

# Traditional Fertility Regulation Methods Among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria

## II. A Prospective Study of Use-Effectiveness

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effectiveness of traditional contraceptives commonly used by Yoruba women, and the attitudes of users and non-users towards family planning services and contraceptives in Nigeria. One hundred forty-two married women aged 19 to 40 years were followed for 18 months. Seventy-two of the women were identified as current users of four types of traditional contraceptives (ring, incision, soup, and waistband types), and 70 women did not use any type of contraceptive. The users and non-users were matched on socio-demographic characteristics. Attitudes of the users and non-users towards fertility regulation were investigated using focus group discussions. The study found that 5.6 percent of the users and 34.5 percent of the non-users became pregnant during the follow-up period. Contraceptive failure was experienced by users of the waistband and ring methods. The main barriers to the use of modern contraceptives as described by women were the negative attitudes of men and the fear of side effects. (*Afr J Reprod Health* 1997;1(1):65-73)

### RÉSUMÉ

Méthodes de contraception traditionnelles chez les Yorouba du Sud-Ouest du Nigéria: une étude prospective de leur efficacité

Cette étude porte sur l'efficacité des contraceptifs traditionnels couramment utilisés par les femmes Yorouba et les attitudes des utilisatrices et des non-utilisatrices envers les services de planification familiale au Nigéria. Cent quarant deux femmes mariées de 19 à 40 ans ont été suivies pendant 18 mois. Soixante-douze femmes ont été identifiées en tant qu'utilisatrices des quatre contraceptifs traditionnels (bague, incision, soupe, ceinture) et 70 femmes mariées en tant qu'utilisatrices d'aucun type de contraception. Les deux groupes ont été appariés pour les caractéristiques socio-démographiques. Leurs attitudes ont été déterminées à travers de groupes de discussion. L'étude a montré que 5,6 pourcent des femmes sous contraceptif et 34,5 pourcent des femmes sous aucun contraceptif étaient tombées enceintes durant la période de surveillance. L'inefficacité des contraceptifs à été constatée chez les utilisatrices de bague et de ceinture. Les principaux obstacles à l'utilisation des contraceptifs modernes ont été les attitudes négatives des hommes et la crainte des effets secondaires. (*Afr J Reprod Health* 1997;1(1):65-73)

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KEY WORDS: *Traditional contraceptive devices, use-effectiveness, Yoruba, Nigeria, Africa*

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characteristics of the husband.

The results of this study differ from previous studies suggesting that traditional African family planning methods consist only of prolonged breast-feeding and post-partum sexual abstinence, and are employed solely for spacing.<sup>10,11</sup> Our study shows clearly that traditional contraceptives include several devices and herbal products, and while the majority are used for birth spacing, they can also be used for limiting family size.

Although the majority of respondents were aware of the existence of orthodox family planning services in their communities, a number of factors constrained their use. These included: fear of side-effects of modern contraceptives, especially infertility; lack of trust in the confidentiality of family planning service providers; expectation of discourteous treatment by providers, and negative male attitudes towards the use of contraceptives.

### Conclusion

This prospective study of use-effectiveness of traditional contraceptives in a rural Yoruba community shows that a significant proportion of non-users became pregnant during 18 months of observation compared with users of these methods. Reasons for the apparent effectiveness of the traditional contraceptives are unknown. However, it is suggested that the devices may have hitherto unknown active ingredients which may exert fertility inhibiting effects. The study also found that the users of the traditional contraceptives were confident about the devices' effectiveness and safety. Negative male attitudes towards family planning, lack of privacy and confidentiality, and fears of the side-effects of oral contraceptives, IUDs, and injectables are the main reasons constraining the use of modern contraceptives in this rural Yoruba community.

There may be value in incorporating the evaluation and promotion of traditional contraceptives into national family planning programmes. This should include conducting basic and operations

research on traditional contraceptives to determine how they exert their effect and training traditional medical practitioners in family planning. Further studies into the comparative effectiveness of various types of traditional contraceptives should be conducted to identify the types that merit promotion and laboratory investigation.

There is also a need to re-orient existing family planning programmes which currently target females and neglect males; more emphasis should be placed on educating men about family planning. Family planning providers should receive training that emphasizes counselling skills and gaining the confidence of their clients.

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