Increasing Postpartum Contraception in Rural India

At nine months postpartum, an equal proportion of women in each group reported discussing the timing of their next child with their husband (85% and 84%, Table 5, page 72). A significantly higher proportion of those in the intervention group than of those in the comparison group reported discussing methods for spacing births with their husband (63% vs. 39%, respectively), and a significantly higher proportion of those in the comparison group reported being pregnant at the time of the nine-month postpartum survey (16% vs. 11%, respectively). None of these pregnancies were among women who had reported the death of a child (not shown).

A higher proportion of women in the intervention group than of those in the comparison group reported modern contraceptive use at the nine-month postpartum follow-up—57% vs. 30% (Table 6, page 73). The method most commonly used in both areas was the condom (41% intervention, 23% comparison), which is one of the least effective methods. The IUD, a long-acting method, was used by only 2% of women in the intervention area and 0.2% in the comparison area. About one-fifth of women in the intervention group and one-quarter of those in the comparison group reported using a traditional method. Only 24% of women in the intervention area were not using a family planning method at the time of nine-month postpartum follow-up, compared with 45% in the comparison area.

Regression Findings

Belonging to the intervention group was associated with increased knowledge of messages on healthy spacing and knowledge of spacing methods communicated through the intervention (Table 7, page 73). Despite the fact that many women in both groups knew that 3–5 years’ spacing between births is ideal and that short interpregnancy intervals can negatively affect the health of the woman, her last child and her fetus, women in the intervention group were significantly more likely to know the healthy spacing messages four months postpartum than were those in the comparison group (odds ratio, 2.1). Similarly, even though more than half of the women in both study groups had correct knowledge of condom and pill use at baseline and the proportions with this knowledge increased in both groups by nine months postpartum, the results indicate that the intervention was associated with an increase in correct knowledge of spacing methods. The odds of knowing the correct use of two or more methods were twice as high for women in the intervention area as for those in the comparison area. Higher education was also associated with increased odds of knowledge of correct use (2.1–3.2).

Women aged 20–24 years and high-caste Hindus had higher odds of knowing healthy spacing messages than younger women and those from scheduled caste (1.7 and 1.9, respectively).

In the analyses of associations between postpartum contraceptive use and selected variables (Table 8), the results suggest that compared with others, those belonging to the intervention group and those with knowledge of at least two healthy spacing messages and at least two spacing methods had higher odds of adopting a modern contraceptive method during the postpartum period (odds ratios, 1.5–3.5).

**DISCUSSION**

The current study was undertaken to test a comprehensive, community-based behavior change communication intervention for its effectiveness in training community workers to educate young couples, families and community members in poor, rural settings in India about healthy pregnancy spacing, postpartum contraception to increase the interval between pregnancies and the use of the lactational amenorrhea method. The intervention, which included in-service training, provision of job aids and educational materials, education of young couples and monitoring of the educational campaign, was feasible and effective. Despite increases in the proportion of couples who were aware of the lactational amenorrhea method, few of them adopted the method and, of those who did, a relatively small proportion switched to a modern contraceptive method when they