

# Husband-Wife Communication and Family Planning Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices in Korea

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## I. Introduction

The positive relationship between family planning IE&C mass media campaigns and the level of family planning knowledge, attitudes and practice has been well established in many countries. Much less understood is the effect of interpersonal communication, in particular that between husbands and wives. Do couples who discuss family planning know more about it, believe small families are better than large ones, and use contraceptives more than couples who do not discuss family planning? If the answers to these questions were yes, could the encouragement of such interspouse communication contribute significantly to the success of a family planning program?

Preliminary answers to some of these questions first appeared in a paper presented to the World Population Conference in Rome in 1954 which reported a high correlation between husband-wife communication and contraceptive use among Puerto Rico couples (Stycos and others, 1954). Since then, studies conducted in Latin America (Centro Latinoamericano de Demografia, 1972), India (Poffenberger, 1969), Bangladesh (Green, 1972), and Hong Kong (Mitchell, 1972) have reported similar findings. ESCAP conducted a multi-country study in India, Iran, the Philippines and Singapore, which not only corroborated the previous findings on spouse communication and contraceptive use, but also attempted to examine the causes and consequences of spouse communication in a more comprehensive context (ESCAP, 1974). However, research to date on husband-wife communication and family planning knowledge, attitudes and behavior remains limited.

It is difficult to explain the neglect of most family planning professionals and researchers in adequately considering the factor of husband-wife communication in developing appropriate education and service programs. The importance of interpersonal communication in general to family planning knowledge and adoption is recognized, as evidenced by two factors: 1) the provision of female and male family planning fieldworkers in many national programs to promote family planning information and use on a personal, one-to-one basis, and 2) the increased research emphasis currently being placed on understanding the role of neighbors.

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\* Follow, KIFP.

friends, relatives, opinion leaders, group and club membership, etc., in family planning knowledge and adoption. Unfortunately, the majority of attention given to interpersonal communication via field workers and researchers has focused on men and women separately, not as an interacting husband-wife unit. Understanding the relationship between the interpersonal communication behavior of a husband and wife and their family planning knowledge, attitudes and behavior is essential for developing more effective IE&C strategies and program planning.

## II. Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this report is to examine the extent to which a relationship exists between husband-wife communication and family planning knowledge, attitudes and behavior among Korean couples. The findings will hopefully add to the understanding of the role that spouse communication plays in fertility attitudes and behavior, and lead to useful suggestions for IE&C program planning in Korea, and perhaps in other countries.

## III. Data and Methodology

The data for this study come from the National Information, Education and Communication Survey conducted by the Planned Parenthood Federation of Korea in 1974, with a stratified random sample. The country was first stratified into metropolitan centers, cities, counties, and townships, the latter two being rural areas. Within each strata, a multi-stage random sampling method was used to select progressively smaller administrative units until households themselves were chosen. A total of 1,805 eligible women aged 15 to 44 were interviewed. Those women who said they believed themselves to be naturally sterile or who had never heard either the term "family planning" or "birth control" were excluded for a final sample size of 1,637 respondents.

Husband-wife communication was measured by six questions, five of which asked, "Have you ever discussed the oral pill (loop, condom, tubal ligation, vasectomy) with your husband?" A woman who reported discussing one or more methods with her husband was considered a contraceptive communicator. The sixth question asked whether the respondent and her husband had ever discussed how many children they wanted to have, their "ideal" family size. Of the total sample, 12 percent had not discussed either contraceptive methods or ideal family size with their spouse, 24 percent had discussed only contraception, 11 percent had discussed only ideal family size, and the remaining 53 percent had discussed both topics.

Knowledge of family planning was measured by asking respondents how many of the five contraceptive methods they knew. Attitudes towards family planning were measured by asking the respondents their ideal number of children. Family planning practice was dichotomized into

the couples' ever, or never, use of contraception as reported by the respondent.

Exposure to mass media family planning messages was measured with four questions which were combined to form a scale of media exposure. Respondents were asked, "How frequently have you heard family planning messages in the past year on television (radio, newspapers and magazines)?" The answers of "never" "once" "occasionally" and "frequently" were weighted as 0, 1, 2 and 3, respectively. The responses to the four questions were added for possible total scores ranging from 0 to 12. Those with a total score of 0, 33 percent of the sample, were assigned a "no exposure" rating; those with a score of 1 to 4, 50 percent of the sample, were given a "medium exposure" rating; and those with a score of five or more, 17 percent of the sample, were assigned a "high exposure" rating. The procedure for deriving this measure of mass media message exposure is less exact than is desirable, but for the purpose of this report, use of at least a rough measure was better than not using any. Hopefully, future researchs will incorporate stricter measures of message exposure.

#### IV. Spouse Communication and Contraceptive Knowledge

The level of contraceptive knowledge, as measured by the number of methods the wife claimed to know was high; 90 percent of the respondents reported knowledge of at least one method, and slightly more than one-third (36 percent) reported knowledge of all five methods. Of the total sample, 70 percent had high contraceptive knowledge, defined as knowledge of at least three methods.

Table 1 illustrates how contraceptive knowledge varies with husband-wife communication on family planning matters. Among those who discussed contraception only or both topics with their spouse, the proportion with knowledge of three or more contraceptive methods was much

Table 1. Percent Reporting Knowledge of Three or More Methods of Contraception by Husband-Wife Communication and Respondent's Education, Residence and Exposure to Mass Media Family Planning Messages

	Husband-wife communication			
	No discussion	Discussed family size only	Discussed contraception only	Discussed both topics
Total	40% ( 76)	57% (105)	71% (271)	79% (676)
Education				
Did not attend school	33% ( 21)	36% ( 13)	66% ( 64)	59% ( 61)
Attended elementary school	41% ( 39)	56% ( 49)	67% (126)	77% (276)
Attended junior high or more	48% ( 16)	73% ( 43)	85% ( 81)	86% (339)
Residence				
Rural	38% ( 55)	49% ( 42)	66% (143)	73% (248)
Urban	43% ( 21)	63% ( 63)	79% (128)	83% (408)
Family planning message exposure				
None	36% ( 39)	39% ( 30)	63% ( 89)	66% (138)
Medium	43% ( 33)	66% ( 54)	74% (151)	80% (359)
High	57% ( 4)	81% ( 21)	89% ( 31)	89% (179)

N=1,616

higher (almost twice), than those who discussed neither topic. Even among those reporting discussion of ideal family size only, though a topic not directly related to contraceptive knowledge, a larger proportion reported knowledge of three or more methods than those who discussed neither topic.

The relationship between husband-wife communication and contraceptive knowledge may be a result of other factors, such as respondent's age, education, residence, or exposure to family planning messages. Because respondent's age was not strongly related to contraceptive knowledge, it was dropped from further consideration.

Table 1 shows that the basic relationship between spouse communication and contraceptive knowledge remained among all subgroups when controlled for these factors. It may be concluded that although the relationship may be spurious due to yet other factors, the elimination of these key variables lend support to the finding that a significant relationship exists between spouse communication and contraceptive knowledge.

## V. Spouse Communication and Ideal Family Size

Ideal family size was dichotomized into two or fewer children and three or more to reflect a major goal and theme of the national family planning program. The report on the Third Five-Year Plan for Family Planning, 1972-1976 stated its basic demographic goal as the reduction of ".....the crude rate of natural increase of population to 1.5 percent per year by the end of 1976." (Korean Institute for Family Planning, 1972; p.40). The target for 1974, the year the national IE&C survey was conducted from which this data is taken, was 1.9 percent; requiring an average of two children per family (Korean Institute for Family Planning, 1972; p.42). The Planned Parenthood Federation of Korea has also conducted various media campaigns stressing the small family, one with the theme: "Daughter, son without distinction. Stop at two; raise them well."

Only one-fourth of the total sample preferred a small family, the remaining women reported a preference for three or more children. Table 2 illustrates how small family preference varies by spouse communication. Those respondents who reported no spouse discussion and those who reported discussion of contraception only had an almost equally low proportion reporting a preference for a small family of two or fewer children. Among those who discussed family size only and both topics with their spouse, the proportion preferring a small family more than doubled.

The results of controlling for age, education, residence and exposure to family planning messages, factors which might be responsible for the relationship between spouse communication and small family preference, are shown in Table 2. The basic relationship remained in nearly all subgroups. The few exceptions appear to be a function of small and uneven cell sizes. It may be concluded that the relationship between spouse communication and small family preference is not spurious due to the respondent's age, education, residence or exposure to mass media family planning messages.

**Table 2. Percent Reporting a Small Family Preference of Two or Fewer Children by Husband-Wife Communication and Respondent's Age, Education, Residence and Exposure to Mass Media Family Planning Messages**

	Husband-wife communication			
	No discussion	Discussed contraception only	Discussed family size only	Discussed both topics
Total	12% (23)	14% (55)	36% (66)	30% (240)
Age				
Less than 25	30% ( 6)	40% ( 6)	41% (11)	47% ( 21)
25~34	11% (10)	17% (27)	40% (46)	34% (174)
35~44	9% ( 7)	10% (22)	20% ( 9)	21% ( 65)
Education				
Did not attend school	8% ( 5)	8% ( 8)	14% ( 5)	14% ( 15)
Attended elementary school	9% ( 9)	9% (18)	25% (22)	17% ( 63)
Attended junior high or more	27% ( 9)	30% (29)	64% (39)	46% (182)
Residence				
Rural	7% (10)	7% (15)	15% (13)	15% ( 57)
Urban	27% (13)	24% (40)	53% (53)	41% (203)
Family planning message exposure				
None	8% ( 9)	10% (14)	23% (18)	20% ( 43)
Medium	13% (10)	14% (34)	40% (33)	28% (125)
High	57% ( 4)	19% ( 7)	58% (15)	46% ( 92)

N=1,637

## VI. Spouse Communication and Contraceptive Use

Contraceptive use was high in the sample. Sixty-four percent had used or were currently using contraception, while the remaining 36 percent had never used contraception. Table 3 illustrates how contraceptive use varied with spouse communication. Those who reported no

**Table 3. Percent Reporting Ever Contraceptive Use by Husband-Wife Communication and Respondent's Age and Exposure to Mass Media Family Planning Messages**

	Husband-wife communication			
	No discussion	Discussed family size only	Discussed contraception only	Discussed both topics
Total	17% (33)	18% (32)	82% (306)	76% (639)
Age				
Less than 25	—	11% ( 3)	46% ( 6)	45% ( 20)
25~34	12% (11)	13% (14)	75% (116)	69% (345)
35~44	27% (22)	35% (15)	90% (184)	92% (274)
Family planning message exposure				
None	20% (22)	19% (15)	83% (115)	76% (152)
Medium	14% (19)	19% (15)	82% (163)	75% (336)
High	—	8% ( 2)	80% ( 28)	79% (151)

N=1,586

spouse discussion or discussion of family size only had almost equally low proportions reporting contraceptive use. Among the two groups reporting spouse discussion of contraception only and of both topics the proportion ever using contraception more than quadrupled.

The same factors (respondent's age, education, residence and exposure to mass media family planning messages), were examined for their effect on the relationship between spouse communication and contraceptive use. Both education and residence were found to be not strongly related to contraceptive use and were not further considered. The results of controlling for respondent's age and exposure to mass media family planning messages are shown in Table 3. Because the basic relationship between spouse communication and contraceptive use remained in all subgroups, it may be concluded that this relationship is not spurious due to the respondent's age or exposure to mass media family planning messages, nor due to education or residence.

## VII. Summary and Recommendations

A strong positive relationship was found between: 1) spouse communication on contraceptive methods only and contraceptive knowledge, 2) spouse communication on both topics (contraceptive methods and family size) and contraceptive knowledge. 3) spouse communication on ideal family size only and a preference for a small family of two or fewer children 4) spouse communication on both topics and a small family preference, 5) spouse communication on contraceptive methods only and contraceptive use. and 6) spouse communication on both topics and contraceptive use. These relationships remained in all subgroups when controlled for the respondent's age, education, residence and exposure to mass media family planning messages.

A noticeable deficiency of the current data is that it does not adequately indicate whether spouse communication preceded or followed contraceptive knowledge and use and a small family preference. It is entirely possible that a certain amount of spouse discussion is a result, rather than a cause, of these three KAP factors. However, because very few women in this study reported first hearing of any contraceptive method from their husbands, or reported using a method without their husband's prior knowledge, the data was presented in the current report with spouse discussion as the independent variable preceding the acquisition of contraceptive knowledge, small family preference and contraceptive use.<sup>1)</sup> But further clarification of this issue is necessary.

Clarification of the causality issue, as well as understanding the communication process, requires that both parties in the communication dyad be interviewed. A second limitation of this data is the only one person in the dyad the wife, was interviewed. Even though questions about one's spouse's knowledge or attitudes may be asked of a respondent, the accuracy of such responses may be questioned. An earlier study in Puerto Rico found that when husbands and wives were interviewed separately about whether they had discussed family size and birth

1) A study conducted among Chicago couples found that wives not only had a much higher level of contraceptive knowledge than their husbands, but also found that husbands learned much more about contraception from their wives than vice versa (Misra. 1967. pp.185,200)

control with each other, only half of the couples gave concurring answers (Hill, 1967; p.211). The lack of agreement as to whether communication had occurred, let alone what was said, is evidence that a respondent may likely report a spouse's attitudes or knowledge inaccurately. Future research should include direct questioning of both husbands and wives.

The communication measure used in this study is not fully adequate. Even though 90 percent of the sample reported spouse discussion of at least ideal family size or contraception, the amount of discussion, its frequency, and when it occurred is unclear. The process of how spouse communication leads to decision-making on family size and contraceptive use, including conflict resolution, should also be examined. And finally, male and female attitudes which may hinder or prevent inter-spouse communication were not determined. These issues must be dealt with to enable program planners to fully understand and use husband-wife communication as a means to improve family planning programs.

Despite the limitations of the present study and the obvious need for further research, several recommendations for IE&C program planning are possible. Because the data also show that as exposure to mass media family planning messages increases, husband-wife communication also increases, the first recommendation is that mass media be used to directly encourage interspouse family planning communication to help increase contraceptive knowledge and use levels. One means of utilizing the mass media is readily available. All current family planning radio and television announcements, newspaper and magazine ads, as well as posters and pamphlets, regardless of content, should close with the suggestion "Talk with your spouse" The directness of this message would be beneficial because less time would be needed for message receivers to individually come up with the idea of approaching their spouse, and because it obviously assumes such a conversation between a husband and wife is acceptable and normal, would lend public support to the hesitant. Further research is also needed to identify specific attitudinal factors among Korean men and women which discourage interspouse communication. Based on the findings, a special IE&C campaign with the main theme of "Talk with your spouse" could then be launched with specific messages to neutralize any communication barriers.<sup>2)</sup> Should additional research indicate that discussion in the earlier family formation stages is more strongly related to contraceptive knowledge and use than is later discussion, this theme could easily be expanded to "Talk with your spouse/fiancee."

Because mass media are more effective when supplemented with personal interaction, the second recommendation is to utilize family planning workers, health center workers and others who work with clients on a personal or a small group basis to further promote and encourage husband-wife communication. Training programs for these family planning personnel should include an element explaining how increased husband-wife discussion can help improve program results, what attitudes generally tend to inhibit communication, and what encouragement might be given to counteract these barriers. Part of the duties of these workers would then be to personally encourage their clients to talk with their spouses and to help neutralize communication barriers which may exist.

Incorporation of these recommendations in current IE&C program planning as well as further

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2) For further discussion, see Bogue, 1975, pp.18~20, and Remsberg and others, (editors), 1975, pp. 50~55.

research on the role of husband-wife communication in family planning, will hopefully contribute to the future success of the family planning program in Korea and elsewhere.

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## 韓國 家族計劃에 있어서 夫婦間 커뮤니케이션의 役割

도 불 련

1954年 Stycos를 비롯하여 몇몇사람들이 Puerto Rico에서 夫婦間 「커뮤니케이션」이 家族計劃에 미치는 영향을 研究한 以來로 「커뮤니케이션」이 家族計劃에 미치는 영향에 대하여 많은 研究가 계속되고 있다.

이 研究는 1974年 大韓家族計劃協會가 實施한 IE & C 調査에서 15歲에서 41歲까지의 可妊女性 약 1,500名을 相對로 調査한 夫婦間 「커뮤니케이션」 資料를 토대로 이루어진 것이다.

調査對象의 可妊女性 중에서 12「퍼센트」는 避妊方法이나 理想子女數에 관하여 男便과 相議를 한 적이 없다고 하였고, 24「퍼센트」는 避妊方法만을 그리고 11「퍼센트」는 理想子女數만을, 그리고 53「퍼센트」는 避妊方法和 理想子女數에 대하여 男便과 相議를 한다고 하였다.

夫婦間의 「커뮤니케이션」과 家族計劃間의 連關性은 可妊女性의 教育程度나 居住地域 그리고 「매스콤」의 영향 與否에 相關하지 않고 밀접한 關係를 나타내고 있고, 男便과 家族計劃에 관한 이야기를 전혀 나누지 않는다는 可妊女性의 13「퍼센트」가 理想子女數를 2名 혹은 그 以下라고 指摘하였다.

그러나 男便과 理想子女數에 대하여 「커뮤니케이터」한다는 可能女性의 36「퍼센트」가 理想子女數를 2名 혹은 그 以下로 나타내고 있다.

農村地域에 있어서는 夫婦間의 「커뮤니케이션」이 많은 것과 少子女家族計劃에 대한 連關性을 都市地域에 비하여 낮은 것으로 나타났다.

調査對象 可能女性의 65「퍼센트」가 過去에 避妊을 해 보았거나 또는 現在 避妊중이며 35「퍼센트」는 避妊經驗이 없다. 夫婦間 「커뮤니케이션」이 전혀 없는 不妊女性의 18「퍼센트」가 避妊經驗이 있으며 避妊方法에 대해 男便과 相議를 한다는 婦人의 83「퍼센트」가 避妊한 經驗이 있는 것으로 나타났다.

비록 婦人의 避妊에 대한 教育程度가 높기 때문에 夫婦間의 「커뮤니케이션」이 잘 이루어지는지 그렇지 않으면 반대로 夫婦間의 「커뮤니케이션」이 잘 이루어지기 때문에 婦人의 避妊에 대한 教育程度가 높은지는 명확하게 알 수 없지만 夫婦間의 「커뮤니케이션」이 家族計劃에 많은 영향을 미치는 것만은 틀림없는 사실이다. 그러므로 家族計劃을 보다 圓滑히 運營하기 위해서는 家族計劃의 IE & C 事業을 위해 “talk with your spouse”라는 標語를 「매스 커뮤니케이션 차널」을 통하여 널리 普及시켜야 할 것이다.