

S. Sureender*, V. Jayachandran and G. Rangaiyan***

Presence of Others During the Interview and its Influence on Reporting of Sensitive Issues: An Insight

Introduction

THOUGH efforts are being made in large scale surveys to obtain the best quality data by training interviewers, using robust sampling techniques and well designed questionnaire/schedule, usually little attention is paid to the interview environment (presence of others during interview). It is generally held that privacy encourages more complete and accurate reporting in surveys, which try to explore sensitive issues. The presence of others is assumed to affect detrimentally the responses to 'sensitive' factual items, in particular items about contraceptive behaviour, abortion and sexual behaviour. In many cultures these topics are considered embarrassing to discuss in public. Interviews in private are likely to improve the quality of responses, if the respondent's behaviour does not meet with approval from other persons, such as her husband, her mother or mother-in-law, who are likely to be present during the interview.

Concern about detrimental effects of the presence of others during the interview is expressed in the strict instructions given to interviewers in many large-scale surveys. For example, in the World Fertility Survey (WFS) strict instruction is given to the interviewers about the presence of others during the interview, "it is very important that the individual interview be done privately, and that all the questions are answered by the respondent herself. The presence of other persons during the interview may make the woman embarrassed and influence some of her answers. Explain to her that some of the questions are private and confidential and ask her where is the best place for

*International Institute for Population Sciences. Deonar. Mumbai-400 088.

**opulation Foundation of India. B-28 Qutab Institutional Area. New Delhi-110 016.

privacy (e.g. a verandah, a corner of the main room, a bedroom, or a kitchen). If another adult does not take the hint and leave you alone with the women, you will have to use tact and ingenuity to attempt to get the respondent by herself. Sometimes you may have to visit the house again at a different time, or make a special effort to seek the permission of some other members of the household, before you can approach the respondent" (WFS, 1975). Despite these strict instructions, privacy was not obtained during many large-scale surveys. The presence of someone during interview is very high in Asian and African countries than Caribbean Countries (Casterline and Chidambaram, 1984). Keeping this in view, the present paper examines the interview privacy and its association with responses to contraceptive knowledge, and use, and experience of abortion/still birth collected by National Family Health Survey (1992-93) in the state of Uttar Pradesh, India.

Data and Methodology

In the NFHS, interviews were conducted from all the ever-married women age 13-49 present in the household. Apart from the questions on respondents' background, reproduction, contraception, health of children, fertility preferences, husband's background, work status, height and weight of the children, and certain questions such as 'presence of others' during most of the time of the interview is also included in the questionnaire (see, PRC, Lucknow and UPS, 1994 for a detailed description on sampling and other related aspects of the survey). The data regarding the presence of others are recorded in five broad categories, i.e., presence of children age less than 10 years, husband, mother-in-law, other males and other females. In the present analysis we use the term 'presence of others' for the presence of any one other than children under 10 years of age during the interview. This has been done with the view that the presence of these minor children during the interview may not affect the responses of the respondent. Hence, a woman gets a score of '1' if some one is present during interview and '0' otherwise.

In the first section of the analysis the 'presence of others' were examined with selected background characteristics of currently married women. To understand the responses of the women for the three sensitive items, i.e., the knowledge regarding the family planning method, current use of family planning and the experience of pregnancy wastage (still birth, induced abortion and spontaneous abortion), in the presence/absence of others: cross tabulation and logistic regression analysis have been carried out.

Factors Associated with the Presence of Others

The results reveal that in Uttar Pradesh nearly 32 percent of the currently married women were interviewed in the 'presence of others'. This calls for the need in understanding

the background characteristics of the women to examine the 'presence of others' in a meaningful way.

Table 1, presents the bi-variate analysis of 'presence of others' with selected background characteristics of currently married women. The bi-variate relationship indicate that rural women and young women are more likely to be interviewed in the presence of others as compared to urban women and older women, respectively. It is evident from the table that the presence of others during the interview is less in case of educated women compared with their illiterate counterparts. For instance, while 34 percent of the illiterate women are interviewed in the presence of others, the corresponding

TABLE 1: PRESENCE OF OTHERS DURING THE INTERVIEW BY SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF CURRENTLY MARRIED WOMEN IN UTTAR PRADESH

<i>Background characteristics</i>	<i>Percent of women interviewed in the presence of others¹</i>	<i>Number of women</i>
<i>Place of residence</i>		
Urban	23.4	2197
Rural	34.0	8817
<i>Respondent's Age</i>		
15-19	33.8	1215
20-24	35.2	2397
25-29	34.0	2094
30-34	31.1	1728
35-39	30.1	1492
40-44	27.8	1099
45-49	25.7	971
<i>Education</i>		
Illiterate	34.0	8304
Lit. Primary	30.0	1097
Middle complete	25.4	626
High school and above	19.9	987
<i>Religion</i>		
Hindu	30.9	9187
Muslim	37.6	1709
Other	24.2	118
<i>Caste/tribe</i>		
Scheduled Caste	32.8	1866
Scheduled Tribe	36.7	132
Other	31.6	9016
Total	31.9	11014

Source: National Family Health Survey, Uttar Pradesh, 1992-93.

¹Husband or mother-in-law or other males or other females.

percentage in case of high school educated women is 20. In case of religion, Muslim women compared to Hindu and others are more likely to be interviewed in the presence of others. Women who belong to scheduled tribes are more likely to be interviewed in the presence of others than the scheduled castes and other caste women. The difference in-terms of age, residence and education with the presence of others during interview are prominent among the background characteristics of women studied. Casterline and Chidambaram (1984) argued that certainly more schooling increased the relative status and independence of respondents, everything else being equal. One imagines that however insistent the interviewer may be about the need for privacy, his/her success in achieving this is largely a function of the social relations within the household and family of the respondents. But certainly of equal or more importance are society specific norms and patterns of social relation.

Influence of Presence of Others on Reporting of Contraception and Pregnancy Wastage

The contraceptive knowledge among married women is almost universal and it is found that the difference in knowledge level of women who reported in the presence of others during interview and that not is very low. In case of current use of contraception, only 15 percent of women expressed that they are using any contraception in the 'presence of others' compared to 21 percent in the absence of others. This clearly reveals the influence of 'others' present during the interview on the reporting of sensitive issues. Women by different place of residence, less than 45 years of age and different level of education, the 'presence of others' during interview is found to be a hindrance in reporting the use status of the contraceptive. The differentials in the reported level of contraceptive use within the group of women interviewed in the 'presence of others' are very low. This further strengthened our base argument of this paper. The difference is very large among women belonging to other than Hindus and Muslims, while the difference is more among scheduled tribe and other caste women compared with scheduled caste women. The difference in reporting of contraceptive use in the presence and absence of others is found to be less among rural women as compared to their urban counterparts. As the health workers in the presence of others, especially in villages distribute the contraceptives, it is possible that women are aware about the neighbours' contraceptive behaviour. And hence, reporting the contraceptive use in the presence of others might not be considered delicate in the rural areas. However, in case of urban areas even the communication between neighbours is very restricted, reporting the use of contraception is a delicate issue.

Table 2 presents the proportion of currently married women who reported pregnancy wastage by background characteristics according to 'presence of others' during the interview. The pregnancy wastage (i.e., experiences of induced abortion or spontaneous

TABLE 2: PERCENT USING CONTRACEPTIVES AND REPORTED PREGNANCY WASTAGE AMONG CURRENTLY MARRIED WOMEN BY BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS, ACCORDING TO PRESENCE OF OTHERS DURING THE INTERVIEW, UTTAR PRADESH

<i>Background characteristics</i>	<i>Current use of contraceptives</i>		<i>Reported pregnancy wastage</i>	
	<i>Others Present¹</i>	<i>Not Present²</i>	<i>Others Present¹</i>	<i>Not Present²</i>
<i>Place of residence</i>				
Urban	24.3	34.2	21.1	23.0
Rural	13.5	18.4	17.0	21.6
<i>Respondent's Age</i>				
15-19	1.7	3.1	3.2	4.7
20-24	5.3	8.6	11.6	13.2
25-29	13.4	19.4	20.0	21.0
30-34	22.8	29.6	23.4	25.7
35-39	27.5	37.4	24.9	30.1
40-44	23.2	36.4	25.7	31.4
45-49	26.4	25.8	19.3	33.2
<i>Education</i>				
Illiterate	12.8	16.8	17.7	22.5
Lit. Primary	24.1	30.5	16.3	21.4
Middle complete	21.3	32.0	17.8	20.4
High school and above	28.2	43.4	17.8	18.7
<i>Religion</i>				
Hindu	16.5	23.3	16.9	22.2
Muslim	7.9	12.2	20.4	20.5
Other	34.0	43.5	16.8	19.5
<i>Caste/tribe</i>				
Scheduled Caste	12.6	16.4	16.1	20.2
Scheduled Tribe	5.4	15.3	8.8	24.9
Other	15.8	23.2	18.1	22.2
Total	15.1	21.9	17.6	21.9

¹ Husband or mother-in-law or other males or other female present during the interview.

² No one present during the interview.

abortion or still birth) is treated as one of the sensitive issue where discussion in public is socially unacceptable. The results reveal that in the presence of others, 18 percent of women stated that they experienced pregnancy wastage compared to 22 percent who were interviewed in the absence of others. It is found that, women generally tend to under report the pregnancy wastage in the presence of others irrespective of the background characteristic. Twenty one percent of the urban women interviewed in the presence of others reported that they had experienced pregnancy wastage, while the corresponding percentage is 23 percent among the women interviewed in the absence of others. In the case of the respondent's age, as the age increases the difference in the level of reporting

the pregnancy wastage increases, except for the age group 45-49 (Table 2). With respect to the educational level of the respondent, there is a decrease in the difference with an increase in the level of education. As far as the religious differentials are concerned, Hindus tend to under report the pregnancy wastage in the presence of others compared to Muslims and those belonging to other religion. Only 17 percent of the Hindus interviewed in the 'presence of others' reported that they had experienced pregnancy wastage compared to 22 percent among those interviewed in the absence of others. As noted in the use of contraceptives, the 'presence of others' is clearly felt in the reporting of pregnancy wastage by Uttar Pradesh women.

Results from the Multivariate Analysis

Some of the differentials observed in Table 2 may be due to the association of other variables with "presence of others" and "current use of contraception or pregnancy wastage". Hence, the socio-economic and demographic variables need to be controlled to assess the effect of "presence of others" as such. To control the influence of socio-economic and demographic variables on dependent variable (presence of others) and assess the effect of "presence of others", Logistic regression analysis has been carried out to understand the role of presence of others in influencing the response to sensitive issues such as contraceptive use and pregnancy wastage. This technique allows us to study the role of 'presence of others' after controlling for certain selected background variables. The results of the logistic regression analysis are given in Table 3, separately for the contraceptive use and pregnancy wastage. In case of contraceptive use, the variables such as current age of the respondent, place of residence, level of education, experience of child loss, exposure to mass media, religion, caste and standard of living are analysed in addition to the variable 'presence of others'. The results clearly indicate that even after controlling for all the background characteristics of the women, the influence of the 'presence of others' is significantly felt in the reporting the current use of family planning.

In case of pregnancy wastage all the background characteristics except the child loss are included in the logistic regression model. The results clearly show that, women interviewed in the 'presence of others' tend to under report the experience of pregnancy wastage compared to the women interviewed in the absence of others (see Table 3).

Conclusion

It is usually assumed that, sensitive issues like contraceptive use, pregnancy wastage and sexual behaviour are more accurately reported when interviews with respondents are conducted in privacy (i.e., absence of other persons during interview). The data collected in the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), 1992-93 has provided an

TABLE 3: FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH CONTRACEPTIVE USE AND PREGNANCY WASTAGE, RESULTS OF LOGISTIC REGRESSION ANALYSIS KEEPING 'PRESENCE OF OTHERS' AS A PREDICTOR VARIABLE

<i>Predictor Variables</i>	<i>Dependent Variable</i>	
	<i>CUSE</i>	<i>PRGWASTE</i>
Presence of others during interview (<i>I = Yes, 0 = No</i>)	-0.2268***	-0.2096***
Current age	0.9753***	0.0511***
Residence (<i>Urban = 1, Rural = 2</i>)	-0.3098***	-0.1375*
Education		
Illiterate Primary Middle (<i>High school = 0</i>)	-0.8997*** 0.2559*	-0.2525* 0.0373 0.0233 0.0881
Child loss (<i>Yes = 1, No = 0</i>)	-0.2616***	N.A.
Exposure to media (<i>Yes = 1, No = 0</i>)	0.2286***	0.0583
Religion (<i>Hindu = 1, Other = 0</i>)	0.7692***	0.0314
Caste/tribe (<i>SC/ST = 1, Other = 0</i>)	-0.1289	-0.1166
Standard of living Low Medium (<i>High = 0</i>)	-1.5399 -1.2119	1.4336 1.1927
Regression constant	-1.7247	-4.1288
-2 Log likelihood	9803	11153

*** : Significance Level Less than 0.001, * : Significance Level Less than 0.05.

CUSE: Current use of family planning (1 = Yes, 0 = No). PRGWASTE: Pregnancy wastage (1 = Yes, 0 = No).

opportunity to investigate the validity of responses in certain sensitive issues such as knowledge of contraception, current use contraception and experience of pregnancy wastage. The results reveal that there is a significant difference in the reporting of current use of contraception and pregnancy wastage between the women interviewed in the 'presence of others' and absence of others in Uttar Pradesh.

This paper basically tried to argue that while collecting information on the sensitive issues as discussed earlier, the ideal situation would be to conduct the interview in privacy. However, keeping in view of the socio-economic situation of our country, it is generally felt that this would be really impossible or not practicable. Hence, to tackle this problem one possible way could be to include/control the variable 'presence of others' in the analysis of sensitive issues such as use of contraceptives and experience

of pregnancy wastage. Further, the same procedure could be extended while analysing the sexual behaviour of women, husband-wife communication, attitudes regarding the dowry system, infanticide and child marriage, as these variables could definitely be influenced by the presence of others during the interview. Though the conceptualisation of this paper is on the basis of Casterline and Chidambaram work, the comparison between these two papers in terms of the results are not really rationale. Because the Casterline and Chidambaram study is a large scale and across continents and tried to understand the presence of each type of individual and its influence on contraceptive knowledge and use pattern. The common finding that observed in both the studies is that a significant differential is observed in the reporting of contraceptive use in the presence others and in the absence of others.

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