Family planning in UP looking up

Sunita Aron
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Even as the state's performance on various developmental fronts has been dismal, there is encouraging news from one of the most difficult areas—population control and family planning programme—which has a direct bearing on the state's economic health.

The positive findings of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-2) on Uttar Pradesh, had surprised the International Institute of Population Sciences (IIPS), the designated nodal agency for this joint project by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, so much so that they had sent a special team of supervisors to cross check the startling revelations. After all the state's achievements during the last six years were almost equal to that of forty years in TFR (Total Fertility Rate).

Surprisingly, UP had fared much better than the three states of Bihar, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, though only in the last six years. The specific areas being TFR, use of spacing methods, knowledge of contraceptive methods etc.

However, the survey also revealed the grey areas, such as women's autonomy, maternal care and immunisation of children. Even today, after the expansion of the health services network, non-institutional deliveries constituted 83 per cent, with only nine per cent attended by a doctor or other health professionals. Though there had been a substantial decrease in the proportion of children without any vaccinations, 30 per cent still do not receive even one recommended vaccination, the report revealed.

The report stated: "The immunisation status of children in Uttar Pradesh is nowhere near 100 per cent, and there is a long way to go to achieve universal immunisation coverage of young children".

The Chief Secretary, Dr. Yogendra Narain, while sharing the preliminary report of the NHRS submitted in December 1999 disclosed that the average number of children in a family (TFR) had decreased from 4.8 per cent in 1992-93 to 4.0 per cent in 1998-99. The survey reports were encouraging, as the TFR had dropped by only 20 per cent from 1951 to 1992-93.

The survey which covered all the eight hill districts, besides 56 districts in different regions of the state, also revealed that the CPR (Contraceptive Prevalence Rate) had also increased by 40 per cent, which was approximately 22 per cent in 1992-93 and had increased to 28 per cent in 1999. Even the share of spacing had gone up by 11 per cent from 34 to 45 per cent indicating thereby that spacing methods had gained in popularity.

Dr Narain told newsmen that in a State where the average age of marriage was nearly 16 years and the average age of sterilisation was 28-29 years, there was need to provide protection against pregnancy in this intervening 13 years period.

Interestingly SIFPSA, which is promoting family control programmes through NGOs, is also trying to cover various communities and religion thereby belying the myth that Muslims considered such measures as anti-Quran.

Disclosing about a meeting recently held in Meerut, the head of SIFPSA said the response was overwhelming.
Family health awareness week ends today

Staff Reporter
Luknow

FAMILY HEALTH awareness week, concluding on Saturday, is a special drive launched by the SIFPSA. It aimed at increasing awareness about family planning methods among women through personal contact.

While the SIFPSA's efforts are concentrated on reducing the total fertility rate (TFR) it is also laying stress on upgrading child health, family welfare and reproductive facilities in the government and private health sectors.

During the week, the RCH camps are organised in selected districts, providing a wide range of services, including health check-ups for women and children and immunisation facility, to villagers. Evaluation of efforts in project areas have shown a marked increase in the number of couples adopting modern methods of family planning.

The family health awareness week, organised in over 7000 villages and 168 town areas in 15 selected districts, will give a boost to the grassroot level activities. The SIFPSA funded non-government organisations and dairy cooperatives in these districts have actively participated in the awareness week. During the week, health workers made door-to-door visits to popularise family planning messages and inviting people to participate in a group meeting to be organised on Saturday. In the group meeting, family planning messages will be conveyed through folk songs and plays. Discussions on advantages of adopting family planning methods will also discussed at the meeting for which woman gram pradhan, auxiliary nurse mid-wife (ANM), anganwadi workers, teachers, etc., have been given special invitation.

Besides, mobile vans are operating in 168 town areas, promoting family planning methods through video shows which include interactive sessions through games based on family welfare. Moreover, messages on the subject are also being relayed by the Doordarshan and the All India Radio.

The SIFPSA activists have also contacted over seven lakh women apprising them of the latest FP methods. Over 14,000 group meetings have been organised during the week for effective communication of family planning methods.
UP women have good knowledge of contraceptives

Staff Reporter
Lucknow.

ALTHOUGH UTTAR PRADESH is the most populous state of the country yet 80 per cent women here possess adequate knowledge of contraceptives, enabling their state to stand third after Kerala and Punjab in awareness about family planning methods. A recent National Family Health Survey-II, conducted by the Union government, confirms the achievement of women residing in UP.

The survey, which was conducted to ascertain success of the FP programmes in the country, took into note the socio-economic, demographic and cultural factors of various states.

According to the survey, the most significant reason behind this achievement is the private sector's participation in popularising FP programmes. Frequent holding of awareness drives and regular supply of contraceptive pills and intrauterine contraceptive device (IUCD) have made these birth control methods available in the remotest parts of the state.

The survey report claims that the use of contraceptive pills by women in the state has registered a sharp increase during the last six years. In 1992-93, only 47.6 per cent women used pills and this number rose to 72.5 per cent in 1999.

Similarly, use of contraceptives by women for birth spacing has also gone up by 11 per cent, clearly indicating rising popularity of such methods.

According to the survey, the proportion of couples using contraceptives and the contraceptive prevalence rate has also gone up by 40 per cent in the last six years.

Highlighting the private sector's role in success of the population control programme, the survey report says that while the private sector has strengthened community mobilisation for providing non-clinical services, the core competence of the government sector is making available clinical services. The report highlights 17 per cent decrease in the total fertility rate in the state during the last six years, equalling the 20 per cent figure reported in the last 40 years.

Besides, the SIFPSA has also contributed a lot in enhancing couples' knowledge about use of effective spacing methods, including pills and condoms, the report says, adding that campaigns launched on television and radio have also inspired women of the state to plan their families.
SIFPSA seeks support from ulama

Staff Reporter
Lucknow

THE STATE INNOVATIONS in Family Planning Services Agencies (SIFPSA) has, for the first time, rolled up its sleeves to popularise family planning programmes among Muslims.

For this, it has launched a project involving ulama and Islamic intellectuals in the Muslim-dominated areas of the Saharanpur district on experimental basis.

The project has been mooted by the SIFPSA experts as part of their efforts to introduce need-based programmes, focusing on specific requirements of the Muslim community. "In fact, it is an attempt to bring a general consensus among Muslims regarding the need for spacing the birth of children for better health of the woman and the child," the programme coordinator said.

The project will be implemented by the Non-Government Agency (NGO), PEACE (Programme for Ethical, Academic and Cultural Enterprises), which is headed by Dr Javed Jamil who wrote a book on 'Islam and family planning' in 1996 after getting financial aid from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

The book, which formed the project base, discusses the desirability of adopting small family norms from the Islamic point of view. It also highlights the Quran and Hadith's views on adoption of the family planning methods.

The book was first published in Saharanpur where the most powerful Muslim institutions, Darul Uloom Deoband and Mazahir-ul-Uloom, exist. No other place could have served the purpose as Saharanpur houses three schools of thought, Deobandi, Sunnis, Bareilvi Sunnis and Shias making it easy to convey the message, the experts feel.

The project aims at holding discussions with the Muslim ulamas and scholars of north India who work as opinion builders. The main objective of the exercise is to clarify ideological hindrances coming in the way of Muslims in adopting the family planning methods.

Gradually academicians, professionals and social activists will also be involved in the project to find out ways for conveying the message to the Muslim population.

The first seminar of the project, involving the Muslim intelligentsia, will be held in July. But before that a base line survey will be conducted on 1000 low and middle-income group Muslim families residing in Saharanpur. Under the project, seminars will be held to discuss the men's role in family planning.

The objective will be to reach out to male members of the community.

Considering it to be a sensitive issue, the SIFPSA has decided to keep the sterilisation issue out of the project. Instead, it will concentrate on ensuring adequate birth spacing and health of the woman and the child. Keeping their fingers crossed on the success of the project, the SIFPSA activists said that after reviewing the impact of the project they will decide whether it will be extended to other places and communities or not.
USAID to increase involvement in social sector in UP

By Raj Saran Varma
The Times of India News Service

LUCKNOW: The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is set to increase its involvement in the social sector programmes currently underway in the state. "It is indeed heartening to note that different agencies, including NGOs are showing keen interest in promoting girls education in the state," said Dr. Linda Morse, director India Mission of USAID in a chat with this correspondent. Ms Morse, who was in Lucknow to inaugurate the newly set up BETI foundation in the city, said the fact that there was a rash of private schools both in rural and urban areas was proof enough that education was becoming a core issue in the country.

She also referred to Mrs. Hillary Clinton's visit during her visit to India when she said "when women prosper, countries prosper." She said the quantum of aid to be provided to a country depended on Washington's perception of place, its political structure and the pace of its reforms. US president Bill Clinton's visit, she said, had opened further avenues of cooperation. However, what was important was the message the president had sought to convey through his speech: 'How could India expect to be a strong nation with 600 million poor?'

Dr. Morse said USAID is the primary funding agency for SIFPSA (State Innovation in Family Planning Services Agency). While the agency provides $220 million in assistance to the agency, a further amount of $100 million is given to the agency in the form of technical services to expand and improve the different family planning programmes including health care services, the use of condoms and spacing methods.

To ensure that the funds are spent on the heads for which they have been released, Ms Morse said the funds for SIFPSA are not released directly to the department. On the contrary it is the Central government which disburses funds to the agency, and only after the task has been successfully completed that USAID reimburses the amount to the Central government. "This is one way of ensuring that money spent has had the desired results," she said. Dr. Morse said that by and large the aid agencies believed more in resource transfer, such as technical assistance, providing training to personnel and helping in setting up infrastructure. "To ensure better administration, the USAID has started a specific training programme called FIRE, or the Financial and Institutional Reforms and Expansion project, for officers at the State Academy of Administration in Nainital.

Giving the example of Ahmedabad, where the USAID had provided resources and assistance to upgrade and manage city services in a better way, she said a similar exercise was on in Varanasi where USAID was providing assistance to the municipality in setting up a sewage treatment plant as well as a stronger infrastructure. She said while ten cities had already been rated for their financial viability, twenty more are being rated "and Lucknow may soon be one of them." While USAID provides resources, CARE (Comparative Assistance for Relief Everywhere) and CRS (Catholic Relief Services) were the primary implementing authorities for food aid in the state which amounts to around $75 to 100 millions a year, informed Ms Morse.
Birth control may soon be God's word

By Manjari Mishra

The Times of India News Service

LUCKNOW: Where persuasion has failed, religion may just succeed. With the population graph spiralling in UP, the state government is cautiously trying to rope in religious leaders to propagate the family planning message. The movement has already begun, and the response is encouraging.

Feelers have been sent to religious leaders and scholars of both Hindu and Muslim communities in Varanasi, Meerut, Saharanpur, Kanpur, Sultanpur, Rampur and Agra. Claim officials of the State Innovation in Family Planning Services Agency (SIFPSA), an outfit aided by USAID. They claim that some leaders have already signalled their acceptance.

Already, Imams of at least three mosques at Jahanium in Kanpur district have exhorted the Friday crowd to avail themselves of various health welfare schemes, including family planning. "The fact that they are doing it openly from the pulpit is proving to be effective as not much is said," says Anupama Johari, executive director, SIFPSA.

The most encouraging response, say officials, has come from Saharanpur which is the centre of some of the most influential Muslim religious institutes such as Darul Ulum Deoband and Mazar-ul-Uloom. Dr Javed Ansari, author of the book, 'Islam and Family Planning', has also done commendable work in bringing about general consensus in the Muslim community to space out children. The book elaborates on the permissibility of modern FP methods from the point of view of Quran and Hadith and has created a stir among Deobandi Sunnis, Bareilvi, Sunnis and Shias, says Ms Johari, quoting a study of the book by the Centre for Media Studies. Similarly, opinion makers in Allahabad and Allahabad have also been approached to educate the masses in the lower socio-economic minority pockets where FP is still taboo and is associated with forced sterilisation of the Emergency days.

"Thus, FP volunteers are cautious. In all the districts shortlisted for the project, SIFPSA is relying heavily on the help of the district administration to help them reach out and convince opinion makers. "Some of them come to our meetings only because they look upon it as an invitation from the Collector," said an official, citing the meeting held in Meerut in which the local qazi, bishop and mahantas participated. Next on the agenda is the Christian community."
There’s condom in your mail

The Times of India News Service

LUCKNOW: It won’t be necessary soon to look over your shoulder when you are at the local chemist’s asking for a packet of condoms. It will be delivered free right at your doorstep by your neighbourhood postman, courtesy the State Innovation in Family Planning Service Agency (SIFPSA).

Come November, and the 400-odd ‘dak sahayaks’ in Agra and Firozabad districts will be performing the unusual duty of distributing contraceptives along with regular mail.

To avoid any embarrassing mix-up, they will be provided with specially designed shoulder bags. If the pilot project goes down well with the people, the agency is likely to take up more districts.

In a day-long training camp held recently, 271 dak sahayaks in Agra were given tips on how to handle their new, ‘delicate’ assignment. The art of communication and timing to drive the home message is vital, says Aradhana Johari, executive director, SIFPSA.

“Knocking at the door and thrusting a packet of Mela D on an unsuspecting housewife will only horrify them.” So, the right technique obviously lies in building up confidence and then dropping the hint.

In addition, the dakias will also be doubling up as family planning counsellors, says Johari, adding the agenda would be to advice couples on the advantages of small families, right age for marriage, pregnancy and also spacing of children.

However, the agency is certainly in no mood to continue with an indefinite supply of free gift packs. Once the demand builds up and the public gets habituated to using contraceptives, the postmen will turn into salesmen. But that will only be in the second phase of the project, Johari hastens to add.

As an incentive to keep up the good work, SIFPSA will pay an honorarium of Rs 100 to those who succeed in “delivering the goods.” An additional reward of Rs 100 awaits those who reach the minimum performance standard set by the agency.

Any special reasons for picking up Agra and Firozabad? Yes, both these districts, says Johari, boast of a very good postal network and the postal officials there were “extremely willing” to cooperate with SIFPSA. If all goes well, milkmen may be roped in next by the agency, she says.
In Uttar Pradesh, when you've got mail, you get condom too

R.B. SINGH
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IN Uttar Pradesh, you won't get only mail; you could also get a condom along with it. The government of the country's most populous state is so serious about taking family planning right to its citizens' doorsteps that it will supply free condoms through dakiyas and even dudhwalas.

Anuradha Johari, Executive Director of the UP State Innovation in Family Planning Service Agency, said 400 daksahiyaks have been specially trained for this 'delicate job' in Agra and Ferozabad districts. They plan to be on the job from November. Each postman will be paid an honorarium of Rs 100, and an additional Rs 100 for fulfilling targets.

The targets, though, haven't been fixed. "If the idea clicks, more districts will be covered," says Johari.

It's ambitious, if not downright drastic, but then Uttar Pradesh's population is 17 crore at present. The state has tinkered around with several schemes, the first of which was launched way back in 1956. Yet, only 50 lakh people use contraceptives at present.
And now postmen, milkmen to distribute condoms in villages

India Abroad News Service

LUCKNOW

A birth control agency in Uttar Pradesh, armed with Rs 1,000 crore provided by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), has come up with a unique plan to popularise the use of condoms in rural areas.

The State Innovations in Family Planning Services Agency (SIFPSA) — specially created to run the USAID family planning project — wants to use postmen and milkmen to distribute condoms in the villages. "We have trained postmen to drop a pocket of condoms with every mail one receives," SIFPSA executive director Aradhana Johri, an officer of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), said. Uttar Pradesh is country's most populous state. The state's population is already well above 180 million, accounting for nearly 20 per cent of the country's total population and more than that of France and Germany put together.

What is proposed to be started as a pilot project in Agra and its neighbouring Farrukhabad district with effect from November is likely to be extended to other parts of Uttar Pradesh as well.

"And once we achieve success with this experiment, we would rope in milkmen, who could also prove to be excellent service providers by delivering condoms with their routine supply of milk," Ms Johri said. According to her, some 300 postmen had been trained by SIFPSA to carry out their additional assignment. "The response had been remarkable even though the incentive offered by us to the postmen was just Rs 100 a month," she told said, adding "What was amazing that the postmen were also willing to undertake the task of some kind of family counselors." Thus, apart from delivering condoms, postmen would also come in handy in educating the rural folk about the benefits of a small family, the need for spacing between children and above all, the health hazards of early marriage. "You see postmen have a tremendous rapport with their clients and often they become a part of the local household. So they would be in a better position to convince their audience than the usual family welfare sector worker," explained Ms Johri. She, however, hastens to clarify, "This practice will not continue indefinitely; the idea is to inculcate the habit of using condoms and once that was done, the demand for condoms would automatically be created, following which the same postmen could work as condom salesmen."
SIFPSA nautankis are runaway hit

By Manjari Mishra
The Times of India News Service

LUCKNOW: Packed in anti dowry, anti-child marriage, female literacy, family planning and reproductive health messages in a drama script can be a tough job. And it took the State Innovation in Family Planning Services Project Agency (SIFPSA) nearly one year of trial and error to master the art.

Now, one of the nautankis — 'Beti ka Byaah' — produced by them is proving to be quite a blockbuster among rural folk here. Entire villages complete with the sarpanches and their families are known to turn up for the performance and it's goodbye to the TV and local matinee show that particular day, claims Sona Sharma, project coordinator, SIFPSA.

The 40-minute play revolves around Sukhbir, a widow with four illiterate daughters. After a long hunt, the man manages to find four eligible boys — illiterate, small-time crooks all. However, during the pheras, the elder daughter turns rebellious. She had been taking private lessons from the village school master and knew her alphabets and numbers. So who else should offer his hand in marriage to the gutsy girl in marriage than masterji's son? The drama ends with the father-in-law delivering a rather graphic lecture on need to spare the family and how to go about it.

The troupe trained by Pandit Ram Dayal Sharma, Amitabh Bachchan of the nautanki world, as Sharma calls him, strikes instant rapport with the audience. So much so that they whip out condoms and copper IJs freely to exhibit to the mixed audience who seem far from embarrassed.

In fact, the artists felt a little odd earlier.

However, practice has finally made them perfect, says Aradhana Johari, executive director, SIFPSA.

This apart, there are puppet shows, magic shows, a laha-birha and even qawwali performances to drive the message home, says she. Qawwals by Ustad Mohammand Hayat from Delhi are quite a hit with the crowd. One of the more popular numbers is the love story of Ahmed and Noori, both minors, who decide to elope and how they are requested by their respective parents to wait till the right age.

On the D-day, they are predictably told about the birds and the bees and also how to avoid early or unwanted pregnancy. Not exactly an easy theme for a qawwal, but the Ustad is managing famously. Already 3500 such shows have been put up in 14 select districts and there is demand for more, says the official.