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| “There is no bigger sin than having kids that are close in age”: Birth spacing as a motivator for family planning use in Rwanda |
| **Background/Objectives**An average 10% of women in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) have an unmet need to space their births, leading to inflated fertility rates and contributing to economic and social strife. These factors serve as obstacles in attaining the SDGs of Sustainable Cities and Communities and No Poverty. In contrast, Rwanda’s rate of unmet need is only 5.6%, and its fertility rate has continuously decreased. This may be attributable to the country’s highly successful family planning (FP) program, which has allowed FP use to double in the past decade. Our research suggests that use of FP in Rwanda is motivated by the desire to lengthen the time between births, thus advancing quality of life in countless areas.**Methods**This study was conducted in July 2018 in the Musanze and Nyamasheke districts of Rwanda. The data came from interviews with 32 FP users. Data analysis was guided by the thematic content analysis approach and executed using Atlas.ti 8 software and group level matrices. IRB approval was obtained at Western Washington University and with the Rwandan Ministry of Education.**Results**“Birth spacing” was a common theme across interviews; nearly every interviewee mentioned it in some capacity. Some even went so far as to state that “there is no bigger sin than having kids that are close in age.” Many women identified spacing as critical not only to their own health and to their ability to provide for their children, as well as the health of their children. With adequate spacing, women stated that they were able to breastfeed longer, work more predictable hours, and save money. Many women also reported a proximity of initiation of FP use to the birth of a child, and identified an overlap in prenatal doctor’s visits and discussion of FP with providers.**Discussion**Since birth spacing is critical to women’s health and maximizing families’ working potential, the ability to regulate space between births may be instrumental in encouraging the use of FP by women in SSA. Nearly a quarter of women living in SSA expressed a desire to put space between their births, but the rate of unmet need can be as high as 15%. Since more than two-thirds of Rwanda’s population lives in rural communities where subsistence farming is widespread, putting space between births is essential to health and prosperity. Therefore, it should follow that spacing is among the primary motivators in using FP in Rwanda. **Keywords**birth spacing; Rwanda; unmet need; family planning |