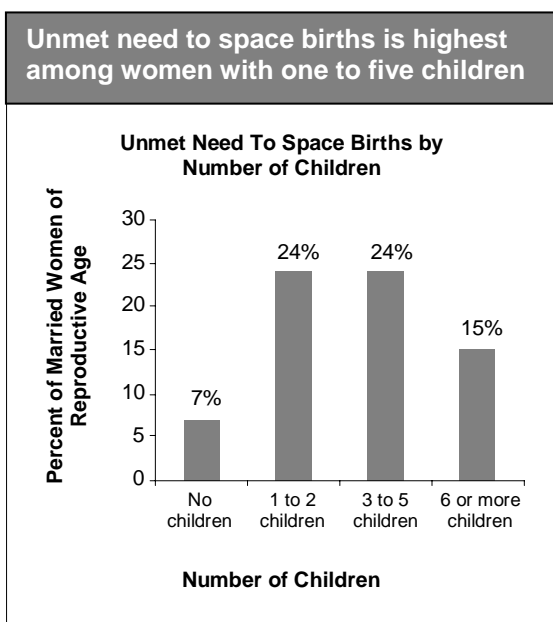


younger women and high among women ages 35 and older. This suggests that there are considerable opportunities to meet family planning needs by promoting methods to space births among younger women and promoting methods for limiting among older women.

Education. In terms of educational background, unmet need appears to be high among women of all educational backgrounds. Only women who have attained four years of secondary education or more have a modestly lower unmet need for than other women.

Household wealth. EDSCI responses can be used to divide households into wealth classifications: highest, second, middle, fourth, and lowest. This does not mean that households in the “highest” group are wealthy, but rather that they have access to relatively more resources than the other households in the sample. In Côte d’Ivoire, however, household wealth does not have a strong association with the unmet need for family planning services. Except for the wealthiest group in the cities, women in households with access to more resources have nearly as much unmet need as women in poorer households.

Previous number of children. For women with an unmet need for spacing, unmet need is highest among women who already have one to five children. About 24 percent of married women with one or two children and 24 percent of women with three to five children have a demonstrated unmet need for services. For those with an unmet need for limiting, the greatest need is expectedly among women who already have a larger number of children. About 20 percent of women with six or more children have an unmet need for limiting.

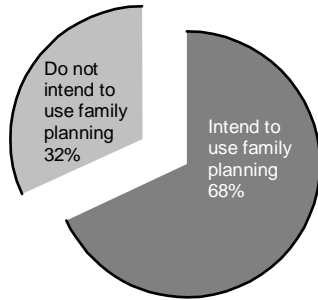


Unmet need and intention to use contraception in the future

EDSCI asks respondents, including women with an unmet need, whether they intend to use contraception in the future or not. It would seem logical that a large proportion of women with an unmet need for family planning services would intend to use at some later time. In fact, more than two out of every three women with an unmet need for family planning report that they intend to use some form of contraception in the future. About 67 percent of women with an

Most women with an unmet need intend to use contraception in the future

Intention To Use among Women with an Unmet Need

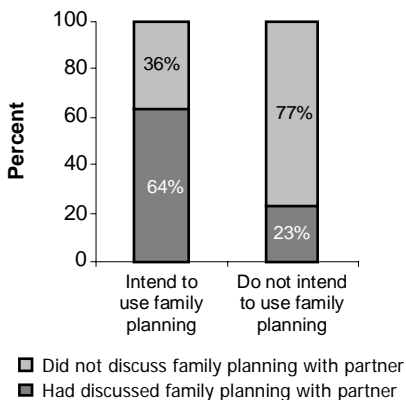


about family planning methods had an association with future intention to use. About 87 percent of women with an unmet need who intend to use in the future knew at least three modern methods of family planning; by comparison, 50 percent of women who do not intend to use were familiar with at least three modern methods.

Discussion of family planning with partner. Whether a

Discussing family planning with partner influences future intention to use

Discussion of Family Planning with Partner among Women with an Unmet Need



woman has discussed family planning with her partner is associated with her future intentions. Nearly 64 percent of those women with an unmet need for family planning who intend to use in the future had discussed family planning with their partners, but just 23 percent of those women with an unmet need who do not intend to use had similar discussions with their partners.

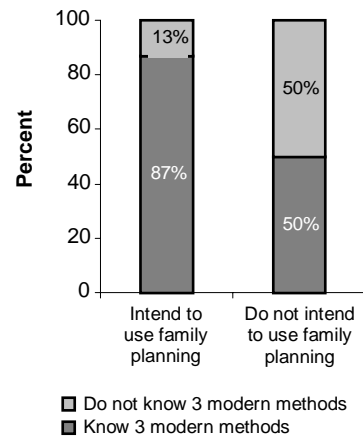
unmet need for spacing and 70 percent of women with an unmet need for limiting indicate their intention to use family planning.

Previous family planning use, knowledge, communications, and associations with intention to use *Previous use of family planning.* Previous use of family planning is associated with future intention to use. About 28 percent of those women with an unmet need who intend to use in the future had previously used a modern method of family planning, while only 11 percent of those who do not intend to use reported earlier use of a modern method.

Knowledge about modern methods. Knowledge

Knowledge about modern contraceptive methods is associated with future intention to use

Knowledge about Modern Contraception among Women with an Unmet Need



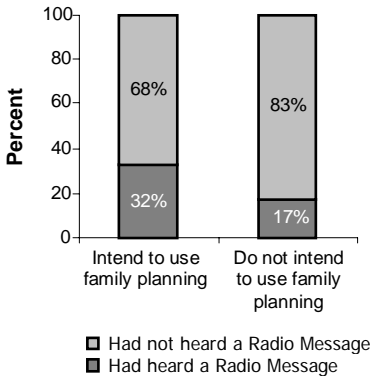
about family planning methods had an association with future intention to use. About 87 percent of women with an unmet need who intend to use in the future knew at least three modern methods of family planning; by comparison, 50 percent of women who do not intend to use were familiar with at least three modern methods.

whether a woman has discussed family planning with her partner is associated with her future intentions. Nearly 64 percent of those women with an unmet need for family planning who intend to use in the future had discussed family planning with their partners, but just 23 percent of those women with an unmet need who do not intend to use had similar discussions with their partners.

Exposure to media messages. Exposure to media messages on family planning was also associated with the intention of women with unmet need to use family planning in the future. For example, among those women with an unmet need who stated their intention to use in the future, 32

Hearing a family planning message on the radio is associated with future intention to use

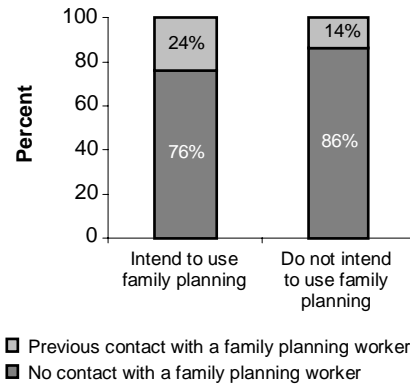
Exposure to Radio Messages on Family Planning among Women with an Unmet Need



Contact with family planning workers. Contact with family planning workers is also associated with future intention to use contraception among women with an unmet need for services. About 24 percent of those women with an unmet need who intend to use in the future had heard about family planning at a health facility or received a visit from a family planning worker in the 12 months prior to the survey; in comparison, 14 percent of those who do not intend to use had similar contact.

Contact with family planning providers is associated with intention to use

Contact with Family Planning among Women with an Unmet Need



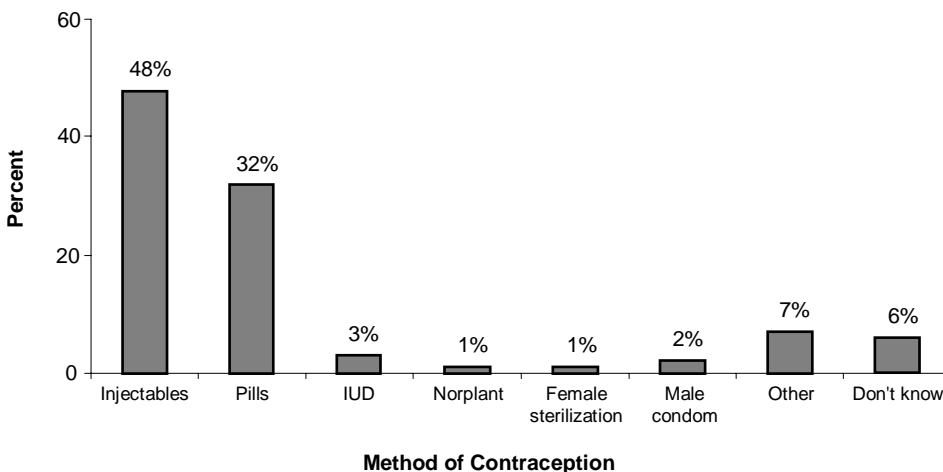
Overall, the very low proportion of non-users who ever have contact with a family planning worker is striking.

Preferred contraceptive methods among women with an unmet need for family planning who intend to use in the future

Program managers can design more effective interventions when they know the preferred methods of those women with an unmet need for services who intend to use contraception in the future. Both spacers and limiters prefer the same future methods, overwhelmingly pills and injectables. However, while spacers have about an equal preference, limiters prefer injectables (58 percent) to pills (16 percent). Norplant, which is the third most mentioned future method in several other countries in West Africa, is identified as the preferred future method by less than 1 percent of women with unmet need.

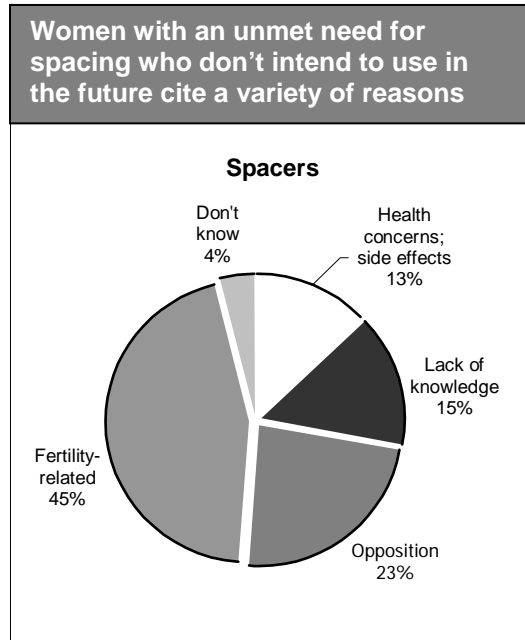
Injections and pills are the preferred methods for future use

Married Women with Unmet Need Who Intend to Use in the Future by Preferred Method

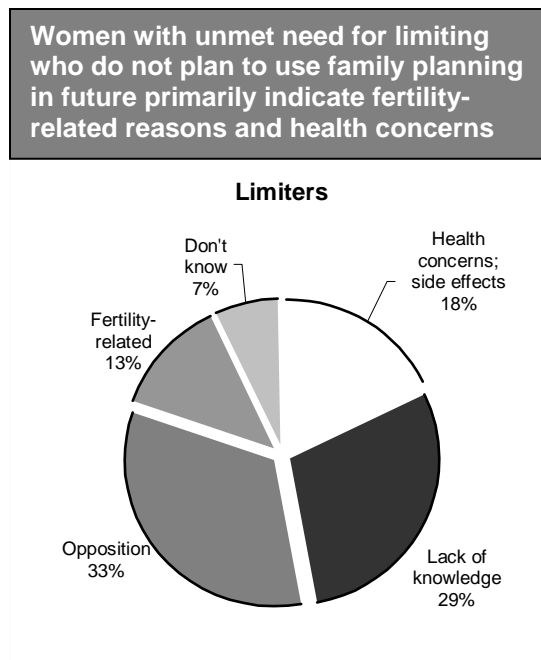


Reasons for non-use among women with an unmet need who do not plan to use family planning in the future

Program managers also need to know the reasons why about one out of every three women with an unmet need for family planning does not intend to use in the future. Among women with an unmet need for family planning for spacing purposes who do not intend to use in the future, 45 percent cite fertility-related concerns, mostly a desire to have as many children as possible. This high proportion suggests that many women with unmet need are concerned that contraceptive use may affect future childbearing. Another 23 percent report religious, cultural, family or personal opposition as the main reason they do not intend to use family planning in the future despite their desire to space births.



Among those women who would like to limit births but who do not intend to use family planning in the future, about 33 percent report opposition as the main reason. Another 29 percent say they don't know a method or don't know a source for contraceptive commodities, an unusually high percentage for West Africa. About 18 percent express concerns about potential health problems or side effects.



Summary

Some key points emerge from this brief. First, there is a very high level of unmet need for family planning services in Côte d'Ivoire. Expanding and improving family planning services would help respond to the expressed desires of Ivorian women and would be good public policy.

Second, failing to respond to unmet need has serious consequences. By addressing unmet need, countries can improve the health of mothers and their children and families, provide couples with the ways and means to decide the size and spacing of their families, and contribute to the overall social and economic development effort. Conversely, the failure to address unmet need would forfeit these advantages.

Third, considerable information exists about the characteristics, intentions, and preferences of women with an unmet need for family planning services. These characteristics will differ from country to country, and it is important that program implementers look at their own situations.

Policymakers and program managers need to use available information to develop appropriate policies, strategies and programs that will improve services and remove obstacles to family planning use by women with a demonstrated unmet need. It is important to the country that they do so.

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Secondary analysis of *Enquête Démographique et de Santé, Côte d'Ivoire, 1998/99* database. This database is available from ORC Macro, www.measuredhs.com