

Spousal communication and sexual and reproductive health behaviour among recently married young girls in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh



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BACKGROUND

India has made considerable efforts over the last few decades in delaying early marriage and creating a conducive family planning environment where couples can make conscious decisions about their SRHR behaviour such as contraceptive use to achieve desired family size or regulate timing of birth.

About quarter of girls in India are still get married before legal age and about two-fifth of girls hardly know their husband before marriage (Santhya, 2017).

Evidence suggests that spousal communication enables married women to exercise their reproductive rights and help them to negotiate for their reproductive choices.

Although, in settings like India, effect of spousal communication on meeting young women's contraceptive needs and desire to delay childbearing, is hardly explored.

Objective: Drawing on a longitudinal study from a state-representative survey of adolescents in ages 10-19, the objectives of this paper is to examine the association between spousal communication and reproductive health behaviours among recently married young girls in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

METHODS

Study setting: The states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, accounting for 29% of India's adolescent population and 6% of the world's adolescent population.

The UDAYA study:

Longitudinal data drawn from a state-representative study of over 16,000 adolescents conducted in 2015-16 and followed up in 2018-19 in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, India, the empirical sample of the study is cohort of 1498 girls who were aged 15-19 in 2015-16 and got married by 2018-19. UDAYA tools examined selected reproductive behaviour such as desire to delay first birth, use of contraception among recently married girls. The present paper focuses on leveraging these information and examine them in light of spousal communication.

Measures and statistical analysis:

☐ The main explanatory variable is spousal communication, defined as having discussions with husband on using contraceptives or number of children they should have before their first pregnancy

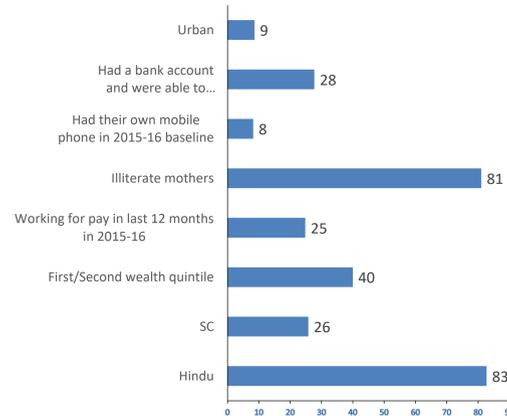
☐ The outcome variables included are:

- ✓ 'wanted to delay first birth'
- ✓ 'used contraception to delay first birth'
- ✓ 'current use of contraception'
- ✓ 'unmet need for contraception'
- ✓ 'began childbearing'
- ✓ 'future intention to use contraception'

☐ Other explanatory variables included were socio-demographic characteristics from round-1 and spousal communication from round-2. Spousal communication is defined as discussions with husband on using contraceptives or number of children they should have, before her first pregnancy. Thus, temporality of events is maintained in the analysis

RESULTS

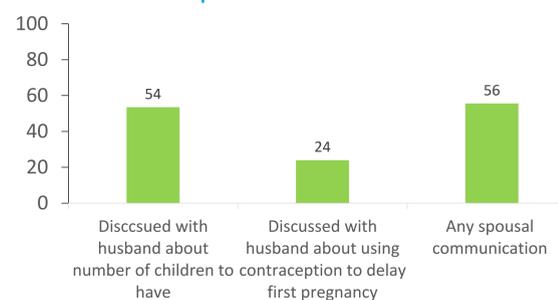
Profile of interim married girls



Characteristics of interim married girls

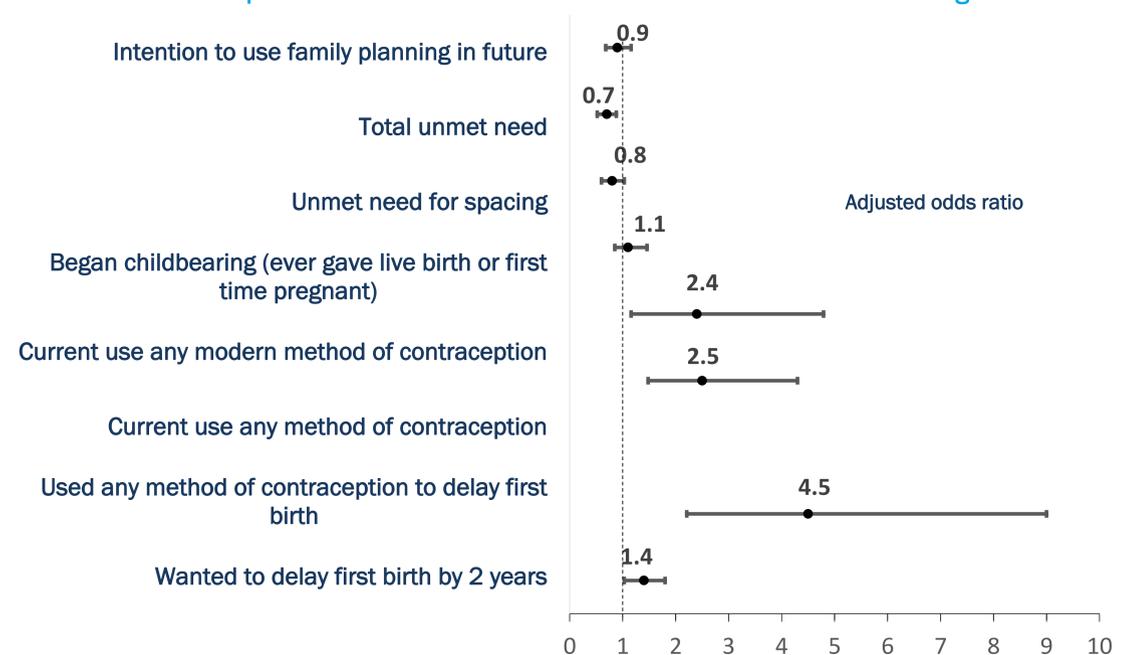
- Most of the recently married girls belongs to Hindu and were from rural areas
- About 1/4th belonged to lower social and economic group, and were working for pay in last one year in 2015-16
- Just one in 10 girl had own mobile phone and about 28% had a bank account and were able to operate it independently

Spousal communication



About half of the girls discussed with their husband about number of children they should have and just 1/4th discussed about using contraception to delay first birth. Combining both a little over half of the girls had any spousal communication

Effect of spousal communication on SRHR outcomes of interim married girls



- Multivariate analysis confirm the importance of spousal communication in reproductive behaviour among recently married young women
- After controlling for confounding factors, the young women who reported to have spousal communication are significantly more likely to have desired to delay first birth by two or more years (AOR:1.4), used contraception to delay first birth (AOR: 4.5), currently using contraception (AOR: 2.5); and significantly less likely to have unmet need for contraception (AOR: 0.8) than young married girls who did not have any spousal communication.

CONCLUSION

Study provides evidence for having spousal communication as important factors among recently married young girls in exercising reproductive health choice.

Young girls, who are comparatively less informed about reproductive health matters and have less agency compared to male counterparts, spousal communication could help them to take positive decisions related to their reproductive health choices.

The reproductive health programs should involve men and educate them about sexual and reproductive health and their own responsibilities. The programs should also address men's own needs.