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| Contraceptive users in Rwanda persist with family planning program despite unmanageable side effects |
| **Background/Objectives**Successful family planning (FP) programs must factor in the impact of discontinuation on success. In some contexts, over half of users cease use within only one year; this is a widespread and troubling quandary. Side effects (SE) and health concerns are the most common causes of cessation among users who wish to continue to avoid pregnancy. Rwanda’s contraceptive prevalence rate has more than doubled in 10 years. This unique success warrants review, particularly regarding support of sustained use, so that techniques may be considered globally. **Methods**This study consisted of eight focus groups with FP providers and 32 interviews with FP users, and was conducted in 2018 in Rwanda’s Musanze and Nyamasheke districts. Focus groups included questions regarding client interaction and a sorting and listing exercise. Interview questions pertained to personal and social experiences with FP. English transcriptions were analyzed via thematic content analysis. IRB approval was obtained at Western Washington University and the Rwandan Ministry of Education.**Results**Interviews with FP users revealed a common theme: persistence. Respondents expressed a strong desire to continue using FP despite SE. When SE were too severe, respondents often switched to another method. In discussions, FP providers expressed that discontinuation was only viable when pregnancy was desired, or when a woman was unable to properly use the method. Switching contraceptive methods was more common than discontinuation. The absence of providers and current users discussing discontinuation as an option was unanticipated. **Discussion**Providers reported two causes of discontinuation: the desire for pregnancy, and improper method use resulting in failure or unmanageable SE. Those who complain of SE are met with two options: either persevere, or consider an alternative method. This could be the reason for low discontinuation rates in Rwanda: 28% of users discontinue at one year of use, versus the 38% global average (Rwanda DHS 2015, Population Council). Rwanda’s impressive success may be rooted in providers supporting those who are unsatisfied and refusing to acknowledge discontinuation as an option. Therefore, users feel supported, understand that SE may reduce with time, and are more willing to persevere or switch to another method, understanding discontinuation to be a last resort. **Keywords**Contraception, discontinuation, side effects, switching, Rwanda |