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Women's knowledge and beliefs about contraceptive use in West Ambae, Vanuatu

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Abstract

Background: In Vanuatu, unmet need for contraception is among the highest in the world, contributing to high rates of unintended pregnancy, adolescent pregnancy, maternal deaths, sexually transmitted infections, and other negative health, economic and social outcomes. This research was conducted to understand factors that influence family planning (FP) and contraceptive uptake by exploring women's knowledge and beliefs.

Methods: A qualitative study utilising semi-structured, face-to-face interviews (n=17) was conducted in West Ambae. The sample comprised 15 mothers aged 19-39 years and two health workers. Participants were sampled purposively to obtain rich and relevant information. Data were transcribed, coded and analysed thematically using an inductive approach.

Results: Women in West Ambae reported that they do not receive adequate information about sexual and reproductive health (SRH), particularly on preventing unwanted pregnancy, until after they have been pregnant at least once. The factors that influence the use of contraception and FP include: difficulties with obtaining reliable information about SRH; lack of awareness about the usefulness or importance of contraception; reluctance to seek information about SRH because of shyness and socio-cultural taboos; a lack of autonomy from male partners to make decisions about contraception and FP; concerns about health risks and side effects associated with contraception; and the availability and tradition of kastom medicine alternatives.

Discussion: Women in West Ambae are ill-equipped to prevent unintended pregnancy due to poor access to adequate SRH information and limited autonomy to make decisions about contraceptive use.