

# **Characterizing Motivational Intensity of Need for Family Planning Among Non-Users in Sub-Saharan Africa**

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## **Background**

Non-users of contraception are diverse in both their needs for family planning and in their intensity of interest in its use. The literature is generally silent on how non-users' motivational intensity differs, but an earlier multi-country analysis (Ross, Stover and Adelaja 2005) found that among non-users, intention to use was more common than unmet need, and overlap between the two groups was surprisingly minimal. In most countries, over 25% of non-users were classified as without unmet need, but nevertheless intended to use a method. These findings suggest that the concept of unmet need may not entirely capture the true picture of potential adopters of family planning. Furthermore, unmet need status may be a less reliable predictor for future use of contraception than motivational intensity.

Westoff (2012) classified women with unmet need by their intention to use a method, but also by whether they had ever used a modern contraceptive method. Two groups emerged, which can be regarded as having high vs. low motivational intensity: 1) women who had used in the past and intended to use in the future, and 2) women who had never used a modern method and did not intend to do so in the future, termed a "hard core" non-user group. Women with unmet need were represented differently across the two African regions: in the East and Southern region 35% were in the high motivation group, vs. only 14% in the West and Central region.

## **Main Question/Hypothesis**

Among non-users of contraception, important subgroups of women vary substantially in their size and in their motivational intensities to use contraception. By focusing on these subgroups and evaluating their demographic characteristics and fertility preferences, we can characterize the consistent indicators of motivational intensity and use this information to guide family planning operational policies and implementation.

## **Methodology**

A team from the USAID-funded Health Policy Project used the most recent DHS surveys from 23 sub-Saharan countries to characterize subgroups based on perceived level of access to

and need for family planning, and motivational intensities to adopt contraception in the future. These surveys, taken between 2003 and 2011, were analyzed using the Stata/SE 12 statistical software package. We restricted the analysis to married/in-union women who were not currently using any method of contraception. Unmet need was constructed using the 2012 revised definition (Bradley et al. 2012). All non-users were placed into eight categories based on yes/no characterizations of intention to use, unmet need, and ever use. The sizes of each group, as well as the socio-demographic and fertility-related characteristics of each group, were analyzed for aggregate and regional patterns within Sub-Saharan Africa. These groups are described by socio-demographic characteristics and fertility behaviors and preferences in Tables 1 and 2. The analysis yielded a new set of measurements of high intensity of need for contraception, including estimations of each group's present and recent size within the 23 countries. These measurements can be applied to other countries and subnational settings as well.

## **Results**

We examined the patterns in the profiles of the eight groups, in combination with their sizes to deepen our understanding of motivational differences and to give a matrix of possible priorities for programmatic action. The groups differ systematically across the features in Tables 1 and 2; a glance at each column shows the wide variations between groups as well as how various indicators of need consistently point to the same subgroups.

Following Westoff, for example, the two groups (2 and 4 in Table 1) with past use who also intend to use in the future can be regarded as having higher motivational intensity, while the two groups (5 and 7) who have never used and do not intend to do so are a “hard core” non-user group having lower motivational intensity. In East and Southern Africa (ESA) 37.4% of non-users are in the high group vs. only 19.6% in West and Central Africa (WCA). The findings for the low group are reversed: 19.5% vs. 39.7% in the two regions, respectively.

Most non-users in ESA intend to use. Across ESA countries, an average of 68.4% reported intent to use, (ranging from 48.6% to 84.8%). In WCA on average, a smaller but substantial group of 41.8% reported intent to use (ranging from 24.7% to 68.2%). However, in both ESA and WCA, among those who intend to use, women with unmet need and women with no need are roughly equally represented. This illustrates a key point that the unmet need measure

is inadequate by itself for understanding use dynamics and likelihood of future uptake, or for informing program planning.

**Table 1. Socio Demographic Profiles of Eight Groups According to Intention, Need and Use**

			Group Number	% of Non-Users	Age (Median)	% Urban	% No Education	% In Poorest Quintile
Intend to Use	Unmet Need	Never Use	1	12.4%	27.8	21.6%	42.5%	26.3%
		Ever Use	2	14.3%	29.5	34.5%	31.4%	14.7%
	No Need	Never Use	3	14.9%	25.3	20.7%	43.4%	26.1%
		Ever Use	4	13.9%	27.6	36.5%	31.2%	13.8%
Do Not Intend to Use	Unmet Need	Never Use	5	10.6%	31.3	20.7%	53.6%	28.5%
		Ever Use	6	6.5%	37.1	37.4%	36.3%	14.8%
	No Need	Never Use	7	19.0%	26.8	17.4%	56.5%	33.6%
		Ever Use	8	8.3%	29.5	35.7%	36.0%	15.2%

**Table 2. Fertility Behavior and Preference of Eight Groups According to Intention, Need and Use**

			Group Number	Children Ever Born	Ideal Number of Children	% Within 12 Months of Birth	% Reported Last Birth Unwanted	% Unmet Need for Spacing	% Reported Contact With FP Worker in Last 12 months	% Reported Previous Termination
Intend to Use	Unmet Need	Never Use	1	3.7	5.1	43.0%	14.1%	69.5%	22.6%	13.2%
		Ever Use	2	3.7	4.7	28.7%	15.0%	62.7%	28.8%	18.8%
	No Need	Never Use	3	2.2	5.2	44.2%	1.3%	N/A	20.0%	14.5%
		Ever Use	4	2.5	4.9	26.9%	1.4%	N/A	28.7%	20.1%
Do Not Intend to Use	Unmet Need	Never Use	5	4.3	6.2	30.4%	12.9%	63.3%	16.1%	13.9%
		Ever Use	6	4.8	5.3	11.7%	16.5%	40.9%	17.6%	21.7%
	No Need	Never Use	7	2.7	6.7	33.2%	0.8%	N/A	12.1%	14.3%
		Ever Use	8	2.6	5.3	17.5%	2.0%	N/A	18.6%	23.9%

## **Conclusion**

Not all women have similar unmet need for contraception, and some women currently classified with “no need” may be highly motivated potential users, wishing to use a method soon. Program interventions should be tailored to fit the diversity of non-using women. This paper characterizes groups of non-users along multiple lines, including relative sizes and likely interest levels. Women with higher motivational intensity should be prioritized in program strategies, and a closer analysis of group sizes can help guide levels of investment in outreach, communication, and service delivery.

The DHS measure of “unmet need” has proven problematic by omitting “spacers” (women who want to space their births), for example those who want a birth within two years but who also intend to use a contraceptive method before then. In addition, many women categorized as having unmet need do not intend to ever use a method. Nevertheless, the concept of “unmet need” is deeply imbedded in the family planning community and in the literature. The intention and motivation measures discussed in this report can help program managers determine the magnitude of the interested/in-need population and its significant subgroups, and form the basis of investments by both donors and governments. For countries where use of contraception remains persistently low, these results will offer family planning program managers and funders valuable information about the women for whom outreach and services are most critically needed in order to meet their fertility preferences.

## **Works Cited**

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