

Sterilization in Iran: Wide Use of a Radical Method in a Fundamentalist Islamic Society.

(Final abstract of paper for presentation at the session on Reproductive Health, EPC, Liverpool, 21-24 June 2006).

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Abstract

The Islamic Republic of Iran is one of the few Muslim countries vigorously promoting use of male and female sterilization as part of the national family planning program. This paper reviews historical evidence regarding the approval of sterilization by Shiite religious leaders since early 1970s and summarizes data on the prevalence of sterilization revealed by nationally representative surveys carried out between 1989-2003. It is shown that the proportion of couples relying on sterilization which was almost zero before the Revolution rose rapidly immediately after the revival of the FP program in 1989. The proportion of married couples aged 15-49 using this method had reached 9% by 1992, 16.6% by 1996 and almost 20% by 2000 when sterilization accounted for 25.3% of urban and 30.0% of rural couples using any method. Detailed analysis of the DHS-type survey conducted in October 2000 shows that a higher proportion of rural women (18.9%) than the urban (16.1%) were tubectomized. The proportion of urban men who had undergone vasectomy (3.5%) was almost three times that of rural men (1.3%). Couples relying on female sterilization are older, have larger number of children and differ in a variety of socio-demographic characteristics from those relying on other modern methods. Women whose husbands have undergone vasectomy are better educated and somewhat younger than their tubectomized counterparts.