

Communication's Support for Family Planning : Role of Different Media and Some Policy Implications

COMMUNICATION is an important ingredient in any strategy for propagating family planning. Since its inception in 1952, the Indian Family Planning Programme has made a series of changes in its strategy and approaches. At present the family planning programme is being linked with the health programme. Attempts are being made to develop an integrated programme of family planning, maternal health and child care and nutrition.

All along, the medical personnel have played the leading role in formulation and implementation of the programme. Medical personnel concentrated their efforts on research into the methods of contraception, with emphasis on semi-permanent and permanent methods. The campaigns to promote family planning have not, however, been fully successful, despite heavy expenditures. The unsatisfactory performance is partly explained by the failure on the part of planners and policy makers to recognise that family planning is basically a social problem and can best be dealt with by the active involvement of social scientists in the programme. To make the programme successful, social scientists have to play a significant role in developing a viable programme strategy focussed on attitude formation and on persuading the common people to adopt family planning methods offered by the programme. This highlights the importance of communications in the field of family planning.

Communications did form a part of the overall programme launched for generating public awareness about the need of family planning and countering the resistences of the traditional social structures. It is evident, however, that the communication strategy has not yet been assessed. A review of the available

studies, on 'communication' in family planning, reveals several basic weaknesses inherent in the design and conduct of the studies. These weaknesses include the limitations of their substantive scope and of sampling size and procedures, lack of depth analysis, etc. The findings of these studies have not been put to any fruitful use.

In this context, the UN-ESCAP had carried out in 1972-73 a study entitled "Comparative Study of Communication and Related Factors Affecting Husband-Wife Communication and the Practice of Family Planning in India, Iran, the Philippines and Singapore", to deal with these limitations. Specific objectives of the study were :

- (i) To find out the nature, content and pattern of family planning communication, and
- (ii) To find out the nature and extent of interspouse communication in family planning.

In India, the study was conducted in the state of Uttar Pradesh in the year 1972 having a sample size of 4,500 respondents. Of the total respondents, 1722 respondents were from the city of Lucknow and the Malhiabad town, which were classified as urban respondents. The remaining 2,778 respondents were from 57 villages of Varanasi, Lucknow and Meerut districts. Half of the respondents were males and other half were females. All the respondents were currently married and were in the reproductive ages. On an average, the present age for males and females was 35 and 30 years respectively in the urban areas. The corresponding figures for rural areas were 32 and 28 years. Mean number of living children was 3 in urban areas and 2.7 per cent in rural areas. About 85 per cent husbands and 63 per cent wives were literates in the urban areas. As against this, only 61 per cent husbands and 22 per cent wives were literates in rural areas. While looking at the level of education it was found that 65 per cent husbands and 40 per cent wives in urban areas had 6 or more years of schooling. Among the rural respondents, 38 per cent husbands and only 7 per cent wives had 6 or more years of schooling. Regarding social participation, it was found that 24 per cent husbands and 5 per cent wives in urban areas and 18 per cent husbands and 4 per cent wives in rural areas were active members of at least one social organisation like a social, civic, religious, professional, or recreational club or society.

We use the data of this survey to assess the respondent's exposure to different media and its relation to adoption of family planning, in the hope that such a study would be of some use in designing communication campaigns.

The data indicate that a large proportion of respondents had relied on personal and mass media as the sources of family planning information. The variety of sources of such information included spouses, relatives, friends, neighbours,

doctors, family planning workers and extension educators; and radio, television, film, newspaper, printed materials (magazines), poster, hoarding and traditional media. For each medium, information was gathered on (i) exposure and recall of family planning; (ii) knowledge of family planning method; and (iii) availability of contraceptives or location of service centres. Extension educator, television and traditional media are not shown to be important and are therefore excluded from the present analysis.

In showing interpersonal differences in exposure to a given medium, we identify respondents, who reported having heard of family planning through that medium, those who had heard about specific method or methods of family planning and those who further said that they had come to know of the location of a family planning services. Table 1 accordingly classifies respondents into three categories.

The general exposure to different media, barring doctors, is fairly large. The proportion of respondents in respect of each method is considerably reduced for the next category of those who learnt about a method and further for those who identified the location of the services. For a more detailed view we consider each channel of communication separately as follows.

Spouse

We find that more females than males mentioned "spouse" as a source of family planning knowledge in both urban and rural areas. The proportion of husbands reporting "spouse" as a source of family planning information is larger for urban areas. We may add here that comparatively a very high proportion of female respondents indicated spouse to be the most important source of family planning information. This highlights the role of husbands in acceptance of family planning practice.

Relative, Friend and Neighbour

Among the personal media, the largest number of respondents were exposed to this source. About 90 per cent respondents in urban areas and about 85 per cent in rural areas expressed that they discussed and gathered some information about family planning from the source. Among husbands, both in urban and rural areas, this source was claimed by the largest number as the most important source. Among urban women it occupied, however, the second position, the first being "spouse". Husbands reported neighbourhood as the most important venue of gossip, followed by corner store. Among women, "neighbourhood" was claimed to be the most common place and this was followed by "maternity hospital" among urban women and "family planning/health centres" among rural women. The village women reported gossip of groups going out together for

TABLE 1—ROLE OF DIFFERENT COMMUNICATION MEDIA IN DISSEMINATING INFORMATION RELATING TO FAMILY PLANNING, FAMILY PLANNING METHODS AND LOCATION OF SERVICE CENTRES

Communication Media	Urban						Rural					
	Male			Female			Male			Female		
	Knowledge of			Knowledge of			Knowledge of			Knowledge of		
	Contact	Method	Location	Contact	Method	Location	Contact	Method	Location	Contact	Method	Location
Spouse	653 (75.8)	500 (58.1)	256 (29.7)	812 (94.3)	741 (86.0)	447 (51.9)	677 (48.7)	445 (32.0)	225 (16.2)	1114 (80.2)	994 (71.6)	462 (33.3)
Relative and Friend	775 (90.9)	768 (89.2)	451 (52.4)	805 (93.5)	719 (83.5)	392 (45.5)	1187 (85.5)	1140 (82.1)	712 (51.3)	1185 (85.3)	1078 (77.6)	558 (40.2)
Doctor	153 (17.8)	151 (17.5)	128 (14.9)	286 (33.2)	257 (29.8)	136 (15.8)	118 (8.5)	107 (7.7)	77 (5.5)	155 (11.2)	150 (10.8)	79 (5.7)
F. P. Workers	500 (58.1)	498 (57.8)	311 (36.1)	255 (29.6)	207 (24.0)	144 (16.7)	876 (63.1)	850 (61.2)	607 (43.7)	466 (33.5)	446 (32.1)	248 (17.9)
Radio	831 (96.5)	726 (48.3)	259 (30.1)	808 (93.8)	745 (86.5)	397 (46.1)	1186 (85.4)	1104 (79.5)	443 (31.9)	877 (63.1)	784 (56.4)	423 (30.5)
Film	736 (85.5)	720 (83.6)	216 (25.1)	640 (74.3)	540 (62.7)	114 (13.2)	1034 (74.4)	948 (68.2)	361 (26.0)	422 (30.4)	377 (27.1)	83 (6.0)
News Paper	645 (74.9)	631 (73.3)	316 (36.7)	326 (37.9)	283 (33.1)	100 (11.6)	615 (44.3)	589 (42.4)	269 (19.4)	103 (7.4)	82 (5.9)	35 (2.5)
Printed Material	433 (50.3)	413 (47.9)	83 (9.6)	318 (36.9)	273 (31.7)	60 (7.0)	351 (25.3)	334 (24.0)	63 (4.5)	119 (8.6)	109 (7.8)	28 (2.0)
Poster and Hoarding	781 (90.7)	648 (75.2)	131 (15.2)	812 (94.3)	368 (42.7)	114 (13.2)	1012 (72.9)	807 (58.1)	155 (10.9)	800 (57.6)	278 (20.0)	55 (4.0)
Total Respondents	861			861			1389			1389		

(Figures in the brackets are per cent respondents in each category to the total)

fetching water or for morning defecation as source of such information. These conversations have their informal and intimate quality in promoting mutual confidence.

Doctor

Surprisingly, the respondents were least exposed to this medium, particularly in rural areas. In urban areas about one-sixth of husbands and one-third of wives claimed exposure to this medium. Women from the urban areas reported that they were exposed to this medium generally when they visited a hospital for maternity care. Few recognized the source as the most important. This reflects inadequacy of medical facilities, particularly in rural areas. It also shows that the doctor is much more occupied in health, particularly in the curative side, than in the motivational work of family planning.

It is, however, notable that from among the people exposed to this medium, most claimed to have obtained information on the methods as well as location of service centre.

Family Planning Worker

Family planning worker is considered to be one of the most important personal source as he is often in a situation where he is in direct contact with the target group. In fact, he acts as a key middleman. His experience is of immense use to policy makers, administrators and research workers. Our data show that about 60 per cent of husbands and about 30 per cent of wives were exposed to this medium. It also appears that this medium was quite effective in disseminating information on all aspects of family planning.

Radio

Among the mass media, radio has the most widespread coverage as it can easily and quickly reach to a large population at a low cost. With the introduction of cheap transistors it has reached the remotest unelectrified villages. Also the information received from radio is normally respected by masses. According to this study, a little more half of urban households and one-fourth of rural households possessed a radio. About 90 per cent of both husbands and wives in urban areas and about 85 per cent husbands and 60 percent wives in rural areas received information about family planning from this source. It must be mentioned, however, that the regular listeners were about one-half in urban areas, one-third among rural husbands and one-fifth among rural wives. The information relating to "location of service centres" from this was found to be comparatively meagre as hardly one-third, except urban wives, of total respondents claimed that they gathered the information from this source.

Film

This audio-visual medium was used to reach the masses through picture houses and mobile units. In urban areas about 84 per cent husbands and 74 per cent wives claimed that they were exposed to this medium. Cinema-going appeared quite popular among urban respondents. In the case of rural areas, the exposure to this medium was about 74 per cent among husbands and 30 per cent among wives. In rural areas, not only the exposure was nominal but the frequency of their contact with this medium was much lower as compared to urban respondents.

Newspaper

Press, among the mass media, is considered to be very powerful medium specially among the educated and the well-to-do. About 75 per cent of husbands and 38 per cent wives in urban areas gathered some family planning information from this source. In rural areas, however, only 44 per cent husbands and 7 per cent wives claimed that they received some information about family planning from this source.

Printed Material

Number of local, regional and national magazines are available in the market. These magazines are mostly "general" in nature and they have been utilised for family planning, in the form of articles, advertisements and so on. Our study shows that about one-half of husbands and one-third of wives in urban areas received some information about family planning from this source. In the case of rural areas this medium, like newspaper, was much less important. This evidently reflects the low literacy level and reading habits among rural masses.

Poster and Hoarding

These methods have been intensively utilised for promoting mass consciousness about family planning. Over 90 per cent of respondents in urban areas claimed that they came across family planning posters and hoardings. In the rural areas, about 73 per cent husbands and about 58 per cent wives were found to be familiar this medium. This medium was quite successful in dissemination of general information about family planning but only 15 per cent husbands in urban areas and 10 per cent in rural areas claimed that they received any information about the location of service centres.

Relationship between Exposure and Adoption

"We now indicate the impact of the exposure to family planning information

through different media in terms of adoption of family planning. In order to test the relationship between exposure and adoption of family planning, chi-square test has been applied. Our data show a significant relationship between the number of media utilised by respondents and their adoption to family planning. This relationship was also found true for personal and mass media separately for all the four categories of respondents i.e. male respondents from urban areas, female respondents from urban areas, male respondents from rural areas and female respondents from rural areas. Considering each medium separately we notice that despite high exposure, "relative, friend and neighbour" does not show high rate of family planning adoption. Similarly, we do not notice any great effectiveness of the doctor and radio in promoting adoption among husbands in urban areas, and of posters among husbands in rural areas.

Implications and Recommendations

As family planning communication is a crucial ingredient in family planning strategy, it deserves much more emphasis than it has received hitherto.

The findings of the present study show that mass media successfully provide general information, while personal media are more effective in promoting the adoption of family planning. Personal and mass media supplement each other. Husbands generally command authority in decision making and so it seems necessary to focus communication channels on them. This is better done through family planning workers.

Our analysis also suggests that intensive investigations are needed for getting clear and dependable picture of the socio-economic, psychological and behavioural patterns of target populations in different areas. Studies should, in each case, be made to evaluate the merits of each medium individually.

Future research on family planning communication should place high priority on the *content* of communication and more so in the rural context rather than highly urban based or foreign oriented slogans. The content should be simple, specific and easily understood by the rural masses. The type of appeal or message should mainly be personal. The appeal, in the area of contraceptives, should mainly relate to the safety, effectiveness and easy availability of methods. The content of the message should suit the married women, particularly the women in middle and lower socio-economic groups.

In spite of great efforts, the family planning programme has not achieved the desired success due to official policy's overconcern with contraceptives. While family planning is equated with certain semi-permanent or permanent methods of family planning, conventional contraceptives, particularly the condom, have been quite popular both in urban and rural areas. Such a situation calls for market research on availability and distribution systems for conventional contraceptives, especially in rural areas. It seems necessary to encourage the use of commercial channels for distribution of contraceptives.

In the context of rural situation avenues like local weekly market, local festivals, local fairs and such other occasions could be exploited both for the supply of contraceptives and as venues of communicating family planning information.

We have seen that mass media was fairly effective in dissemination of information, in generating awareness and in publicizing the availability of services. But to give positive motivations to accept the concept and to adopt family planning, face-to-face communication is essential. This requires more involvement of local workers rather than city based workers whose visits are limited. More attention should be given to involved local and other voluntary agencies to help in forming the women clubs, particularly from the middle and lower socioeconomic groups.

The exposure to family planning information through different media shows a significant relationship between the number of media utilised by respondents and their adoption to family planning. Studying each medium separately, we find that despite high exposure, "Relative friend and neighbour" does not show significant relationship. Similarly, we also find that doctor and radio, among husbands in urban areas, and posters among husbands in rural areas, do not show great effectiveness in promoting family planning adoption.

Thus we conclude that family planning communication deserves much more emphasis than it has received hitherto. Intensive investigations are needed for getting the clear picture of target population and also to evaluate each medium individually. Market research on availability and distribution systems of conventional contraceptives is needed. Local educated persons, particularly in rural areas, be deployed for family planning work rather than city based multipurpose workers whose visits are limited. This requires the involvement of voluntary agencies of different levels.

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