

Family Planning & Immunization Integration:

Development of New Guidelines and Resources for Providers in Jharkhand, India

Women in the extended postpartum period (the 12 months following a birth) often do not use family planning, although serious adverse health outcomes are associated with short birth intervals. Integrating family planning with child immunization services is seen as a promising strategy to increase access to and use of postpartum family planning. Utilization of child immunization services is high and the recommended vaccination schedule calls for multiple visits in the first year of life, which provides key opportunities to reach mothers with counseling and services during this critical period.

The National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) in the Indian state of Jharkhand has policies in place which support linking family planning and immunization services as a way to better reach mothers with family planning. Between 2010 and 2011, FHI 360 and CARE India conducted a cross-sectional descriptive study to assess the quality of integrated services provided in Lohardaga district. Results from the assessment revealed that providers and managers lacked formal guidelines for providing integrated services. Also, providers and clients did not have sufficient information about postpartum family planning, and misperceptions about related issues—such as when women’s fertility returns after birth—were common.

From the new Standard Operating Procedures for Family Planning & Immunization Integration:

“The existing technical and programmatic guidelines...recommend the provision of multiple services along the full spectrum of client contact opportunities....The aim of integrated service delivery is to proactively offer family planning and immunization services to women during the full range of maternal and child health services....Integrated service delivery means planning and delivering more than one health service, including family planning and immunization, during any one service contact.”

As part of a follow-on activity designed to address these gaps, FHI 360 in partnership with the Government of Jharkhand, developed new Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to offer health providers—including medical officers, Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) and Sahiyyas—formal guidance on how to link family planning and immunization services effectively and efficiently. Information-Education-Communication (IEC) and Interpersonal Communication (IPC) materials—including interactive games for clients and counseling resources for providers—were also developed and released.

Methods

The development of the SOPs and IEC and IPC materials included an initial review of existing national and state-level guidelines for both family planning and immunization services, as well as evidence on integration. Informational interviews were held with key stakeholders including policymakers, providers, staff from other organizations working in the state, and clients to solicit input on how best to link the two services and to identify what information should be reflected in the new resources. Materials were drafted and then shared with NRHM officials in Jharkhand for feedback and revisions. The SOPs were field tested with medical officers, ANMs and Sahiyyas, and the IEC and IPC materials were field tested in Ranchi District during two Village Health and Nutrition Days (VHNDs). The resources were refined based on the feedback received.

Results

The SOPs and IEC and IPC materials were released in Jharkhand at a dissemination meeting in March 2013. The new resources include:

- **“Standing Operating Procedures: Integrated Family Planning and Immunization Services”**—Topics covered in the SOPs include: the potential benefits of integration; prerequisites for integration; engagement of key stakeholders; service delivery guidelines for the three different cadres of providers; and specific messages for clients linked to the recommended schedule of visits. The SOPs also identify service delivery points for integration (i.e. health centers, VHNDs and home visits). They outline counseling messages for women, their husbands, mothers-in-law, and other potential decision-makers.
- **Pocket diary for providers**—This easy-to-carry resource for ANMs summarizes key family planning and immunization information and messages tailored for each scheduled health visit.
- **Desk Calendars**—These tabletop calendars provide reminders for Medical Officers to offer integrated services during various healthcare contacts.
- **Leaflet**—This resource for community members contains basic family planning and immunization information including reminders about the recommended schedule of visits. It can help promote communication among women, husbands, and mothers-in-laws, and other decision-makers.
- **Interactive games**—Games are designed to be facilitated by Sahiyyas to engage community members in a dynamic learning process.

Next Steps

At the dissemination and launch meeting, the NRHM described their plans to roll-out and scale up use of these resources in Jharkhand. The SOPs will be incorporated into the NRHM’s regular training curricula for all three frontline providers in Jharkhand, and the IEC and IPC materials will be printed and distributed for regular use by all providers in their routine service delivery. These activities will be reflected in the State’s Program Implementation Plan, including plans to monitor initial dissemination and use of the materials.

From the new SOPs:

“Think of the health needs of the mother when you provide services to her child; think of the health needs of the child when you provide services to its mother.”

