



## ISSUE BRIEF

# Healthy Mothers, Healthy Families

**Access to Education about Contraceptive Methods and Tools Empowers Women and Men to Plan their Families, Educate their Children, and Provide for their Families.**

Hina Bhushan is a 22 year old mother of two children living in the poor rural village of Rampur Sigariyawa in India. In Hina's village, family planning is a private issue, barely discussed among women in the community. When Hina and her husband Pankaj decided to have a family, they had little access to contraceptive methods or the education they needed to help them determine the timing and spacing of pregnancy.

After their first child was born, Hina and Pankaj decided to participate in a CARE maternal health and family planning program in their village. In this program, frontline health workers provide access to education and services around maternal, newborn and child health and nutrition as well family planning education and contraceptive methods. After visiting a mobile health unit, which provides maternal health and family planning services in remote locations where they are not readily

available, Hina and her husband learned about the different methods of contraception available and made the decision to choose a contraceptive method that best fit the needs of her and her family.

After learning about the health and economic benefits of birth spacing, Hina's family became very supportive of her decision. Today, Hina and Pankaj are intent on providing for their two sons and ensuring they have access to education.

**"Family planning is important because we can care for our small family in a better way. We can educate them [their children], we can feed them well. I could not afford a big family; I don't think anybody else can also, so it's important. Family planning is important."**  
—Hina Bhushan

More than 220 million women wish to delay or prevent a pregnancy but do not have access to voluntary family planning services. By educating women and men about family planning, families are empowered. With more economic resources, parents can plan for a better future for their children. They are more likely to be able to afford to send their children to school and feed them nutritious meals.

**But what is family planning? Family planning is the education about, and use of, contraceptive methods that allow women and men to determine the timing and spacing of pregnancy. It is a voluntary multi-step**

**approach that allows women and men to access the education and tools to help them determine if, when and how many children to have.**

Family planning also plays a critical role in preventing maternal deaths. **One woman dies nearly every 90 seconds during pregnancy or childbirth—and millions more are left with life-altering disabilities. In fact, pregnancy is the leading cause of death for young women aged 15 to 19 worldwide.** By using voluntary family planning, and planning a pregnancy when a woman is healthy and the timing is right, many of these deaths can be prevented.

As an organization with more than 50 years of experience successfully implementing voluntary family planning programs globally, CARE knows that simple, inexpensive, and effective interventions can reduce maternal and child deaths substantially. CARE is working in more than 30 countries with some of the highest demand for family planning and maternal health services.

### The Tools Needed to Plan Responsibly Training And Communications

In many communities around the world there is a desperate need for trained health care providers. Where trained health care providers do exist, women are often not allowed to speak directly to them about their own care. By educating both health care providers about the effective proven interventions for healthy pregnancies and births as well as recipients about their health care rights, infant, child and maternal mortality can be reduced.

### Education Around Birth Spacing

Learning about the importance of birth spacing is critical for women of reproductive age. Research shows that children born less than two years after the previous birth are about 2.5 times more likely to die before age five than children born three to five years after the previous birth. When a pregnant woman has not had time to fully recover from a previous birth, her new baby is often born underweight or premature, develops too slowly, and has an increased risk of dying in infancy or contracting infectious diseases during childhood. **In addition, women who space births three to five years apart not only have healthier babies, but are also more likely to survive pregnancy and childbirth.** By preventing high-risk pregnancies, it is estimated that family planning prevents 215,000 maternal deaths each year, including those from unsafe abortion.

### Education And Voluntary Decision-Making

CARE seeks to involve men and women in dialogue around equity in couples' decision making, including education about family planning and parenthood based on the social and cultural norms of the countries and communities in which we work. **A woman's decision to use family planning is always voluntary.**

### Impacts of Successful Planning

Education about family planning enables women and men to make better decisions for their families, resulting in improved economic and health outcomes. Women and men are more likely to be able to afford to send their children to school and feed them. Including family planning in maternal and child health interventions provides greater impact and is more effective and less costly than focusing on either intervention independently. Meeting the unmet need for family planning would:

- Cut maternal deaths by more than two-thirds from the current global level of 356,000 to 105,000
- Reduce newborn deaths by more than half, from 3.2 million to 1.5 million
- Reduce unintended pregnancies by more than two-thirds, from 75 million to 22 million

Helping educate women on modern family planning methods in the developing world delivers far more than health benefits. From an economic perspective, **meeting these needs would lower the cost of providing maternal and newborn health services by \$5.1 billion.**

**In addition, family planning can actually reduce abortions.** Approximately 87 million unintended pregnancies occur each year; more than half result in abortion and 18 million of those take place in unsafe conditions. About 68,000 women die from unsafe abortions annually; thousands more suffer serious complications. Studies in several countries show that increased contraceptive use contributes to dramatic declines in abortion rates, thereby reducing abortion-related deaths.

Sources: Singh S et al., Adding It Up: The Costs and Benefits of Investing in Family Planning and Maternal and Newborn Health, New York: Guttmacher Institute and United Nations Population Fund, 2009; Patton GC, Coffey C, Sawyer SM, Viner RM, Haller DM, Bose K, Vos T, Ferguson J, Mathers CD. Global patterns of mortality in young people: a systematic analysis of population health data. *Lancet*, 2009. 374:881-892; Setty-Venugopal, V. and Upadhyay, U.D. Birth Spacing: Three to Five Saves Lives. *Population Reports, Series L, No. 13*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Population Information Program, Summer 2002; Singh S et al., Unintended pregnancy: worldwide levels, trends and outcomes, *Studies in Family Planning*, 2010, 41(4):241-250; Amy Deschner and Susan A. Cohen, *Contraceptive Use Is Key to Reducing Abortion Worldwide*, The Guttmacher Report on Public Policy, October 2003, Volume 6, Number 4

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