Practice and barriers of family planning: A comparison among Muslim women in three main cities, viz. New York City, Tehran and Kuala Lumpur

Raja Noriza Raja Ariffin¹, Muzalwana Abdul Talib @ Abdul Mutalib², Nurulhuda Mohd Satar³, Hanira Hanafi⁴, Azmah Othman⁴, Makmor Tumin¹, Rustam Khairi Zahari¹

Background: There is a lack of information on the practice of family planning among Muslim women in New York City in the United States of America (USA) [hereinafter known as “Muslim women residing in the United States” (MWRIU)], Tehran in the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The limited figures on this issue are either outdated or mere estimates. The importance of sexual and reproductive health of Muslim women is expected to have massive effects on the social and economic progress of developing countries like the IRI and Malaysia. It is also expected to have imperative impacts on the attempts to empower the MWRIU community and enhance their health status to meet the national standards.

Objective: The study objective is to explore and compare the practice of family planning, namely on contraceptive use and abortion among Muslim women in 3 major cities of different countries.

Methodology: A survey of 379, 377 and 380 respondents from New York City, Tehran and Kuala Lumpur respectively was conducted in 2013 using self-administered questionnaires.

Results: There were significant differences in contraceptive and abortion practices across these countries (P<0.01). While a significant 86.6% of Iranian and 66.2% of the MWRIU used contraception, only 22.9% of the Malaysian women did so. For abortion, 13.6% of the MWRIU and 6.3% of the Malaysian respondents had abortion at least once; while only 22% of Iranians revealed their abortion history, totaling 32.1% of them who had abortion. Financial problems and having an unsupportive husband were among the major factors hindering their practice of healthy family planning.

Conclusion: Educational campaigns should be promoted to increase the awareness on the permissibility of family planning in Islam, as well as on sexual and reproductive rights.

Keywords: Barriers, comparison, contraception, family planning, Islam

Introduction

Abortion laws play an important role in determining the practice of unsafe abortions. More access to safe abortions will result in less practice of unsafe abortions. Although abortion in the USA is legally permissible for all women upon request, abortion in the case of Malaysian women is allowed only to save their life or preserve their physical and/or mental health. In the IRI, abortion is only permitted when a woman’s life is under threat¹.

Data on abortion rates and its related implications on maternal deaths in the IRI and Malaysia are rather limited. As there is no official data, only few studies have provided some estimates on this concern. Tey et al. (2011)⁵ estimated that the abortion rate in Malaysia is at 16%. A study in the IRI estimated the abortion rate to be 26% per married women aged 15 – 49 years⁴. Another study in the IRI estimated that 5% of maternal deaths were due to complications resulting from unsafe abortions⁴.

Unsafe abortion is rarely practiced in developed countries and 98% of unsafe abortions were reported in the developing world⁵. In the USA, unintended pregnancies amounted to 50% of the total number of pregnancies, and about 30 – 40% of unintended pregnancies ended with abortion⁵. However, there has been a noticeable decline in the overall abortion rate among the USA women: 8% decline between 2000 and 2008⁶, and a 13% decline between 2008 and 2011⁷. Statistics also showed an apparent decline among rich women (28%), but an increase in abortion rates among poor women (18%) between 2000 and 2008⁸. Poverty can be considered as one of the main reasons for abortion in the USA, as 42% of women who performed abortions were living in poverty⁹. However, there are no figures or estimates on the abortion rates and contraception use among the MWRIU.

¹Department of Administrative Studies and Politics, Faculty of Economics and Administration, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA
²Department of Applied Statistics, Faculty of Economics and Administration, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA
³Department of Economics, Faculty of Economics and Administration, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA
⁴Department of Development Studies, Faculty of Economics and Administration, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA
⁵Kulliyyah of Architecture and Environmental Design, International Islamic University Malaysia, Gombak, Selangor, MALAYSIA

Address for Correspondence:
Associate Professor Dr Raja Noriza Raja Ariffin, Department of Administrative Studies and Politics, Faculty of Economics and Administration, University of Malaya, 50603, Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA
Email: rmoriza@um.edu.my

IeJSME 2016 10(2): 30-37
earlier, the permissibility must be within the context of the Islamic law.

With different levels of development, the practice of family planning varied significantly among the MWRU, respondents from Tehran and Kuala Lumpur. Unsafe abortion and contraception were still used by Muslim women in the three cities as a means for family planning. Muslim women in Tehran showed the highest percentage in practicing contraception and unsafe abortion, while Malaysian women were the lowest. Although unsafe abortion in the sample from New York City was rare, a non-negligible portion of Muslim women was still involved in this risky practice.

Conclusion

Contraceptive methods should be subsidized in Malaysia and the IRI to reduce the practices of unsafe methods. Educating Muslim women in the three countries on the permissibility of practicing family planning and their sexual and reproductive rights is expected to leave a positive impact on the overall health and economic standard of the community.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank The Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia and University of Malaya for funding our project under the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (Grant No: FP022-2013B). It was conducted in accordance with University of Malaya Ethics Guidelines, and obtained the ethical approval (No: UM.TNC2/RC/H&E/UMREC – 74) from the University of Malaya Research Ethics Committee (UMREC). The authors hereby declare no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES