



The Assessment of the Role of Traditional Methods of Family Planning Within the Household in Coastal Communities of Tanzania: A Case of Kisiju Ward in Mkurunga District Council

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Abstract

This paper intends to comprehend the assessment of the role of traditional family planning methods in Tanzania's coastal communities. The study focused on the effectiveness of traditional methods of family planning, the commonly used traditional methods, and the relationship between child spacing and traditional methods of family planning within the household. The research was conducted in Kisiju ward, specifically at Kerekese and Kisiju Pwani villages within the Mkurunga district council. Questionnaires were utilised for data collection, along with an in-depth interview guide and a narrative to gather information from key informants such as ward leaders and older women with relevant experience. A total of 133 respondents participated in the survey, consisting of 15 males were male and 118 females. A mixed method approach was employed, whereby quantitative data from the questionnaires were analysed and subjected to statistical tests, primarily chi-square ($P \geq 0.05$), while qualitative data were coded, and themes were developed. The study's findings indicate that traditional methods of family planning remain effective as they continue to be used by women in the study area for various purposes including child spacing. Additionally, it was further revealed that the commonly practiced traditional methods encompass withdrawal, tie knot, traditional herbs, tree seeds, sex abstinence, and breastfeeding. Qualitatively, reports suggest that traditional methods are still favoured by women in coastal communities due to their accessibility, and simplicity of use, effectively serving the purpose of child spacing. The findings also no statistical differences regarding gender, education level, religion, and occupation concerning the role of traditional family planning methods in these communities. The use of traditional family planning methods in these communities has historical roots and has persisted despite the introduction of modern family planning methods. Furthermore, findings

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suggest that, traditional family planning methods enable child spacing, being continuously employed by women of childbearing age in light of modern family planning options. The study further recommends exercising caution in the use of traditional family planning methods to minimize potential side effects among users. Additionally, it advises healthcare workers to consider couples' preferences, cultural beliefs, awareness, and the cultural context when selecting traditional family planning methods.

Introduction

In Africa, traditional methods of contraception continue to play a significant role in preventing unwanted pregnancies, despite the introduction and popularity of modern contraceptives. There are common techniques and practices in African indigenous contraception and reasons for their usage. Essentially, there are two major methods of family planning: traditional and modern methods. Among the common techniques are periodic abstinence, lactational amenorrhea, withdrawal, the use of herbs, waistbands, calendar methods, the cervical mucus method, and indigenous emergency contraception (Molelekwa et al., 2020). Others include rituals and the use of traditional medicine and herbs. Birth control methods have significantly impacted reproductive health and effective family planning for women in their reproductive years. In this context, Pazol et al. (2015) found that having access to accurate information about various birth control methods is crucial for women to make well-informed decisions about their reproductive health. Similarly, Bardaweel et al. (2015) emphasised that positive attitudes towards chosen contraception enable its successful utilisation. Health, social, and economic benefits are among the advantages of family planning for women, their families, and the nation at large (Foreman & Spieler, 2013). Additionally, family planning contributes to reduced malnutrition and improved child survival and maternal health status (Kitula, 2017).

The Tanzania Demographic and Health Survey (2022) reported that the need for family planning has been unmet by 15% among married women aged 15 to 49 years. It was further established that the relationship between the high prevalence of contraceptives and unintended pregnancies is complex. Unintended pregnancy among women of reproductive age has been rising despite the increased prevalence of contraceptives (Izugbara et al., 2018). Notably, Tanzania and Uganda have reported the lowest contraceptive rates in Sub-Saharan countries (Izugbara et al., 2018). Additionally, Liddell (2023) studied indigenous communities in another region and shed light on the impact of cultural beliefs and limited access to reproductive health services on contraceptive use. In this study, family planning is defined as initiatives taken by a couple to limit the number of children they wish to have through the use of contraceptive methods. This way of living is voluntarily adopted based on knowledge, attitude, and responsible decision-making to minimise the number, timing, and spacing of children (Aliyuu et al., 2015). This lifestyle further promotes the health and welfare of family members and contributes to the advancement of society. Despite the fact that modern contraceptive methods are mostly accepted by female students, unmarried women, and women in unstable marriages (Sedekia et al., 2017), some methods, such as intrauterine devices and implants, are regarded as inappropriate (Sedekia et al., 2017). This has resulted in the use of traditional methods as the preferred family planning technique among



women. This study assessed the role of traditional methods of family planning within the household to specify the communities.

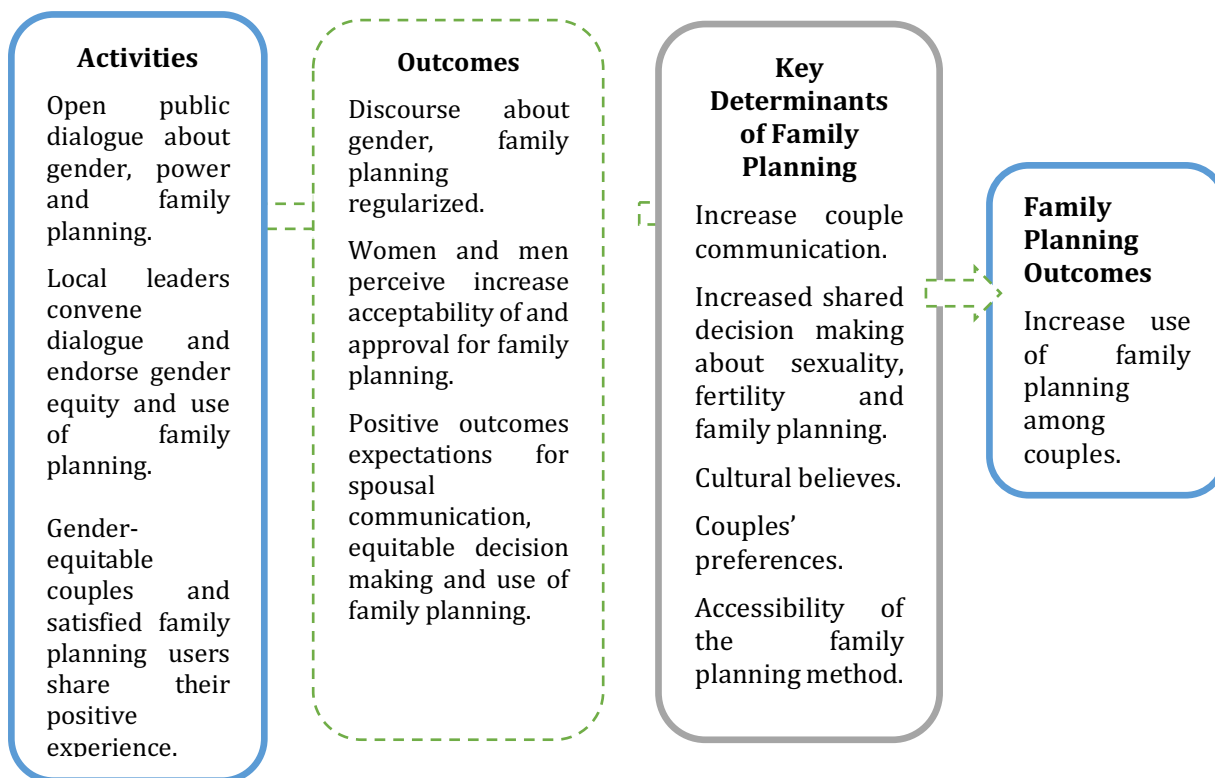
In medical history, it has been indicated that our ancestors spaced their children using traditional means, and family planning methods were handed down from generation to generation (Malarcher et al., 2016). In developing countries such as Tanzania, children are valued not only for proving the masculinity of men but also for providing additional benefits in communities where agriculture is the major source of income. Additionally, in family relations, older parents and extended family rely heavily on their children for protection in old age, leading to a reluctance to limit childbirth. Encouraging the use of modern family planning, with the assurance of access to preferred contraceptive methods for women and couples, is crucial for securing the well-being and autonomy of women, ultimately supporting the health and development of communities. Among the benefits of child spacing are preventing pregnancy-related health risks in women, reducing infant mortality, empowering women, and decreasing the need for unsafe abortions.

Traditional methods of family planning have been used for quite some time for child spacing before the use of modern contraceptive methods. Despite the introduction of modern methods, some women prefer and still use traditional methods of family planning. Women's contraceptive choices and practices are key elements of the quality use of contraceptive methods. Although numerous studies have been conducted on various family planning methods, there is little knowledge regarding the assessment of the role of traditional family planning methods within households in coastal communities. Specifically, the study focuses on the effectiveness of traditional family planning approaches, the commonly used traditional methods of family planning, and the relationship between child spacing and traditional family planning methods within the target population.

Conceptual framework

In comprehending the role of traditional methods of family planning in coastal communities, the conceptual framework has been used to inform the study. Therefore, the traditional method of family planning is the independent variable as it changes based on the dependent variables such as various activities at the local level, decisions at the family level, and its multiplier effects eventually implicate the increased use of family planning, whether through traditional methods or modern methods. Figure 1 provides a detailed description.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework used in the study



Source: Researcher, 2025

Methodology

Study Design

The study employed a mixed approach, utilising qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. The qualitative design aims to understand people’s interpretations, attitudes, feelings, and opinions regarding the role of traditional family planning methods in coastal communities (Cheung *et al.*, 2016). Additionally, a qualitative research approach was used to gather detailed data by interacting with key informants and experienced individuals to capture their views, feelings, and perceptions of the study objectives. In-depth interviews and narratives were conducted to gather qualitative data pertinent to the study objectives. Meanwhile, the quantitative approach was applied to analyse and present the data collected in this study, including sample size and sampling procedure. The quantitative design further enables the researcher to evaluate the role of traditional family planning methods. Questionnaires facilitated data collection, with variables including the effectiveness of traditional methods of family planning, commonly used traditional methods, the relationship between traditional methods of family planning and child spacing, reasons for the continued use of traditional methods, and the demographic characteristics of respondents.



Study Area

The study was conducted in Kisijupwani and Kerekese villages within Kisiju ward in the Mkurunga district council. Kisiju ward has six villages; however, two of them are located along the coast, namely Kerekese and Kisiju Pwani. Therefore, this study focused on these two villages, Kerekese and Kisiju Pwani. The villages were selected because they are located along the coast and are homogenous by nature, exhibiting typical features of coastal communities in Tanzania (Mkurunga District Council Profile, 2018).

Study population

In this study, households were the unit of analysis because traditional family planning methods are utilised within the households by their respective families. Essentially, both men and women participated in this study through their households. A total of 133 households were surveyed. Among these, 118 women were identified in the households during the survey, while 15 men were also present. More female respondents were observed in the households during the survey due to the nature of the coastal communities, where men engaged in breadwinning activities while women remained in the household to handle domestic chores.

Sampling and Sample size

Stratified sampling was employed to select study participants in a quantitative approach to capture respondents’ experiences regarding the effectiveness of traditional family planning methods, the commonly used traditional methods of family planning, and the relationship between child spacing and the traditional methods used within the household. Meanwhile, purposive sampling was utilised to select participants under the qualitative approach who were knowledgeable about the topic under study. The sampling process involved three main procedures. First, the sample was specifically chosen by selecting the ward located along the ocean. Kisiju ward was purposefully selected; it contains six villages, two of which, Kisiju Pwani and Kesereke, are situated along the ocean. Secondly, the selection of villages involved choosing two of them within Kisiju ward that are located along the ocean. After selecting the study ward and villages, the next step was to identify the specific number of households to be surveyed and interviewed. The total number of households from the two selected villages was 1183, which included 913 households from Kisiju Pwani village and 270 households from Kesereke village (Census, 2022). The statistical analysis requirements approach was utilized, incorporating the sample size calculation formula developed by Cohen (2014) to determine the sample size as follows:

S = X²

$$\frac{NP(1-P)}{d^2(N-1)+X^2P(1-P)} \dots\dots\dots \text{Equation 1}$$

- Where X= Z -score (1.96 for confidence level)
- P = population portion (50% for maximum sample)
- d = degree of accuracy (0.05 for 95% confidence level)
- N = population size (1183)

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 \times 0.5(1 - 0.5)}{0.05^2}$$



$$\frac{1 + (1.96)^2 \times 0.5(1-0.5)}{(0.52) (1183)}$$

$$\frac{3.8416 \times 0.25}{0.0025}$$

$$1 + \frac{3.816 \times 0.25}{363}$$

$$\frac{0.9604}{0.0025}$$

$$1 + 0.954$$

$$384.16$$

$$1.954$$

$$n = 196.6$$

Total number of households surveyed to be as per formula developed by Cohan (2014) was 196 households, in that 45 from Kerekese village and 151 households from Kisijupwani villages.

Sample from Kerekese village

$$\text{Households number (270)} = \frac{270}{1183} \times 196 = 45$$

Sample from Kisijupwani village

$$\text{Household number (913)} = \frac{913}{1183} \times 196 = 151$$

The researcher managed to interview 133 households due to geographical location constraints, along with limited time and financial resources. However, this number represented more than 50% of the sample size, making it representative (Rwegoshora, 2016).

Data collection

In the quantitative study approach, data were collected through questionnaires. Questionnaires were employed for data collection. The questionnaire gathered information on the effectiveness of traditional methods of family planning, the commonly used traditional methods, the relationship between traditional methods of family planning and child spacing, the reasons why traditional methods of family planning are still used, and the demographic characteristics of the respondents. In contrast, the qualitative approach utilised in-depth interviews and narratives to obtain qualitative data related to the study objectives. Essentially, qualitative data aims to acquire detailed insights by interacting with key informants and experienced individuals in the study area to gather their views, feelings, and perceptions concerning the study objectives. Moreover, employing various data collection methods in this study helped to mitigate the individual limitations of specific methods while maximising their benefits. Data-source triangulation in this study involved



collecting data from multiple sources or utilising a diverse range of participants. This means that data were obtained not only from questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and narratives but also through a documentary review, which served as an additional data source.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were obtained through questionnaires. A total of 133 questionnaires were collected from the survey. These questionnaires were further coded and summarised, then fed into the computer using SPSS software. A chi-square test was conducted to establish the significance level in the differences attributed to the resulting responses, while data from the qualitative approach from in-depth interviews and narratives were coded into themes in accordance with the specific objectives of the study. Eventually, findings from the quantitative approach were presented using frequency tables, pie charts, and histograms, while narratives were used to present the qualitative data.

Ethical consideration

In this study, the researcher adhered to all procedures for obtaining a research permit prior to the execution of the study. During the study, each participant was asked for their consent to participate. This was done intentionally to ensure that the study adheres to proper research standards, allowing only those willing to participate in the data collection process. The researcher further explained to participants that the present study was conducted for academic purposes and that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without fear of reprisal. Participants were also assured that their names would not appear in the study report.

Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents

The socio-demographic characteristics of respondents included descriptions of their gender, age, education, occupation, marital status, and religion. Table 1 showed that the total number of cases was 133. These comprised 15 (11.3%) male respondents and 118 (88.7%) female respondents. There were more female respondents than male, indicating that more females were found in various households during the survey. It was further revealed that the respondents interviewed were primarily in the 25-32 age group compared to the remaining four age groups. These age groups represented different categories of respondents within the study, with variations in their understanding of traditional family planning methods. Education was another aspect, as study findings revealed that 10 (8%) male and 95 (81%) female respondents had a primary level of education, while 2 (13%) male and 18 (15.2%) female respondents did not attend school.

This indicates that more male and female respondents primarily completed their education at the primary level. Others attained secondary and university levels, with 3 (20%) male and 4 (3.4%) female respondents at the secondary level, and 0 (0%) male and 1 (0.8%) female respondents at the university level, respectively. In terms of occupation, 12 (80%) male and 92 (78%) female respondents were small business owners, while 3 (20%) male and 25 (21.2%) female respondents were unemployed. This demonstrates the homogeneous nature of the respondents interviewed in the study area. Regarding religion, 1 (6.7%) male and 4 (3%) female respondents identified as Christians, while 14 (93.3%) male and 114 (97%) female respondents were Muslims. Findings from the study further revealed that, concerning marital status, 11 (73%) male and 74 (63%) female respondents were married, while 4 (27%) male and 35 (30%) female respondents were single. Moreover, 0 (0%) male and 9 (7%) female respondents were widows. There was no significant difference between gender, age group, education, occupation, marital status, and religion concerning the role of traditional methods of family planning in coastal communities. Table 1



below provides a detailed description of the demographic characteristics of respondents within the study area.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Sn	Characteristics of Respondents	Gender		Chi-square P-value
		Male(n)	Female(n)	
1.	Age of Respondents			.109
	18 - 25	1(7%)	21(18%)	
	25 - 32	5(33%)	37(31%)	
	32 - 39	1(7%)	15(13%)	
	39 - 46	3(20%)	15(13%)	
	46 and above	5(33%)	30(25%)	
	Total	15(100%)	118(100%)	
2.	Education level			.087
	Primary	10(67%)	95(81%)	
	Secondary	3(20%)	4(3%)	
	University	0(0%)	10(0.8%)	
	Did not go to school	2(13)	18(15.2%)	
	Total	15(100%)	118(100%)	
3.	Occupation			.406
	Small business doers	11	92(78%)	
	Not employed	4	25(21.2%)	
	Formal employment	0	1(0.8%)	
	Total	15(100%)	118(100%)	
4.	Religion			.456
	Christian	1(7%)	4(3.4%)	
	Muslim	14(93%)	114(96.6%)	
	Total	15(100%)	118(100%)	
5.	Marital status			.662
	Married	11(73%)	74(63%)	
	Single	4(27%)	35(30%)	
	Widow	0(0%)	9(7%)	
	Total	15(100%)	118(100%)	

Source: Field Data, Kisiju ward, December 2024

Effectiveness of traditional methods of family planning

In comprehending the first objective of the study, it was crucial to establish the effectiveness of traditional methods of family planning within households. Findings revealed that 10 (67%) male and 70 (59%) female respondents stated that the usage of traditional family planning methods was effective in the household, while 5 (33%) male and 48 (41%) female reported that the usage of traditional family planning methods was not effective. Similarly, Rabiou and Rufa (2018) noted in their study that the usage of traditional methods of family planning, such as self-restraint, spiritual invocations, devices, spells, concoctions/herbs, and other forms of human behavior, has been used to determine when to give birth and the number of children an individual or couple should have. These traditional methods persist today, and with proper usage, their effectiveness is well observed by couples. Rabiou and Rufa (2018) further stated that traditional methods eventually play a role in delaying pregnancies, preventing unwanted pregnancies, ensuring birth spacing, and leading to a smaller number of children per woman in Nigeria. Additionally, Edeh and Egwim (2019) stated in their study that the effectiveness of traditional family planning is observed in its ability to control fertility and limit the number of children within the household. For them, the usage of traditional family planning methods requires no medical attention, has no side effects, is easily understood by

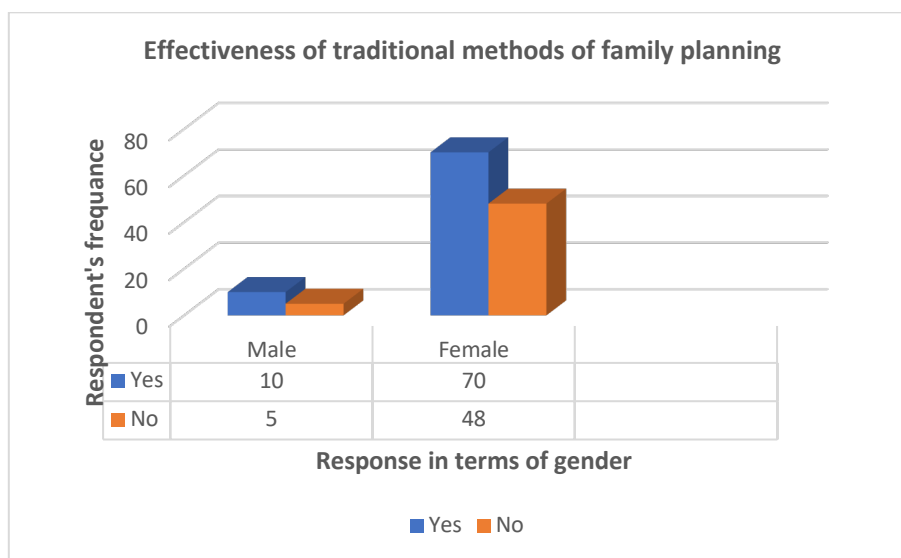


the user, is culturally grounded and traditionally acceptable, and is highly accepted by most religious groups. It is also more accessible when compared to modern family planning methods. Figure 2 provides a more detailed description of the effectiveness of traditional methods of family planning within the study area. Contrary to the findings in this study, Gumussoy (2019) reported that it was difficult to accurately estimate the rate of effectiveness of natural family planning methods, meaning the effectiveness of these family planning methods depends on the consistency and motivation of couples using them. Thus, couples should be able to correctly identify the fertility period and use a barrier method or avoid sexual intercourse during fertile days. The commonly used traditional methods of family planning range from abstaining from intercourse to using spermicide on fertile days, while correct usage involves avoiding sexual intercourse or using condoms on fertile days. The findings of the study further reported that traditional family planning methods were favored in the study area because they were easily accessible, with 7 (47%) male and 95 (81%) female respondents indicating this; cheap, with 9 (50%) male and 75 (64%) respondents; easy to use with minimal side effects, as noted by 67 (62%) male and 97 (82%) female; and based on cultural beliefs and practices, noted by 8 (53%) male and 99 (84%) female. Information concerning traditional family planning methods was obtained from close relatives by 6 (40%) male and 78 (66%) female respondents, available older women in the study area, noted by 10 (67%) male and 100 (85%) female respondents, herbalists, as reported by 12 (80%) male and 95 (81%) female, and communication between couples, indicated by 7 (47%) male and 62 (53%) female. Witt et al. (2013) pointed out in their study that traditional methods of family planning were still used because they serve the purpose of child spacing, are easy to use, and are accessible at a low price, especially in rural settings. It was further argued that cultural beliefs, context, and side effects are also determining factors for couples to choose the respective traditional method to be used.

Similarly, in the in-depth interview with a local midwife (mkunga), the following views:

Polygamy also plays a fundamental role in family planning since it was among the traditional methods of family planning. In coastal areas, polygamy was usual and still plays a fundamental role by ensuring universal marriage for women, hence controls family planning as it allows a long period of abstinence from sexual relations for women who give birth, while reproduction continued among other co-wives. Eventually, polygamy helps in birth spacing and limits the number of children the woman has (In-depth interview with Local midwifery, Kisiju ward, December 2024)

Figure 2: Effectiveness of traditional methods of family planning



Source: Field Data, Kisiju ward, December 2024

Commonly used traditional methods of family planning

The second objective of this study was to establish the commonly used traditional methods of family planning. The study findings revealed that the most commonly used traditional method included withdrawal, reported by 12(80%) males and 47(40%) females, followed by tying the knot by 5(33%) males and 67(57%) females. It was further reported that traditional herbs were among the commonly used traditional methods of family planning in the study area, with 6(40%) males and 50(42%) females utilising them, while tree seeds were reported by 4(27%) males and 80(68%) females. Lastly, it was mentioned that sex abstinence was another traditional method of family planning used by 3(20%) males and 47(50%) females. In their study, Jane *et al.* (2018) categorised traditional methods of family planning into natural, herbology, voodooism, and animal parts. The natural methods of family planning included abstinence, withdrawal (coitus interruptus), prolonged lactation, polygamy, and certain types of foods. The herbology methods included scarification with knives, herbal tea, soup, soap, as well as plants and seeds. Examples of voodooism methods included waist bands, padlocks, arm bands, charms, rings, and spiritual invocations. Additionally, animal parts such as crocodile dung, honey, weasel testicles, and skins were mentioned. On the other hand, Gebreselassie *et al.* (2017) stated that traditional methods of family planning are still used by 6% of the world's women. This includes methods such as periodic abstinence (rhythm or calendar method) and withdrawal (coitus interruptus). For them, country-specific traditional methods of proven effectiveness have been among the practical traditional methods. Figure 3 provides a detailed description of the commonly used traditional methods of family planning.

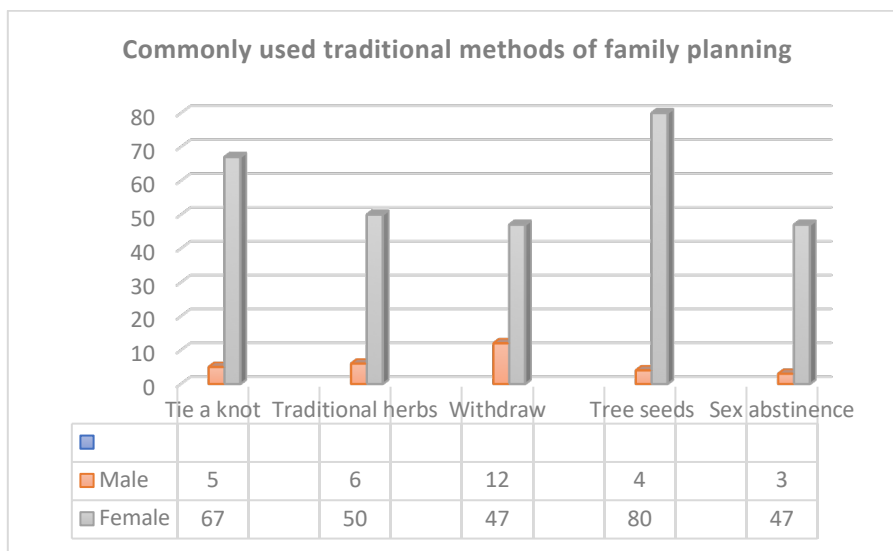
It was further reported by an old woman in her narratives that:

The woman in Kisijupwani village, during the discussion on the common traditional method of family planning mainly used in this area, mentioned that the commonly used traditional methods of family planning in this area include drinking herbal, breastfeeding, withdrawal,



polygamy and abstaining from sex until the child starts walking. However, young women nowadays are so jealous of their husbands that they cannot allow them to marry another woman. Moreover, all the methods mentioned are readily available and cheap, and hence help with child spacing (Narratives, Old woman in Kisiju Pwani, December 2024).

Figure 3: Commonly used traditional methods of family planning



Source: Field Data, Kisiju ward, December 2024

In the third objective, the study focuses on assessing the relationship between the use of traditional methods of family planning and child spacing within households. Findings from the study revealed that 7 (47%) males and 91 (77%) females agreed that the use of traditional methods of family planning enables child spacing within the household, while 8 (53%) males and 27 (23%) females disagreed that traditional methods of family planning relate to child spacing in the household. There was a statistical difference in terms of gender and the relationship between the prevailing traditional methods of family planning and child spacing within households in coastal communities. Marstona & Churchb (2016) were of the view that lactational amenorrhea plays a crucial role in child spacing. In this regard, couples should decide on the methods to be used for family planning. More importantly, lactational amenorrhea is easy to use, inexpensive, and effective. Similarly, the WHO report (2014) on traditional methods of family planning stipulated that traditional methods of family planning are effective when correctly applied and their guidelines are followed. Therefore, healthcare staff should respect couples' choices regarding traditional methods of family planning, as these choices are primarily based on beliefs, preferences, and accessibility. It was further noted by Samuel & in their study that the use of family planning has a multiplicity of health benefits, such as preventing unplanned pregnancies, ensuring child spacing, and reducing maternal and child mortality. Despite the advancements in science and technology that accompanied the establishment of the family planning unit across the state, women of childbearing age still cling to traditional family planning. Figure 4 provides a detailed

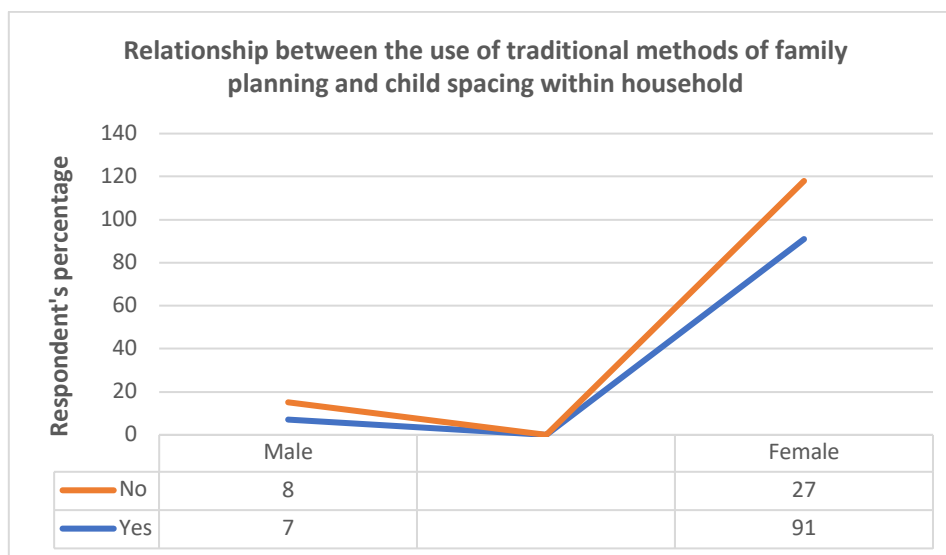


description of the relationship between the use of traditional methods of family planning and child spacing within the household.

It has been further explained by the herbalist in the study area in his narratives:

He had the view that women in the area use traditional methods of family planning with caution, as they are scared of being affected by them, especially when the herbalist passed away. It was mostly used by women in previous years, but now they use it carefully. Despite the usage with caution, traditional family planning methods serve the purpose of child spacing. In coastal areas, traditional family planning methods still prevail since women hesitate to use modern methods of family planning because of their side effects (Herbalist, Kereseke village, December 2024).

Figure 4: The relationship between the use of traditional methods of family planning and child spacing within household



Source: Field Data, Kisiju ward, December 2024

Conclusion

This study aimed to provide an understanding of the assessment of the role of traditional methods of family planning. Specifically, the study focused on the effectiveness of these traditional methods, the commonly used techniques, and the relationship between child spacing and traditional family planning methods within households in coastal communities. The research was conducted in Kisiju ward, specifically in the Kerekese and Kisiju Pwani villages within the Mkurunga district council. Findings from the study revealed that traditional methods of family planning were effective, as they are still used by women in the study area and serve various purposes, such as child spacing. It was further revealed that the commonly used traditional methods included withdrawal by females, tying knots, traditional herbs, tree seeds, sexual abstinence, and breastfeeding. The findings further indicated that traditional methods of family planning facilitate child spacing, as they have been continuously utilised by women of childbearing age, despite the introduction of modern methods. More importantly, traditional methods of family planning are easily accessible,



inexpensive, and simple to use, thus effectively serving the purpose of child spacing. The study further recommends that the use of traditional methods of family planning should be approached with proper caution and care to minimise side effects among users. Furthermore, the study recommends that healthcare workers consider couples' preferences, cultural beliefs, and awareness regarding the chosen family planning methods.

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