

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. DATA COLLECTION AND DATA QUALITY

The Expert Group repeatedly expressed concern for the deficiencies in the supply and quality of data required for evaluation of the impact of family planning programmes on fertility. Vital statistics registration is inadequate for nearly all the developing countries and non-existent for a majority of them. In its view, years of international effort have failed to produce statistics of the quality needed to measure short-term changes in fertility, and researchers must rely mainly upon results of population censuses, which are generally short on fertility data and which, in any case, are taken at intervals too infrequent to meet essential data needs. Moreover, family planning service statistics also are often inadequate for evaluation purposes. Accordingly, the Expert Group made the following recommendations:

1. Governments and international agencies should give the highest priority to improvement of the supply and quality of data required for the few basic measures of fertility needed to assess family planning programme impact;

2. Countries with a good census-taking system but with poor vital statistics systems should give serious consideration to conducting a population census or large-scale demographic survey every five years;

3. Decennial censuses should be followed by post-censal surveys that would allow for more intensive interviewing on a broader range of topics than is feasible in a population census. These post-census fertility surveys should obtain interviews using family planning modules that would incorporate, along with a fertility history, programme policy variables as well as major socio-economic variables. The sample design should facilitate a community stratification system that would allow for analysis of the interaction between individual and community variables;

4. As a supplement to family planning programme statistics, or in lieu of them where they are inadequate, sample surveys at reasonable intervals should be employed to obtain the information on acceptors and other programme variables that is required for evaluation purposes. The scheme for data collection in these surveys should provide for the classification of respondents by their family planning status, i.e., ever-user (of a method from the programme, a method from another source), never-user, current user and so on,¹ and some measure of their fertility;

5. Intensive effort should be made by national programmes and by international agencies to improve the quality of family planning service statistics and to increase the supply of information on acceptor characteristics by geographical areas to facilitate special analytical studies. These service statistics should be published periodically, and the reports should include some estimate as to the quality of the data.

6. While family planning service statistics systems should be made to realize their full potential as sources of useful statistical data, the systems should not be so overloaded as to impede the delivery of the services;

7. The United Nations should use its influence to urge and assist the World Fertility Survey in continuing to give high priority to inclusion of the family planning module in surveys conducted under its auspices where national family planning programmes exist. Further, the United Nations should urge the World Fertility Survey, wherever feasible, to invite its participating Governments to include the community-level data module, so as to facilitate research on relationships between individual behaviour and relevant conditions in the society. In addition, it is of the first order of importance that the World Fertility Survey should be encouraged by United Nations to undertake methodological research on the reliability and validity of data obtained in fertility surveys and that funds from bilateral and multilateral sources be sought for this purpose.

B. IMPROVEMENT OF METHODOLOGY

The Expert Group is of the opinion that although researchers have made much progress in refining the techniques of evaluating the impact of family planning programmes on fertility and in coping with many of the critical methodological issues, there remains, none the less, a need for considerable work in this sphere. To facilitate greater progress, it recommended that:

1. A concerted effort should be made to determine how the validity of different methods of evaluation could be established. Among other things, several methods, including areal regression analysis where feasible, should be applied simultaneously in evaluation as an aid to determining the reliability of the results achieved by each; multiplication of evidence would serve as a basis for greater confidence in the methodology;

2. Although pure control permitting experimental designs in their classical forms may be impossible to establish for family planning evaluation purposes, experimental designs should, none the less, be viewed as

¹ *Assessment of Acceptance and Effectiveness of Family Planning Methods*, p. 7.

an ideal evaluation procedure, and every effort should be made to approximate them. Currently, quasi-control groups serve as a proxy for true control in evaluation studies. Important advances in knowledge of the impact of family planning programmes on fertility would result from such quasi-experimental studies of the relations between family planning programmes and fertility change, where an effort is made to control or randomize other possible determinants; such studies should be provided for in both data collection and evaluation research schemes. However, unless subjects or areas have been randomly assigned to different levels or types of programme input, it would be preferable to designate groups used in analysis as "comparison" rather than as control or experimental groups. In studies of the impact of types or levels of programme impact on fertility change, to the extent possible, areal subgroups should coincide with official administrative (statistical) units;

3. Evaluators should determine and report range of error within which estimates of programme impact lie. Moreover, the estimates themselves should be related in terms of order of magnitude and not as precise numbers, which are less realistic. This requirement applies also to estimates of potential fertility. In addition, high priority should be given in evaluation studies to determining the source and extent of errors;

4. The original formula for estimating couple-years of protection did not allow for a demographically reliable estimate of births averted, a necessary part of the assessment of family planning programme impact. If this method is applied, it should be modified so that when couple-years of protection have been estimated, births averted can be determined;

5. More work should be undertaken in development of analysis of the reproductive process as an approach to determining programme impact on fertility. Accordingly, there should be empirical measurement of its key parameters, and the methodology should be integrated theoretically with the more general issue of measuring fertility change;

6. While simulation is not a method of evaluation of the impact of family planning programmes on fertility, simulation models are a powerful tool for investigating the methodology of various approaches to determining programme impact on fertility; and, for this purpose, greater use should be made of them.

C. FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES AND ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

There has recently been a growing interest among researchers in the importance of the quantity as well as quality of family planning programme input as a variable in fertility change. In light of this interest and owing to the need for national programmes to place greater emphasis upon evaluation, the Expert Group made the following recommendations:

1. The evaluation of the impact of family planning

programmes on fertility should be undertaken by evaluation units and these units should be viewed as complementary to the family planning effort and hence given high priority;

2. Inasmuch as the impact of a family planning programme depends at least in part upon the nature and intensity of the family planning efforts, or inputs, it is necessary to have a valid method for classifying and measuring such efforts. Accordingly, research should be undertaken to classify and measure the types and intensity of family planning efforts, including specifically studies of the feasibility of utilizing some measure, such as number or distribution of service personnel by type of service and time spent on family planning, as an index of programme input. The measure adopted should be suited for comparison between areas of countries and/or between countries. Researchers should address the general problem of developing a yardstick suited for use within a country and invariant to time and areas;

3. Efforts should be made to improve methods of obtaining information on quantities of contraceptive supplies to clients, especially pills and condoms, to permit greater precision in determining the numbers of couples or individuals using these methods.

D. SPECIAL NEEDS FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAINING AND RESEARCH

The Expert Group considered the questions given below to be the more crucial unsolved problems remaining in evaluation research. Because of its unique position, the United Nations was considered to have greater opportunities than other bodies to contribute solutions. The Group made the following recommendations:

1. In view of the intrinsic merit of evaluation in the improvement of programmes and the methodological value involved, the United Nations is urged to promote efforts in training personnel from various countries in the evaluation of such programmes, including assessment of births averted by the programme. The United Nations is also urged to assist in the production of training materials required for the purpose. In this connexion, the United Nations should develop a manual utilizing aspects of the results of this Expert Group meeting and other existing knowledge, classifying the methods, specifying when to use them and illustrating how to use them, and indicating the data needed for each method of assessing the demographic impact of family planning programmes on fertility;

2. The United Nations should develop additional methodological case studies in which the population studied should be subdivided and examined in parallel fashion by areas classified by the degree of family planning programme input, to determine whether the input relates to fertility and its change. Such studies should be verified by repetition;

3. The United Nations should, within a reasonably short period of time, select the most critical unsolved

issues emerging in this meeting and invite a small group of experts to consider them and the methodology for solving them. The United Nations should follow its usual procedure in exploring the issues in some suitable manner to provide documentation for the proposed group of experts;

4. The World Health Organization should be encouraged and supported to continue expediting the collection and dissemination of data on family planning in health services, including the inputs provided through those services to family planning activities.