

Birth spacing awareness pivotal for a mother's health

Parveen Bibi, a resident of Village Tiba Bhojowana, some 22 km away from district headquarter Jhang, gave birth to seven children by the age of 40 years. She was not fortunate to have information and education on birth spacing methods when she got married. Parveen say, "Education on birth spacing before marriage is the only way to improve mother's health." She now practices birth spacing methods but still repents on not having known them at the time of her marriage.



Her village Tiba Bhojowana lacks basic facilities like safe drinking water, sanitation, health and education. Basic Health Unit (BHU) and Family Welfare Centre (FWC) are located about 17 km away from the village. There is no health education worker from Health Department or Population Welfare Department (PWD) in the village. The village is a totally ignored and unserved area consisting of mainly poverty stricken people. They have little or no awareness on reproductive health.

Parveen was 24 when she got married to a local named Mazhar Hussain and became pregnant in the first month of her marriage. The newlywed couple and their family were very excited at the birth of their first baby girl. However, there was still a strong desire of having a son. To fulfill this desire, Parveen ignored the importance of breastfeeding and birth spacing. She became pregnant again and gave birth to another baby girl. While the family celebrated another child in the family, they still expected Parveen to give birth to a son. This desire made her mother of seven children, without birth spacing.

Parveen was not aware of established protocols of Maternal and Child Health Integrated Programme (MCHIP), which deteriorated her health. The burden of raising seven children and poor health took a toll on her mental state. She became more upset whenever she thought about the meagre income of her laborer husband and family's future.

In 2015, Punjab Rural Support Program (PRSP) under PSI-RSPN Project "Provision of Reproductive Health Services through Social Marketing" visited village Tibba Bhojowana and conducted an open dialogue with the community to introduce the project and asked for the formation of the community institution: Village Health Committee (VHC). The community institution in its first meeting, selected Saffia Iqbal and her husband as the Community Resources Persons (CRPs) for the implementation of project activities. CRPs performed their role and introduced project to every woman through group meetings and household visits. As a result of her endeavors, 52 potential clients were referred to service outlets. Parveen was amongst her clients. She visited service provider and took IUCD. She is now an active and

satisfied user of family planning. Parveen said that CRP has changed my life, and because of her good counseling I have adopted the method though it's too late. I think it is better to take birth spacing method than never. I don't want other young women to become pregnant without birth spacing. "I will educate all brides-to-be in my village on birth spacing," she avows.

She said she is thankful to Safia Iqbal and her husband who supported her in taking decision on birth spacing. I will support and educate young women on birth spacing and in the supervision of village health committee will stress the communities to educate their daughters on birth spacing before marriage.