

Evaluation on the Level of Knowledge and Use of Contraception Methods Among Women and Girls in Elbasan			Medicine
		Keywords: women, contraception, contraceptive method, active sexual age.	
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Abstract

Objective

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the level of knowledge as well as the use of contraceptives among 300 women and girls in the city of Elbasan.

Methods

The study was conducted for a period of 5 months (April-August 2013), based on direct and half structured interviews carried on in the residences of girls and women in 6 administrative units of the Municipality of Elbasan. The participants are individually interviewed.

Results

Out of 300 interviewed women and girls , 292 (97.3%) have heard for at least one contraception method, (91,4%) of them recognize the condom as the contraception method as well as a protecting method against STI, 142 (47.3%) of them recognize the emergency contraception as an effective method against an unintended pregnancy. 72.2 % of them have received the information on contraceptives from their friends, 23,5% of them from media, 4.3% of them from the Health Personnel. Only 198 (66.1%) women and girls were using the contraceptive method including here the natural method. Meanwhile, 45 (15%) of interviewed women and girls were using the modern contraceptive method. Although couples have decided to regulate the number of births (67%), still they did not prefer the modern contraceptive method due to the fact that: 59,3 % justified it with their husband’s disapproval ,14,4 % of them were afraid of the side effects caused by the contraceptives. Besides, 27,8 % of them said that they will attend the Health Centers to take the contraceptives and the services from the RH.

Conclusion

Although the contraception and the contraceptive methods are familiar to the population they are used by a small number of people, 72,2% have received the information on contraception from their friend and only 4,3 % of them have received this information from the health personnel. 198 (66.1%) of them were using one contraceptive method. Meanwhile, 45 (15%) of interviewed women and girls were using the modern contraceptive method. Couples had decided to regulate the number of births (67%) but they did not prefer the modern contraceptive method due to disapproval of their husband, this group comprises 59,3%. Besides, 27,8 % of the interviewed women and girls said that they will attend the Health Centers to take the contraceptives and the services from the RH while 25,6 of them had not deiced yet.

Introduction

The Albanian population continues to be a young age population and its average age stands at 32,8, where the age of 32,3 is for males and the age of 33,3 is for females¹. However, compared to the year 2001 where the average age was 29 ², it is noticed a shift due to the considerable decreasing birth rate. This decrease is not due to the incorporation of the Reproducing Health and contraceptives in the Health Services³, but due to the increasing “awareness” of couples to limit the number of births.

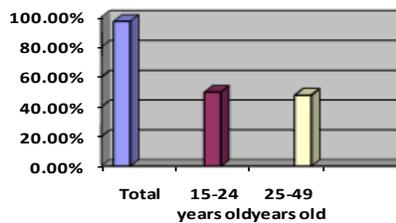
More than 100 million women in less developed countries, or around 17% of all married women, would prefer to avoid a pregnancy, but they are not using any method of family planning⁴.

The Health Policy in Albania has changed from a pro-fertility policy to a policy that stimulates and encourages the use of contraceptives by delivering free contraceptives through a special program of the Ministry of Health and with the support of UNFPA. In 2002, the law no. 8876, dated 4, 4, 2002, “On Reproductive Health”, was approved and its aim was to recognize and accept the reproductive rights and the reproductive health of any individual, the improvement of the population’s health, especially the health of woman, child and teenagers⁵. Although the Reproductive Health (RH) of the population is promoted for 15

years, the access to the PF Services and Contraception still remains low. In the demographic and health survey that was conducted in 2008-2009 the rate of using the modern tools of contraception did not go beyond than 11%.⁶

In order to help understand the reasons for such situation, we have conducted a study in 6 regions of the city of Elbasan, with 300 women and girls, divided to 150:150 of the age 15-24 and 25-49, ages that are considered sexually active, through direct and half structured interviews. The parameters of this study included the socio-demographic characteristics, knowledge on family planning, contraceptive methods used by wife or husband/its partner, the geographical and financial approach toward FP services; their access in using the RH Services.

Being aware of the Health Matter, including reproduction supported even by Ministry of Health, NGO, national ones, have worked to establish and revitalize the health services (RH)/Family Planning (FP)⁷. Moreover the intensive campaign of the communication with the population on changing the favorable attitude toward RH which was performed during the last decade can provide explanation on the fact that recently in this observation only 149 women and girls, of the group age 15-24 (49,7%) and 143 women of the group age 25-49 (47,6%) have heard at least about one modern contraceptive method.



Contributing specifically to find out and estimate the reasons for a low use of Modern Contraceptive Methods by the young generation and women and to further understand their concerns in RH, we undertook this study to identify the context of usage, the nature of contraceptive methods practiced by girls and women as well as to draft the strategies to encourage the best use of the modern contraceptive method or the RH/FP.

The Method

This study is conducted in a period of 4 months (April – August 2013), with direct and half-structured interviews in the residences or location of girls and women (schools, enterprises, institutions, boarding-schools, markets, streets) in six Administrative Units of Elbasan Municipality, where 21 quarters are included. The questionnaire is filled in the presence of the interviewed female. Elbasan has a population of around 116,971 inhabitants in total; out of which 58,617 males and 58,354 females⁸. We have contacted around 356 women and girls in the city but 56 of them refused to participate in this questionnaire. The sample was selected among the quotes taking into consideration their characteristics, females and group ages.

Nevertheless, determining of the minimal theoretical size of the sample equal to 281, by using the reliability level of 90%⁹ was increased to 300 to make the questionnaire results more reliable.

Criteria of Involvement

The number of quarters included in a region, population of regions, total number of women, number of contacted women and girls as well as the interviewees divided in group ages is reported in table 1.

Table1. Distribution of the population study based on regions and group ages

Distribution	Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	Region 4	Region 5	Region 6
No. of quarters	4	5	4	5	2	1
Population	24172	22731	27111	22000	13145	19259
Females	11880	11237	13527	11149	6385	9264
Contacted people	55	57	55	61	65	63
Interviewees 15-24	19	17	18	17	16	17
Interviewees 25-49	34	32	33	32	31	34

‘Age’ Criteria:

Age: 15 to 24 years old (104 teenagers and women) and 196 women (25-49 years old) gave their verbal consent and chosen from the selected area were involved in this questionnaire.

Table 2 Educational Criteria:
Distribution of women and girls based on the educational level:

	Primary	9-year system	Secondary	High
18-24	-	-	33	71
25-49	9	43	81	63
TOTAL	9	43	114	134

‘Exclusion’ Criteria

The age under 15 and over 49, Male gender, and areas outside the demographic survey map.

Results

The questionnaire was conducted with 300 women- girls of the age 15-49, out of which 104 (34,7%) belong to the group age 15-24 and 196 (65,3%) belong to the group age 25-49. (Table 1)

The respondents were selected from 6 regions of the city and 17.6% (53) were interviewed in region no. 1; 16.4% (49) belong to region no.2; 17% (51) region no 3; 16.3% (49) region no. 4; 15,6%(47) region no. 5 and 17% (51) region. no 6 (Table 2).

Out of the interviewed women and girls two third, 206 (68,8%) of them were married, 82 (27,3%) of them were single; 12 (0,4%) of them declared they cohabitated with a partner (Table 3)

With regards to their educational level 44,6% or 134 of them were with high education, 38% or 114 of them with Secondary education, 14,3 or 43 of them with the 9-year system, only 9 of them or 0,09% were with primary education (table 4).

The questionnaire location was randomly chosen, 33 of them were interviewed in school, 71of them in Universities,11 Saleswomen, 32 of them in Tailor shop, 81 in Institutions, 6 Hairdressers, 43 at home and 23 in daily service center offered by local NGO.

Table 3. Distribution of interviewed women& girls based on the questionnaire location

School	University	Shop	Tailor shop	Institut.	Hairdresser	Home	Service Centers
33	71	11	32	81	6	43	23

As expected, the contraceptive knowledge are a bit higher among women recently married and unmarried women sexually active rather than among all females¹⁰. Among them 292 (97,3%) of the interviewees have heard for at least one contraceptive method (8 were in the age of 15); 274 of them (91,4%) are familiar with the condoms as a contraceptive method as well as a protecting one against STI¹¹.

After the condom with 91,4%, the best known contraceptive by the interviewees was the oral contraceptive with 61,3%, then was DIU 54,7%, and 47,3% of them have heard about the Emergency contraception. (Table 5).

To the question ‘Where did they get this information?’ 72,2% of them replied that they have heard from friends, 23,5% from media (visual and written one) and 4,3 % of them from the health personnel. (Table 6)

To the question if they were recently using any contraceptive method, 198 (66,1%) of them are using a contraceptive method including here the natural method. Only 45 (15%) of interviewed women and girls use the modern contraception method. (table 7). So, 51,1% of women use the Withdrawal (pull-out) method. This is a national-based characteristic as the majority of females recently married in Albania use the traditional method (59%).¹² The natural method that was known and used was coitus while the method of standard days and Billings was not familiar to any of the interviewed women and girls.

Table 4. Types of contraceptives based on age

Method	Pills	DIU	Injection	Condom	Diaphragm	SKV	CU
age 15-24	2	0	0	13	1	0	5
age 25-49	10	5	0	5	0	2	2
TOTAL	12	5	0	18	1	2	7

Table 5 Distribution based on regions: (table 11)

Method/region	Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	Region 4	Region 5	Region 6
Condom/diafr	12	2	3	2	0	0
CU	4	1	0	1	1	0
DIU	0	0	1	0	1	3
Pills	7	2	1	1	1	0
SKV	0	0	1	0	0	1

Table 6 Regarding educational level we would have had this table (table 10)

Method/educat.	Primary	9-year system	Secondary	High
Diaphragm	-	-	-	1
SKV	1	-	1	-
Pills	-	2	4	6
CU	-	1	1	5
DIU	1	2	1	1
Condom	1	3	5	9
TOTAL	3	8	12	22

Although the interviewees had agreed together with their partners (66,1%) of them said they were going to use the contraceptive method to regulate the number of births¹³. But only (15%) of them used a modern contraceptive method, 51,1 % of them preferred the natural method (table 8).

Besides the fact that couples had decided to regulate the number of births they still did not prefer the modern contraception method due to the fact that ; 59,3 % of them justified it with their husband’s disapproval; 19,2 % of them trusted their partners, 14,4 % of them was afraid of contraceptive’s side effects and 7,1 % of them do not consider their use as necessary.(table 12)

A variety of modern contraceptive methods are provided (free) from the public sector, social marketing (subsidized) and private¹⁴.

Besides, 27,8% of the interviewees said that they will attend the Health Centers to take contraceptives and to receive the services of RH, 36,2 % of them will go in the drugstore, 10,4% will go in the market, while 25,6 % of them had not decided yet (table 13). Lack of information resources and interest from women and girls, or lack of necessity for sex, the shame they have to address such problems, are the main reasons for low use of the health Centers¹⁵. The reported reasons that they will attend the Health centers to meet their needs with RH and conceptive methods is not considerably related to age, educational status, profession or marriage status.¹⁶ It is more related with the social economic status. At least 9 out of 10 women that said that will attend the health centers had a low social status (unemployed with few incomes). Regarding to the supply location dominated by the drugstore and market was mainly related to the distance from their residence, the service timetable, communication with a person that she does not know especially for pupils, students and interviewees in the institutions.

Discussion

The findings of this survey are consistent even with the other surveys on women in reproducing age in Albania¹⁷ where it is noticed lack of knowledge on Contraception and methods (except condom and oral contraceptive)¹⁸. A qualitative study found out that this is due to the fact the women think that the withdrawal (pull-out method) and condom are very intimate contraceptive method¹⁹. Based on a study of PHI conducted in 2002, women's knowledge on specific methods was closely related to their level of education²⁰.

97,3% of the interviewees have heard at least about one contraceptive method, 274 (91,4%) of them know the condom as the contraceptive method and as protecting methods against STI and based on our observation this is regardless the intellectual/cultural level. Besides condom the next well known contraceptive by the interviewees 61,3% was the oral contraceptive, then was DIU with 54,7% and 47,3 % of them have heard about the emergency contraception. It was a surprise to us that the emergency contraception was known by such a large percentage of women and mainly by 90,6% of the group age 15-24. To the question where did they get this information 72,2% of them replied that they have heard from friends, 23,5% from media (visual and written) and 4,3 % of them from the health personnel. What we notice is the very low percentage of women and girls who take the information from the Health personnel, who are present in all the Health centers that offer the primary service and are well trained for services of FP.

One of the main purposes of conducting this survey was to take information on the level of using the contraceptive methods by the population. The question 'if you recently are using any contraceptive method; 198 (66,1%) of them replied that they use one contraceptive method including here the natural method. This means that 2/3 of them intended to limit the number of births or to extend spacing between births. But to realize the above-mentioned intention they did not prefer the modern method of contraception and only 45 (15%) of interviewed women and girls used these method recently. So, 51,1 % of women use the withdrawal (pull-out) method (they did not know the method of standard day and that of Billings). Among 102 (33,9%) women and girls have declared that they do not use any contraceptive method (taking into consideration that 27,3% were declared single, assuming that that do not have sexual relationship). Thus, only 20 (6,6%) of the interviewed married or in a relationship women do not use any kind of contraceptive method.

Relating to the contraceptive methods the widely used are the condom and the pills in the ratio 18 and 12 women, while the other methods are CU (7 women) DIU (5 women), SKV (2 women) diaphragm (1 woman). As expected the condom is the most used contraceptive by women and girls of the group age 15-24 (13) and by women and girls of the group age 25-49. The opposite is with the pill which was widely used by

women of the group age 24-49 (10 women) and 2 women of the group age 15-24. This result can be justified by the fact that the young ages use the condom as they have different partners and the condom might be a double protection.

We cannot say that the level of knowledge depends on their educational level because it seems that women 22 who have high educational level use more the modern contraceptive, but considering 134 interviewed women and girls belonging to this category, it means that 16,4% of them use modern methods. Moreover, among women and girls with secondary education we selected 114 and out of this only 12(10,5%) women use the modern methods. The opposite must be said for women with 9-year system and primary one, e.g. we selected for our study 43 women with 9-year education system and 8 (18,6%) use the contraceptive method, while among women and girls with primary educational level 3 (33,3%) out of 9 selected women use the modern methods.

While based on the region distribution it results that out of 45 women and girls that use contraceptive methods 22 (48,8%) of them belong to region 1, while 51,2% is divided among other 5 regions. Although the number of selected women is higher in this region, this does not justify the use of contraceptive methods at the level of 50%.. The only excuse might be the establishment of health centers that provide RH services in this region (Gynecological and Obstetric hospital, Woman Advisory Health Center, two Emergencies Health Centers)

Although 67% of interviewed women had decided along with their partners to use the contraceptive methods to regulate the number of birth 52 % of them preferred the natural method. The did not prefer the modern contraceptive method because: 59,3% of them justified it with their husband's disapproval; 19,2% of them trusted their partners; 14,4% of them were afraid of the contraceptive's side effects and 7,1% of them do not consider their use as necessary. What is noticed is the fact that partners or spouses agree with women 'decision to avoid mistimed pregnancies'. This means that their status is low regardless the place of living or the cultural level.

Besides,27,8 % of the interviewed women and girls said that they will attend the nearest health center to get contraceptives and RH services, 36,2 of them said they will go to the drugstore, 10,4% of them said they will go to the market or other centers while 25,6 % of them had not decided yet. Comparing the data of this study with ADHS data, first they seem contradictory. Based on their data 53% of the modern contraceptive users attend the public sector²¹. But in both studies the majority of the users of pills and male condom get the methods from the private resources, mainly from the drugstore. This low percentage is mainly due to lack of information by the centers that offer these services²². The interviewed women and girls have not discussed on the family planning with a Health Personnel or with a provider in a health center. The causes vary from lack of information in centers where the contraceptives are delivered to the difficulty these women face to attend the health centers because of the 'Shame', the distance of the RH services from their residences, different from the drugstore or the market whose timetable is suitable even in the afternoon, communication with a person that does not know them up to the lack of necessity for sexual relationship.

Lack of information resources, the distance of the health centers from the residences, the shame they face to attend these centers, or lack of necessity for sexual relationship are the main reasons that lead to a low use of Health Centers²³

The modern methods are used less compared to the traditional method and this is the fundamental reason for low attendance of the Reproductive Health Centers. If we include all the findings of this study in the analysis of the situation we shall draft the local strategy of intervention further.

Conclusions

Although, generally the contraceptive methods are known by girls and women of the group age 15-49, the use of the modern methods of contraception remains low.

Although the level of knowledge was high, generally the information was provided by friends, media and fewer by the health personnel, showing that the level of ‘lost opportunities’ to provide information on contraception especially by the health personnel is extremely low.

Generally couples are aware of limiting birth numbers and spacing between births but they continue to remain traditional. The contraceptive methods are used in low percentage.

The widely used methods remain condom and oral pills. Even the emergency contraception is widely known and used as well.

We notice that the choice of spouses/wife is dominant in this selection. Under the excuse of ‘protecting her health’ they limit the use of secure contraceptive methods.

Lack of information resources, distance from their residences, shame they feel to treat such problems or lack of necessity for sexual relationship are the main reasons for low use of health centers

The low use of health service is related to the fact that women and girls have difficulty in attending the health centers due to lack of information provided for free in the primary services, fear of side effects, their low social status in decision making for their reproductive health, mentality and shame they have to talk on such problems to RH and FP.

If the intervention will be applied in all the above-mentioned levels the results will be evident.

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