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## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Dynamics of contraceptive use: A study of King Saud University women staff, Riyadh

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## KEYWORDS

Fertility;  
 Birth spacing;  
 Birth control;  
 Associates;  
 Determinants;  
 Predictive variables

**Abstract** *Background:* Contraception, a little researched topic in the Saudi Arabian context, receives attention in the demographic transition for its implications on population policy. The population of Saudi Arabia appears homogeneous but shows differences across social and economic groups. An important component of demography – contraception is been hypothesized in Saudi Arabia, as a determinant of fertility, along with other factors such as age at first marriage, women’s educational attainment, husband’s education, child deaths, women’s work force participation, place of residence, type of family, preference for sons, level of living, and administrative area of residence. This hypothesis has significance due to the fertility differentials depending upon marital relations, female literacy, modernization and migration. This study intends to capture the attention of academicians and social reformers in line with building “happy families”. The specific objectives of the study were to assess the associates and determinants of contraceptive use and to ascertain the importance of factors promoting contraceptive use. *Methods:* Here the contraceptive use of a unique group of ever-married women employees of King Saud University Riyadh was examined in 2015, with an aim to assessing its associates and determinants. The sample of 354 women was drawn by a simple random sampling method tested with a self-administered questionnaire. Analyses were primarily means of age at first marriage, age of husband at marriage, age gap between spouses, years lived with husband, and number of children; association of demographic, geographic, social, and economic variables; and determinants. *Results:* Demographic variables of age, number of marriages, age of husband at first marriage, and continuing with first marriage; geographic variable of place grown up; social variables of type of family and type of job; and economic variable of income are significant associates of contraceptive use. Meanwhile, age, continuing with first marriage, age at first marriage, number of children, and home ownership are significant predictors. *Conclusions and recommendations:* Manipulation of these indicators or characteristics of women

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facilitate the demographic scenario desired by the Kingdom or conceptualized in the population policy.

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## 1. Introduction

Contraceptive use has been researched in the Saudi Arabian context mainly for its effectiveness. No evidence of an effective usage in terms of couple protection was revealed; this finding was attributed to shyness about reporting, its use for spacing births or use of ineffective methods (1). However, it still proved to be of value as contraceptive users have lowered levels of fertility (2,3). However, contraception is an important tool not only in reproductive health wishes but also in women's empowerment, leading to achievement of an ideal family size (4); it is supported through local-level research in the Kingdom that has found that contraceptive knowledge is important in achieving the ideal/intended number of children for bringing up a happy family (5). Contraceptive use has been found to be high (74.9%) among Saudi Arabian women: oral and intra-uterine contraceptives are used for birth spacing, and the former is especially popular (6,7). Maternal age, level of education, family size, and breastfeeding are correlates of birth spacing in eastern Saudi Arabia (8). However, contraceptive use intended for birth spacing in Saudi Arabia is found to increase with parity and educational level (9) given the rapid pace of economic growth (10).

The increased use of modern contraceptives observed in Arab countries (11), even though low in the Middle Eastern countries, is restricted to the urban and educated population (12). The prevailing wider acceptance and access to contraception among Arabs are distinctive, especially given the increase in girls' education along with the relaxation of laws restricting women's rights and participation in the wider society; these developments are accompanied by social changes: modernization and urbanization. This influences fertility through delaying marriage (13); women's education and employment encourage delays in marriage and the use of modern contraceptives (14). Arab countries are experiencing a marriage revolution with the age difference between husband and wife, endogamy, consanguinity, polygamy, and marital fragility/dissolution making observed fertility levels close to the ideal family size of two children per couple (3). Such changes are to be assessed in the context of the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of reducing rates of child, infant and maternal mortality (resulting from an increase in institutional deliveries), and increasing immunization rates (15,16).

Contraception has been hypothesized as a determinant of fertility, in Saudi Arabia, along with other factors such as age at first marriage, women's educational attainment, husband's education, child deaths, women's work force participation, place of residence, type of family, preference for sons, level of living, and administrative area of residence (1) in the context of low fertility among women in polygamous marital relations, literate women, and contraceptive users but neither migration nor modern life influences reproduction values. Fertility in Saudi Arabia, and especially in the rapidly modernizing urban areas such as Riyadh, is in tune with the Middle

East and North Africa region's veritable revolutions in marriage and childbearing, especially in the larger countries (13).

The term "dynamics" is broader than determinants or correlates as it covers discussion, decisions, and actions; clarifying issues and identifying motivation leading to concrete goals ensure the completion of the task. The term also refers to the changes in the number or rates referring to populations or behaviors over time. Thus, it is a demographer's approach to address various concerns of population, including birth and death rates and factors that influence demographic change such as population growth, migration, urbanization, density, and age structure. This paper attempts to address contraception within such a broad perspective to explore associates and determinants.

## 2. Objectives

Contraceptive use in Saudi Arabia, especially among the prominent occupational groups, has been a rarely studied topic because of social stigma and the confidentiality of personal information. This study is intended to capture the attention of academicians and social reformers in line with building "happy families," who achieve the intended number of children and avoid unwanted children, by engaging a special group of ever married women working in an academic institution – the university – under the Ministry of Higher Education, Government of Saudi Arabia. The specific objectives of the study are

- To assess the associates and determinants of contraceptive use.
- To ascertain the importance of factors promoting contraceptive use.

## 3. Methodology

This study carried out at King Saud University, the biggest and oldest university in the Kingdom, located in Riyadh, the most populous city, by taking a random sample of ever-married women employed either in academic or in non-academic jobs (Table 1). There were 26,975 staff members in the university, as of 2014, out of which 11,390 were ever married (6481 males and 4909 females). Saudi staff constitutes 59.0% (6676) of the total whereas non-Saudis constitute 41.0% (4714).

In order to ensure a confidence level of 95% with a margin of error of 5% for the 3123 Saudi native ever married women members of the university staff, the desired sample works out as 343 (see <http://www.raosoft.com>). Adopting a simple random sampling method, sampling elements were selected from the women's campus of the King Saud University (under the Ministry of Higher Education, Government of Saudi Arabia), and covering both academics and non-academics. This study

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