

**PARTICIPATION OF MALES IN DECISION MAKING AS AN INDEX OF THEIR PERCEIVED INVOLVEMENT IN REPRODUCTIVE AND CHILD HEALTH IN TAMIL NADU, INDIA.**

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**Abstract**

**Background:** In recent past, the family planning and other reproductive health programs have become interested in the subject matter of men and reproductive health. These programs recognize that men have an important persuade on women's and children's health and also have distinct reproductive health needs of their own. The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo and subsequently alarm of increasing incidence of STD and HIV/AIDS have brought under sharp focus on the need of involving men in reproductive health and contraception. This issue is important for reducing gender disparity and empowering women to be in charge of their destiny, in all domains of life including sexuality and reproduction. Involving men in reproductive health is expected to have an encouraging impact on maternal and child health care, prevention of STI/HIV/AIDS transmission, and progress in contraceptive use-effectiveness and continuation. Equal participation of the spouses in decision making on various issues including reproductive matters is an indication of husband's inherent involvement in promotion of the reproductive and child health.

**Objectives:** This study tries to assess the varying levels of participation of men and women in family decision making and its impact on contraceptive adoption, maternal and child health care, breast feeding practice, unwanted pregnancies and abortion practice, awareness of HIV/AIDS, etc. An attempt was also made to examine the relationship between the socio-economic and demographic backgrounds and the decision making between the spouses.

**Methods:** The data were drawn from the National Family Health Survey – II conducted in Tamil Nadu State of India during 1998-99. The data were collected from a population-based representative sample of 4676 currently married women. Logistic regression analysis is used to examine the effects of male involvement (decision making participation) on reproductive and child health.

**Results:** The findings revealed that 46.69 percent of the spouses had equal participation in decision making. Equal participation of wife and husband in decision making was responsible for high contraceptive adoption, better utilization of ante-natal and post-natal care services, more institutional deliveries, low proportion of unwanted pregnancies, safe abortion practice, greater awareness about HIV/AIDS, better knowledge of RTI and favourable behaviour change to seek treatment, etc. which are the some reproductive health components. These all show men's perceived involvement in reproductive health matters. In contrast, independent decision making role of males has not made a greater impact on reproductive and child health. The results of logistic regression and path analysis revealed that SED variables have a strong bearing on varying levels of participation of spouses in decision making.

**Conclusion:** The overwhelming conclusion of this study is that equal participation of spouses in decision making could be considered the perceived involvement of men in promotion of reproductive and child health. The findings suggest information, education and communication (IEC) strategy for making the men participate equally with wife in decision making on various issues. Empowering women in terms of educational attainment will also be an effective casual mechanism to achieve this goal.