


THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY PLANNING IN PRIMARY HEALTH CARE <https://doi.org/10.56238/sevened2024.037-167>

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ABSTRACT

Family planning is a fundamental strategy in primary health care (PHC), being essential for the promotion of sexual and reproductive health, the reduction of maternal and infant mortality rates, and the strengthening of gender equity. This integrative review aimed to analyze the scientific evidence on the importance of family planning in PHC, identifying its benefits and challenges. Twenty studies published between 2010 and 2023 were reviewed, and eight studies were selected in the PubMed, Scopus, and SciELO databases, using descriptors related to the theme. The results showed that the offer of diversified contraceptive methods, associated with sex education and qualified counseling, contributes significantly to the reduction of unplanned pregnancies and complications related to maternal and child health. In addition, these actions favor female empowerment and expand access to educational and professional opportunities. However, obstacles persist, such as scarcity of resources, lack of training of health teams, regional inequalities in access to services, and cultural and religious barriers that hinder adherence to

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contraceptive methods. Continuous training of health professionals, the strengthening of public policies, and the development of culturally sensitive strategies are essential measures to improve the effectiveness of family planning actions. It was concluded that the effective integration of family planning in PHC is essential to ensure informed reproductive choices, reduce social inequalities and improve the quality of life of populations, and it is necessary to carry out future studies that evaluate intervention models and public policies in different regional contexts.

Keywords: Family planning. Primary health care. Reproductive health. Unplanned pregnancies. Gender equity.



INTRODUCTION

Family planning is an essential component in primary health care, playing a key role in promoting sexual and reproductive health, reducing maternal and infant mortality rates, and strengthening the autonomy of individuals and families in decision-making about reproduction. This practice involves access to effective contraception, sexual and reproductive health education, and psychological support, allowing people to plan whether they want to have children, when, and how many they want to have. In addition, family planning contributes to the prevention of unplanned pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), directly impacting quality of life and social well-being.

The effective implementation of family planning is aligned with the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 3, which aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, and SDG 5, which seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Through public policies and health programs aimed at offering family planning services, it is possible to reduce social inequalities, promote gender equality, and ensure better health conditions for the population.

In primary care, family planning plays a strategic role, being the main gateway to the provision of accessible and quality health services. The availability of various contraceptive methods, individualized counseling, and health education are essential to prevent unplanned pregnancies, reduce the risks associated with early pregnancy, and minimize complications resulting from STIs. However, despite their relevance, several challenges still compromise the effectiveness of these services, such as inequalities in access, low training of health professionals, cultural barriers, misinformation, and social stigmas related to the use of contraceptive methods. These obstacles make it difficult for the population to adhere to family planning practices, especially in vulnerable communities.

The relevance of this study lies in the need to understand and highlight the importance of family planning as an essential component of primary health care. Although the benefits of this practice for public health are widely recognized, significant challenges persist in its implementation, especially in contexts of social and economic vulnerability. The lack of investment in sex education, the lack of equitable access to contraceptive methods, and cultural and religious barriers become obstacles to the effectiveness of family planning policies, compromising the reproductive health and well-being of the population.

Given this scenario, it is essential to gather and analyze the available scientific evidence to understand the positive impacts of family planning on public health and to identify the main difficulties faced in its implementation. This analysis will make it possible to

subsidize strategic actions and more effective public policies, promoting universal access to reproductive health services and contributing to the reduction of health inequalities. Thus, this study seeks to offer a solid knowledge base for health professionals, managers, and public policy makers, emphasizing the importance of strengthening family planning as an indispensable strategy for the promotion of integral health and social development.

The present study aimed to review in an integrative manner the scientific evidence on the importance of family planning in primary health care, highlighting the positive impacts of this practice on the health of the population and the main limitations observed in its implementation.

METHODOLOGY

This study consists of an integrative literature review with the objective of systematically gathering and analyzing the available evidence on the importance of family planning in primary health care. To ensure the quality and transparency of the process, the guidelines of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) were followed, which guide the selection, analysis, and presentation of scientific studies. The search for articles was carried out in the PubMed, Scopus and SciELO databases, recognized for the relevance and scope of publications in the areas of health and biomedical sciences. The survey covered publications from January 2013 to December 2023, considering the evolution of family planning practices and policies in the last ten years.

The following descriptors were used, combined with Boolean operators (AND and OR) to optimize the search: "family planning", "primary health care", "public health", "reproductive health services" and "contraceptive methods". The combination of these terms allowed the identification of studies that addressed family planning in a broad way, including aspects related to the provision of services, access, barriers, and impacts on public health.

Original studies (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed) and systematic reviews published between 2013 and 2023, in Portuguese, English, or Spanish, that directly addressed the benefits, challenges, or implementation strategies of family planning in the context of primary health care were included. Studies exploring the relationship between family planning and the promotion of sexual and reproductive health, the reduction of maternal and child mortality, or access to contraceptive methods were also considered. Studies that dealt exclusively with public policies unrelated to primary care, studies focused on family planning in hospital contexts or specialized outside primary care, opinion articles, editorials,

abstracts of scientific events, unpublished dissertations, and duplicate studies among the databases consulted were excluded.

Twenty studies published between 2010 and 2023 were reviewed, and eight studies were selected. The selection of studies occurred in three stages. In the first, the initial screening was performed by reading titles and abstracts to exclude studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria. Then, the selected articles were read completely to confirm eligibility. Finally, the included studies were analyzed in terms of objectives, methodology, main results and conclusions. The extracted information was organized in a descriptive way to facilitate the comparison and interpretation of the data.

The data collected were analyzed qualitatively and descriptively, allowing the identification of patterns, benefits, challenges, and gaps related to family planning in primary health care. This approach made it possible to broadly understand the positive impact of this practice on public health, as well as the difficulties faced in its implementation, providing subsidies for the formulation of public policies and more effective professional practices in promoting reproductive health and strengthening primary care.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of the eight included studies showed the relevance of family planning as a strategic pillar in primary health care (PHC). In developing countries, the supply of contraceptive methods in PHC has resulted in a 30% to 40% reduction in unplanned pregnancy rates (Silva et al., 2021). In Brazil, family planning assistance within the scope of PHC represents a set of essential actions to guarantee the right to reproductive health of users of the Unified Health System (SUS). However, several obstacles hinder the full implementation of these services. A study carried out in Fortaleza (CE) pointed out that the population's lack of knowledge about family planning is related to the scarcity of care, the lack of reception by health professionals, the inefficiency of public policies, and the population's lack of interest (Rocha et al., 2021).

In addition, sex education, combined with easy access to family planning services, has a direct impact on the reduction of maternal and infant mortality, especially in regions of greater socioeconomic vulnerability (Oliveira et al., 2022). In Brazil, the expansion of access to contraceptive methods and the qualification of health teams have contributed to the improvement of these indicators (Brasil, 2013).

The role of PHC professionals is central, especially in individualized counseling and continuous monitoring of families. Well-trained health teams promote greater adherence to the use of contraceptive methods and strengthen patient confidence (Fernandes et al.,

2023). However, the scarcity of resources, such as the unavailability of contraceptive supplies and inadequate infrastructure, is a recurrent limitation in low-income regions (Pereira et al., 2020). A study published in the journal *Ciência & Saúde Coletiva* highlights that family planning care continues to be marked by the lack of contraceptive methods in public services and the insufficient training of health professionals (Pinto et al., 2018).

Another relevant point is the need to overcome cultural and religious barriers that still interfere with the acceptance of family planning services in some communities. Strategies such as awareness campaigns and the involvement of local leaders have been shown to be effective in increasing adherence and decreasing resistance to modern contraceptive methods (Rodríguez et al., 2021). In the Brazilian context, studies indicate that the perception of the effectiveness of family planning in promoting gender equality and women's autonomy is still limited, requiring educational actions and the confrontation of cultural barriers (Coutinho et al., 2019).

Despite the challenges, family planning integrated with PHC plays a key role in promoting gender equity, allowing women to have greater control over their reproductive choices and, consequently, more educational and work opportunities (González et al., 2023). According to the Ministry of Health, expanding women's and men's access to information and contraceptive methods is essential to ensure the exercise of reproductive rights in Brazil (Brasil, 2013). To this end, it is necessary to maintain the supply of contraceptive methods in the public network and to train health professionals to adequately guide contraceptive choices throughout life (Pinto et al., 2018).

In summary, the results analyzed reinforce the importance of family planning in PHC as a fundamental strategy for promoting reproductive health, reducing maternal and child mortality, and strengthening gender equity. However, challenges such as the unavailability of contraceptive methods, the lack of training of health professionals, and cultural barriers still need to be overcome to ensure the effectiveness of these actions in the Brazilian context.

CONCLUSION

Family planning in primary health care (PHC) has undeniable benefits for the health of the population, contributing to the reduction of maternal and infant mortality rates, the control of unplanned pregnancies, and the promotion of gender equality. These actions are essential to guarantee the right to reproductive health and improve the quality of life of individuals and families. However, several challenges still compromise the effectiveness of these services, such as the scarcity of financial and human resources, inequality in access

to health services, and the persistence of cultural and religious barriers that hinder adherence to contraceptive methods.

Among the limitations of this study, the temporal and geographic restriction of the publications analyzed stands out, focusing on studies published between 2013 and 2023 and, for the most part, focusing on the Brazilian context. This delimitation may have limited the identification of successful international experiences or new approaches implemented in other regions. In addition, the predominance of qualitative studies and the scarcity of robust quantitative data make it difficult to generalize the results, compromising a more comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of family planning policies in PHC.

Another limiting factor was the absence of studies that longitudinally evaluate the impact of family planning actions over time, making it difficult to analyze sustainable results and understand how changes in public policies affect reproductive health.

To maximize the benefits of family planning, it is crucial to invest in the continuous training of health teams, ensuring adequate training on contraceptive methods and counseling sensitive to the cultural specificities of the communities served. It is also necessary to expand access to contraceptive supplies, ensure the availability of adequate infrastructure, and promote educational campaigns that involve local leaders to reduce cultural resistance.

Future research should explore successful intervention models in different regional and international contexts, with a focus on implementing innovative and sustainable strategies. Longitudinal studies and broader quantitative analyses are also needed to assess the long-term impact of family planning policies on primary care. In addition, it is essential to investigate how socioeconomic, cultural, and political changes influence adherence to family planning services, allowing adjustments in public policies to ensure their effectiveness and sustainability.

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