

Building Healthier Families in Uzbekistan

November 2004

While contraceptive use in Uzbekistan is relatively widespread, with 63 percent of married women using contraception in 2002¹, the IUD dominates and breadth of knowledge regarding other methods and their usages is very narrow. Focus groups conducted by the USAID-funded ZdravPlus project in Ferghana Oblast revealed many common misperceptions about family planning methods among married women of childbearing age. These misperceptions, combined with a traditional deference to the doctor as decision-maker on family planning issues, has contributed to the observed prevalence of IUD use and lack of knowledge about other forms of modern contraception.

Because no single contraceptive method is right for everyone, couples need to be informed of their options and should be able to work with their health care providers to make an educated decision about the contraceptive choice that is right for them. In an effort to empower the population to make choices about family planning, educate the population and counter these misunderstandings about modern contraceptive methods, ZdravPlus undertook a health promotion campaign in April 2003 in Ferghana Oblast.

Based on the contraceptives available, data about their use, and focus group results, a series of key messages were developed for the campaign, designed to 1) increase knowledge of the range of available family planning methods; and 2) encourage couples to take responsibility for decisions about childbearing and contraceptive use, rather than leaving these decisions largely to health workers. As the head doctor from the Bekavot SVP in Uzbekistan Rayon explained, “Before the campaign, women didn’t know about contraceptive methods—they only used IUDs.” The campaign aimed to change that.

Key campaign messages were developed to address the many misconceptions about modern contraceptives that were expressed by focus group participants.

Pills are not safe to use. I heard that if a person starts using pills, her body gets addicted to them. Any drugs are harmful.

I heard that if one takes an injection three times, one will not be able to bear children at all, that's why this method can be used by those who don't need any more children.

Condoms are used mostly by men who are unfaithful to their wives.

The key messages for the campaign included the following:

1. Four methods of contraception are widely available in Uzbekistan. All are safe and reliable. They are pills, injectables, IUDs, and condoms.
2. Each method has advantages and disadvantages:
 - Pills and injections can cause side effects but these usually disappear as the body adjusts to the medication;
 - Oral contraceptives and injections are not addictive;
 - IUDs:
 - are a good long-term method;
 - are cheap and convenient to use;
 - may not be the best method for women with anemia; and
 - are not recommended for women who have a reproductive tract infection.
 - Condoms are a good method of contraception for married couples.

For the duration of the six week campaign, health promotion centers, NGOs, primary health care (PHC) facilities, and others conducted a



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¹ 2002 Uzbekistan Health Examination Survey

range of interpersonal communications activities around the oblast and distributed a poster and brochure developed for the campaign. A soap opera, entitled “Family Happiness”, TV spots, and radio spots were also developed and widely aired. In addition, newspaper articles and print advertisements reinforced the campaign’s key messages in Ferghana newspapers. It is estimated that at least one million people in Ferghana Oblast were reached through the campaign.

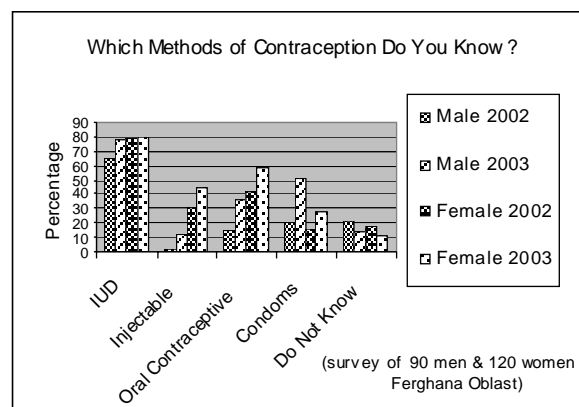
Thanks to the campaign, today the population in Ferghana Oblast is more knowledgeable about the range of contraceptives available and more confident that those contraceptives are safe to use. The resulting shift in contraceptive methods used among couples, from the IUD to other methods, came in conjunction with an impressive increase in the population’s knowledge about these methods. Women in particular now know more about oral contraceptives, injectables, and condoms.

The head doctor from the Bekavot SVP notes that one year after the campaign, things have changed. Today, “[women] are giving more attention to other kinds of contraceptives such as injectables and pills. After the campaign, use of these methods increased. As a result, sicknesses like anemia and gynecological problems [which could be related to IUD use] have decreased... We have also seen a decrease in the number of abortions because women are preventing unwanted pregnancies and they are keeping longer intervals between children.”

Part of the reason for this shift may be the campaign’s impact on the population’s confidence in the safety of contraceptives. After the launch of the campaign, there was an increase in the percentage of the Ferghana Oblast population reporting that injectables (9 percent to 11 percent) and condoms (11 percent to 21 percent) are safe to use.

A Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) survey conducted after the April campaign showed that, for many, that contraceptive of choice was still the IUD, but the survey revealed an increase in the use of injectables from 0 percent in 2001 to 5 percent in 2003 and oral contraceptives use from 4 percent in 2001 to 5 percent in 2003 among respondents using contraception.

A secondary objective of the “Let’s Build Healthy Families” campaign was to foster improved communication about family planning within couples. The results of the KAP surveys indicate that after the launch of the campaign in 2003, there was an increase in the percentage of respondents who said that they talked to their spouses about when to have a child; from 53 percent in 2002 to 66 percent in 2003.



The Focus Group Discussions and an overwhelming preference for IUDs showed that an opportunity existed to make the population more aware of their choices and to get them more involved in making decisions about their health. Through the “Let’s Build Healthy Families” campaign ZdravPlus brought important information on contraception to the people living in Ferghana Oblast; those people are now aware of their options and can make educated decisions regarding use of contraception and family planning.

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