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**TITLE OF THE ABSTRACT:** **A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF DECISION PROCESS IN SEEKING ABORTION**

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# **A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF DECISION PROCESS IN SEEKING ABORTION**

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In the Indian cultural context matters related to sexuality, reproduction, abortion etc. are considered as a taboo to talk on. Even though abortion is legalized very less information is available regarding the availability and utilization of abortion services, the providers and acceptors view points. Even lesser information is available on the decision-making aspects of abortion seeking services, which is important as it would provide opportunities to design interventions which could make abortion services accessible to women desiring to abort unwanted pregnancy. It would also help in planning IEC and advocacy campaign to bring about changes among men/husband to be more egalitarian in sharing authorities and power with their partners while deciding their reproductive goals.

Women with unwanted pregnancy might have only two options - accept it to end up in full term delivery or undergo abortion. Very little is known how the women cope with such situations. When and how a decision is taken to abort an unwanted pregnancy? Who all are involved in such decision-making process? What is the role of husband in such decisions, and what is the pathway in accepting or rejecting abortion? In the present paper, an attempt has been made to answer some of these questions.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The paper is based on a detailed qualitative study conducted by the Centre for Operations Research and Training in two villages of central Uttar Pradesh. The focus of the study was to understand decision-making processes involved in seeking abortion.

To collect the information first 20 per cent (every fifth house) of all the households in the two villages were systematically visited by a trained social scientist. All currently pregnant women of these households were interviewed and their pregnancy history was noted down. For each pregnancy probing was made whether it was a wanted or unwanted one. In case of unwanted pregnancies, further probing was made whether it was with respect to timing or with respect to number of children.

Information was also collected whether in case of any unwanted pregnancy they had desired, attempted or induced abortion. All those who answered in affirmative, were selected for in-depth case study. After dropping three women who declined to participate in the study, 32 in-depth case studies were conducted.

In-depth case studies of the selected women were conducted by two trained female social scientists. They spent about 5 months in the field to collect relevant information

through in-depth case study and informal interviews with the informants. During the five months of data collection, they stayed in Lucknow and made frequent visits to the two selected villages. On an average, each woman was visited five times ranging from two to eight times. The total time spent with each of them ranged between eight to ten hours. Both the social scientists are experienced in using qualitative approach of data collection. Particularly on sensitive issues such as contraceptive use dynamics, sexual behaviour, domestic and sexual violence and abortion. They were earlier engaged in collecting soft data on user's and provider's perception on quality of family planning services, documentation of the process involved in innovative operations research projects, reasons for unmet need for family planning and sexual behaviour including sexual violence.

For collecting the relevant information and to keep the discussion focused, a detailed guideline was prepared. To help the social scientist, the guideline was translated in local language. The social scientist who was involved in collecting the data and data analysis participated at every stage of preparatory work including development of guideline, translation in Hindi, its pre-testing and modification of language if required. The field notes, which they prepared, were carefully read on weekly basis. Gaps in their answers if any were identified and regular feedback was given so that they could collect the missing information during their next visit.

## **FINDINGS**

Sixty per cent of the women interviewed (79 out of 132 women) reported at least one unwanted pregnancy in their lifetime. The 132 study informants reported a total of 487 pregnancies. In other words, the mean number of pregnancies reported by the women was 3.7. The schematic presentation gives the details on their fertility intentions and outcome of unwanted pregnancy.

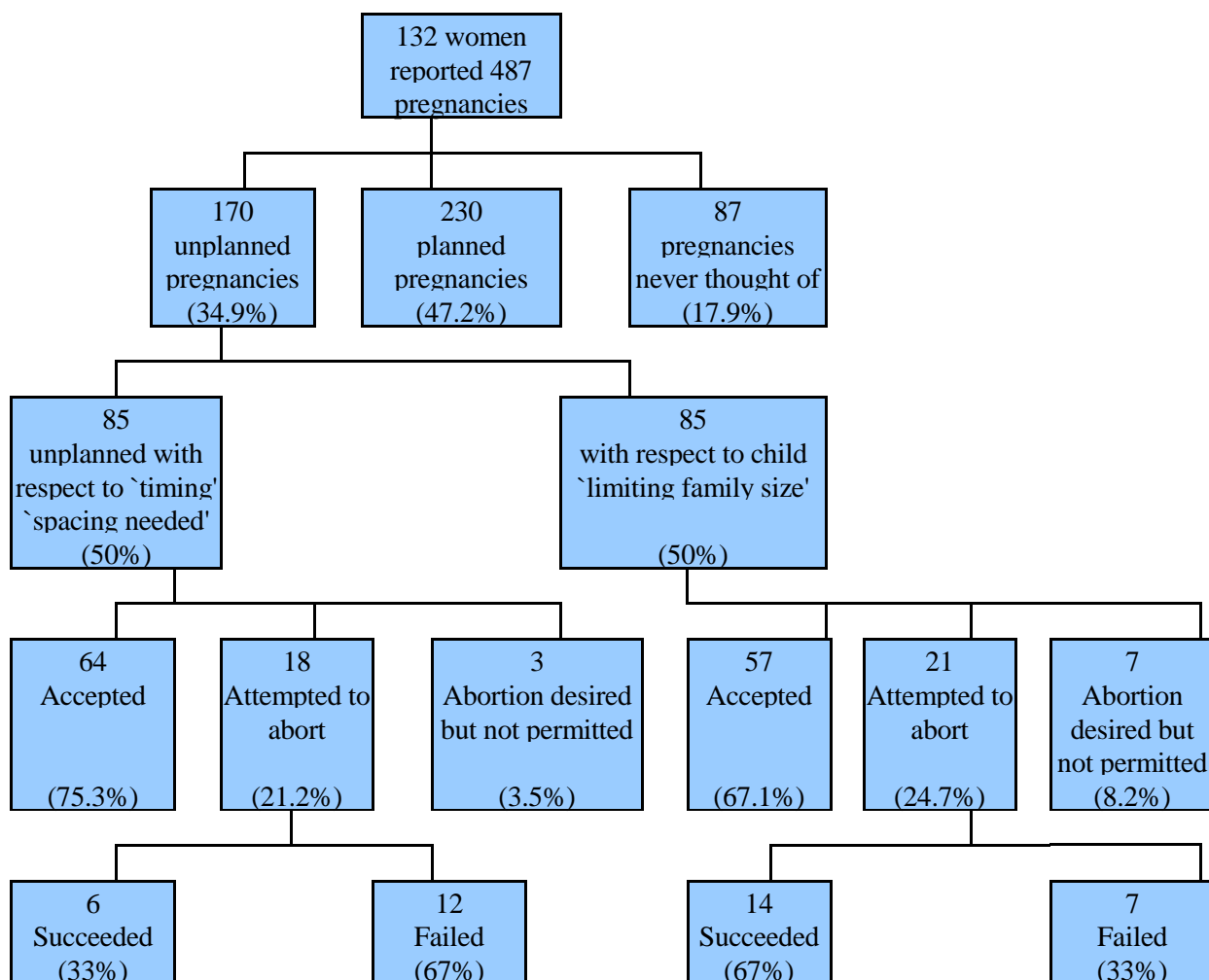
As the diagram shows, only less than half (47 per cent) of the total pregnancies reported were planned and wanted. Over one-third (35 per cent) of the pregnancies were reported as unplanned pregnancies while in the case of 18 per cent, the couple had never thought of whether the pregnancy was wanted or not. For them, becoming pregnant was a natural phenomenon.

Of the 170 unplanned pregnancies, 50 per cent were unwanted with respect to limiting the family size (no more pregnancies wanted) while the rest 50 per cent were unplanned with respect to timing (spacing desired). Of the women who wanted to limit their family size but were pregnant unwantedly, two-thirds accepted the pregnancy, 25 per cent attempted to abort it while the remaining 8 per cent desired abortion but were denied by their husband or other significant members of the family, e.g. mother-in-law/mother.

Among those who wanted to space their delivery but were pregnant unplanned, 75 per cent accepted the pregnancy and 21 per cent attempted to abort the unplanned pregnancy. In other words, out of the total 170 unwanted or unplanned pregnancies, 71 per cent were accepted, 23 per cent were attempted to abort and around 6 per cent desired abortion but were not permitted to do so. Of the 39 pregnancies attempted to abort, 20 were aborted

successfully while in the remaining 19 pregnancies, the women failed to abort her unplanned pregnancies.

### PREGNANCY PLANNED AND OUTCOME OF UNWANTED PREGNANCY



It can also be seen from the chart that the probability of accepting an unwanted pregnancy with respect to 'timing' (spacing) is observed to be relatively higher than that with regard to 'limiting'. The tendency to accept an unplanned pregnancy by reconciling with the situation is more prominent amongst the couple needing spacing than the couple wanting to limit their family size.

Amongst those who attempted to abort the pregnancy in both the groups, it is noticed that the couples wanting to limit family size was more successful than the group wanting to space in getting the unplanned pregnancies aborted. This perhaps indicates that couple not desiring any more child were more determined and desperate for abortion than the other group.

Analysis of the informal interviews and case studies reveal that there are several

situations when pregnancies are not desired and if occurred are aborted. The main one include:

- Pregnancy immediately after marriage
- Already have too many children
- Pregnancy at short interval
- Suspected infidelity by husband
- Economic compulsions
- Health reasons
- Old age pregnancy
- Unmarried pregnancy

In the following sections, each of the circumstances under which decisions to terminate an unplanned pregnancy is taken has been discussed.

### **PREGNANCY IMMEDIATELY AFTER MARRIAGE**

Generally, it is believed that the first pregnancy is always welcomed as it proves that the woman is not infertile and if a son is born her status increases in the family. However, the present study shows that with the general social change, many young girls do not want to become pregnant immediately -- both because of 'shyness' and desire to enjoy life.

However, when in many cases the first pregnancy was reported to be unwanted, few women took any action to terminate the pregnancy. Most of the women accepted, the first pregnancy as 'God's wish'. Out of hesitation and shyness being 'newly wed', they could not even speak to their husband about it. One of the women, who did confide in her husband saying she did not want to keep her pregnancy, it being too early, was asked not to do so since that was her first conception.

*"My husband said he would definitely bring some medicine to delay the next pregnancy, but since this was our first child, I should not try to do anything. I also thought, he was right and so agreed."*

Says a 26 years old woman (married at the age of 18 years) who attempted to abort her first pregnancy,

*"When I learnt that I was pregnant, I told my husband that it was too early to have the baby. But he said that this was my first conception and that I should accept it."*

Disappointed by her husband's lack of support, she decided to do something on her own.

*"I did not listen to him. I went alone to the PHC where the doctor after a check up prescribed me some medicines, which might bring about bleeding after a few days if I took them regularly. I bought the medicines from Bhanani Store, consumed them, but nothing happened. Eventually I told my husband about it and got a good scolding from him. He said, 'when I asked you not to do anything, then why did you go anywhere?' I gave up."*

Another 33-year-old, scheduled caste woman reported,

*"My husband readily agreed to do something when I told him about my conception. Both of us were not prepared to have a child immediately after marriage. I alone went to a doctor in Alambagh who wrote some medicines (tablets) and also some mixture (liquid) in a small bottle. He said if I consumed both together till the mixture did not finish, I would surely experience bleeding. But nothing happened. Finally I gave up and accepted the pregnancy."*

## TOO MANY CHILDREN

One of the main reasons for accepting abortion is not wanting additional children. Many women, even after completing their desired family size do not accept family planning and become pregnant unwantedly. In such situations, women often become desperate to go for abortion of unwanted pregnancy.

An illiterate, 26 years, Paasi woman said,

*"I could not think of having another child after this (5th pregnancy). Neither our income nor my health allow this. My husband was also convinced. So we had a mutual decision of getting rid of this (5th) pregnancy."*

Another 28 years, Nayee woman said,

*"I initially wanted only two children, a son and a daughter (which she gave birth to). But later both of us decided we should have at least two sons. We thought of taking one more chance. But unfortunately our third child turned out to be a daughter. Now we thought we should not have another child but in spite of this I got pregnant. In such situations, we had no option but to undergo abortion."*

Kamla, 35 years, Paasi woman, after giving birth to two sons and a daughter felt her family size was complete.

*"I did not want to have another child after three children. I did not know how to avoid getting pregnant. I always thought the only way to avoid getting pregnant was to avoid any contact with my husband. I told him I did not wish to get pregnant any more."*

*"However, even after my 4th pregnancy, I conceived 4 more times, each time when I did not want to."*

Too afraid to confide in her husband regarding getting rid of the pregnancy, she during her **5th pregnancy** attempted to abort by drinking home made concoction of lime (*choona*), jaggery (*gur*) and bamboo keel, mixing it with water, boiling and drinking it, but to no avail.

When she got pregnant for the **6th time**, she tried to confide in her husband and told him,

*"I am pregnant and I went to the PHC to get rid of the pregnancy".*

At this he said,

*"This is wrong, don't commit this sin".*

In spite of this, Kamla tried the same blend she had tried earlier, but to no avail.

The **7th time** she got pregnant, Kamla herself went to a medical practitioner and took some medicines (capsules and tablets); she got her 7th pregnancy successfully aborted. She later on told her husband about this who said,

*"You should have told me before trying all this. If something happened to you, people would blame me for being ignorant and careless".*

The **8th time** Kamla conceived, her husband too seemed to be considering abortion now. He himself went and called the medical practitioner who gave Kamla two doses of tablets and injections, after which she experienced bleeding.

The above case study clearly demonstrates how because of the non-availability of contraceptive services and lack of husband concern, women continue to become pregnant, and undergo both physical and mental tension.

### **PREGNANCY AT SHORT INTERVALS**

Yet another major reason of opting for abortion, particularly by the younger couples is conception at short intervals. Abortion is perceived (at times) as a means to give spacing between pregnancies.

A Yadav woman, 26 years, illiterate said,

*"5-6 months after my daughter's birth, my first child, I conceived again. I told my mother-in-law about this. Since my first child was already suffering from polio, my mother-in-law suggested that I should get safai (abortion) done. It was after her decision that my husband took me to Amrai for abortion."*

Another 19 years, 8th class pass, Yadav woman reported,

*"When I left for my mother's house for a few months with my 3 months old daughter, I did not know that I had conceived. I experienced the same symptom I had during my first pregnancy. I got very upset. I told my mother that I did not want to keep this child. It had come too early."*

Guddi got disappointed when her mother first said *'do not commit this sin'*. But later on seeing Guddi's desperation and the fact that her first child was still an infant she also

permitted for abortion.

*"She sent me out with my aunt (chachi) who took me to a hospital next morning for abortion."*

Says 18 years, 10th pass, Naayi woman,

*"There was unusual delay in my MC. My menstrual cycle had always been regular but when my child was only 7-8 months old, I realized I had missed my MC."*

Rohini's husband opposed her in trying for abortion when he learnt about her pregnancy. He asked her sarcastically, if the pregnancy was 'out of the wed-lock' that she wanted to get rid of it.

*"Much at the way my husband reacted, I thought I would not speak about it to him and decided that I will have to do something on my own."*

### **ABORTION DONE ON GROUNDS OF INFIDELITY**

Often desire to abort unwanted pregnancy creates suspicion of infidelity in the mind of their husbands, if the couple is using condom. In such cases, abortion is the only solution. Narrating her own case, Suchitra, 32 years, illiterate woman was scared she would be blamed for infidelity.

*"My husband had been using 'Nirodh' regularly still I do not know how this has happened i.e. she became pregnant). I visited Dr. Manjula at the PHC on my own. After a check-up she confirmed a pregnancy of three months. She also said that she would conduct MTP only if I am ready for sterilization or IUD. I refused. I begged doctor to at least write some tablets for me that would help in aborting. Doctor said I should take 2 capsules twice a day for one week. I took the medicines, which did not work. Finally, I disclosed it to my husband who instantly suspected infidelity."*

Her husband's suspicion was followed by threats and violence. The very next day, he asked her to get ready to go to hospital for MTP.

### **ECONOMIC COMPULSIONS**

Economic constraint in rearing of children is one of the factors why couples do not want more children.

Says 32 years, illiterate, Kalavati,

*"When my husband came to know that I was pregnant for the second time, he said, "get rid of this pregnancy. Economically, we are not in a position to have a child right now. I also agreed with him and had an abortion."*



Kalavati tried to terminate her 4th pregnancy also for the same reason by taking injections. However, she could not succeed.

Says Gayatri, a 26 years, educated up to class 8th,

*"I was on Home Guard training those days. I had to take up a job to support my family. I could not afford to miss a single day of it. Already we had a hand-to-mouth existence. Delivery of the baby, initial care, would demand a lot of time at the expense of my job - as it is it was temporary - they would check me out if I missed a single day. While on training once I fainted and was taken to the hospital where the doctor declared a pregnancy of 2½ months. I wanted abortion immediately, but my family (mother-in-law, sister-in-law, and husband) did not let me go for it that time. After that I thought I would go on my own some day and get rid of the pregnancy, but never got the time. By the time I did manage to go, the doctor refused to help me saying it was too late. The pregnancy was already 4 months old. I finally had to accept my child. I had to quit the job."*

### **ABORTION ON HEALTH GROUNDS**

Women in rural areas are mostly overburdened and have poor health. Most of them are anaemic and repeat pregnancies have made them victims of the vicious cycle of malnutrition, poverty, ignorance and poor health. Desperate with repeat pregnancies and poor health often women seek abortion.

Verbatim of a 25 years, illiterate, scheduled caste woman,

*"After my first pregnancy, I was too weak. I was not even able to look after myself. Soon I got pregnant for the second time. I was very much worried because of my own health problems. I was all the time thinking how would I have this third pregnancy carrying on. But, I knew my husband would not allow for abortion. Later on when my husband went to Delhi with some work, I with my neighbour's help consumed one phial of medicine (she said it would help in abortion), first taking few drops, when nothing happened, I took more. Then I finished the whole bottle but again nothing happened. Then I took three pills also, which I took from my sister-in-law's relative. But that also did not help."*

### **LATE PREGNANCY**

In Indian culture pregnancy of older women, particularly if their children have been married or have grown up is generally ridicule by family members and neighbours. In such cases, they desperately try to abort it. The following verbatim of Laxmi is typical example of their thinking:

*"Marriage preparations of my eldest daughter were going on when I discovered that I was pregnant. It was shocking to me what people will think about me. Fortunately, my friend Rajkumari knew a dai who secretly abort such pregnancy. I went with*

*Rajkumari to the dai who performed the abortion. She wrapped a tiny stick in a piece of cloth and inserted it in my vagina. I do not know what medicine she applied. It is difficult to learn about it. However, it was successful and it saved my izzat (prestige) in the society."*

## UNMARRIED AND PREGNANT

Pregnancy of unmarried women is one of the most serious social offences in Indian society and strictly discouraged. If it happens, the girl's parents/relatives try to get it aborted as early as possible secretly. Narrating about this practice, Zaahid Ali, 38 years, medical practitioner of village Dhaaman said,

*"There was a case of an unmarried girl last year, who wanted abortion. She must have heard from other women about me. She once secretly came and confided in me. I took pity on her and agreed to give a try. I made her keep 'STT test' (medicated stick) inside her vagina overnight. Also gave injection Mixogen and tablets. Yes, it was successful."*

## DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

As mentioned in the earlier section, out of the 170 unplanned pregnancies, abortion was desired or attempted successfully or unsuccessfully in the case of 49 (28.8 per cent) pregnancies. Table 1 gives the details of these 49 unwanted pregnancies where abortion was desired or attempted.

**Table 1: Abortion details of unplanned pregnancies (Number)**

Outcome	Unplanned pregnancy with respect to		
	Timing	Limiting	Total
Abortion done successfully	6	14	20
Abortion attempted but failed	12	7	19
Abortion desired by women but not permitted	3	7	10
<b>Number of cases</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>49</b>

An attempt was made to understand the dynamics of decision-making process in abortion seeking behaviour. Table 2 gives an understanding of who was consulted first, who all were consulted and who finally made the decision to accept or not to accept abortion.

**Table 2: Dynamics of decision-making process in abortion seeking behaviour**

(Number)

	Person consulted first	Persons consulted in all	Who finally decided
No one/self decided	-	-	15
Husband	32	34	8
Both	-	-	23
Mother-in-law/sister-in-law	7	7	3
Friends/neighbours/relatives	4	13	-
Doctor	4	23	-
Nurse/Dai	2	4	-
Medical Store	-	4	-
<b>Number of cases</b>	<b>49</b>		

## WHO IS CONSULTED FIRST?

Out of 49 cases of wanting to abort their unplanned pregnancy, 32 (65 per cent) women reported that they first discussed it with their husband (Table 3). Of them, 5 husbands themselves suggested to undergo abortion. Mothers-in-law or sisters-in-law were consulted first in 7 cases followed by doctor in 4 cases. In remaining 7 cases, neighbour or other relatives and nurse were consulted first in 4 and 2 cases respectively.

Thus, in about one-third of the cases, husbands were not informed first while in around 22 per cent cases neither husband nor in-laws were the first person to be informed.

Husbands were the most important person about the unwanted pregnancy who were involved and discussed before deciding for abortion. Table 2 shows, in 34 cases (69 per cent), women consulted their husband prior to seeking abortion. Very often, it was reported.

*"When I conceived unwantedly, I told my husband that I want to get rid of the pregnancy."*

(more details have been discussed under husband's role)

Secondly, in a significantly large number of cases (23), a doctor was consulted before deciding for abortion. As Ramvati puts it:

*"When I discovered that I was pregnant for the fourth time, I consulted Dr. Manjula. She was very friendly with us. I told her that I wanted to have an abortion along with sterilization. She told me that she would extend her all co-operations and I would not face any problem. I had both MTP and tubectomy without any problem."*

Another 26 years old, Thakur woman with schooling up to primary level and having 2 sons and 2 daughters, desired abortion. She narrates,

*"When my husband did not allow me to go for abortion, I went to Sarojini Nagar hospital (PHC) with my Jethani (elder sister-in-law) and consulted Dr. Manjula for abortion, but she also refused to perform it because of my poor health. After hearing doctor's advice I decided not to abort the pregnancy".*

Influence of neighbour and other peer group in decision-making process of abortion in well reflected in comments from Roopvati, 32 years old, illiterate mother having 2 sons and 3 daughters:

*"When I conceived unwantedly (4th pregnancy), I wanted to abort the pregnancy. I consulted one of my neighbour who had an abortion from PHC earlier. She told me not to undergo abortion because it affects health like, stomach pain, irregular MC, etc. So I was afraid to undergo abortion by medicine at hospital. Hence, I did not go to the hospital. But I consulted one nurse who had been posted at Sarojininagar PHC and used to visit us time to time. She prescribed some medicine to abort the pregnancy which my husband brought from medical store. It however did not work"*

21 years, illiterate Dhuri has 3 sons and 1 daughter. She belongs to Yadav caste. Her eldest son is suffering from polio. She told,

*"When I missed my periods for the second time, I got panicky. I told my mother-in-law about this. Since my first child was already suffering from polio and was barely 5-6 months old at that time, she also opined that I should get the safai done."*

Though many persons were consulted before deciding for an abortion it is only the concerned partners who finally made the decision. In 23 cases (out of 49), it was a joint decision of husband and wife in 8 cases it was husband while in 15 cases the women reported that they did not consult anybody and decide themselves. Among 34 cases, where husband was consulted many reported as joint decision to accept or reject abortion. However, in most of these cases, as the following verbatim of 4th pass informant, 34 years, a mother of 3 sons, suggests husband had the final authority.

*"Although both of us had taken this decision, but I had thought first and then told this to my husband. He also agreed. It was obvious, when I am facing more problems then definitely, I will think about it. Getting pregnant again and again, delivering the baby and nourishing them, is not easy?"*

Another inter pass (13 years of schooling) informant of same age and parity, said:

*"Initially my husband did not want me to abort the pregnancy. But as I was determined, I insisted. At last he had to agree with me."*

Fifth pass Ritudevi, 36 years, having 2 sons and 2 daughters says,

*"It was my decision but my husband also approved it."*

There was cases when women did not want abortion but they accepted it because their husband suggested it. In case of Phulan Bai, a 30 years, illiterate, Yadav informant, with one daughter and 3 sons, accepted abortion, only because her husband allowed her for sterilization also which earlier he had denied to her,

*"When I went to Indiranagar hospital, after examining me the lady doctor informed that I had 2 months pregnancy. I came out and told my husband about the pregnancy. He suggested me to have an abortion and get the sterilization done. I also agreed with him. Just for a moment, it was not my wish. If I had known about the pregnancy before going to the hospital, definitely I would have not agreed for abortion. But then, I also thought earlier he had not agreed to my request for sterilization after waiting long time, today I got the chance to have an operation. If I am not accepting it today then after having this child I do not know whether I will get this chance again. So better I should accept it."*

Male took complete authority and dominance in such decision-making was mentioned in 8 cases and is well reflected in the answers of Parvati, a middle aged, illiterate informants

who experienced abortion twice and once she attempted to abort but could not succeed:

*"I have had abortion two times. Both the time it was my husband's decision. Whatever he says, I always agree with him. He is the head of the household. He should take the decision. He is nice to me and never forces me for anything but I also never contradict him either. Both the time when he came to know that I am pregnant he suggested me to undergo an abortion."*

Her husband, 35 years, educated up to high school, works in Scooters India company. He said,

*"Both the time I had decided that she should go for abortion. Being an illiterate woman what decision she would be able to take."*

There are also instances when the husband does not permit his wife to go for abortion though she desires it. In the words of young, 23 years illiterate, Sitadevi, who now has one daughter and two sons,

*"When I learnt that I was pregnant for the third time, I told my husband that I do not want to deliver this child. I wanted to go to Chinhat to abort the pregnancy. My husband disapproved it and said that, do not do that. It is a sin. You can get the sterilization done after having this child."*

*After that I did not insist him. I knew that he would not allow me to go for abortion, then why should I ask again? Is there any time when woman's wish is given priority over the man's decision? So I had accepted the child."*

36 years, 5th pass, Radha, having 2 sons and one daughter could not abort her 4th pregnancy because her husband had fear of procedure and complications.

*"When I came to know that I was pregnant for the 4th time, I asked my husband to abort the pregnancy. But he did not approve it. He argued that unnecessarily I would be facing health problem. The doctors will be carrying out abortion by using equipment and if something happens then I will be in trouble."*

It was interesting that in 15 out of 49 cases (30 percent) decision to abort the unwanted pregnancy was taken by the women themselves without consulting their husbands. An analysis revealed that usually it was observed that women took decision herself under two circumstances. First, when husband disapproved it, then they took their own decision. They consulted whatever source was available to them and selected the method accordingly. Secondly, women themselves assumed that their husband would not allow them to go for abortion. Hence, they did not even ask him or informed about the pregnancy and took their own decision to abort it.

Kashi, 23 years, is illiterate Yadav woman discussed with her husband for abortion during her third pregnancy but he did not agree and she was forced after 3<sup>rd</sup> child. However,

she did not accept it because of physical discomfort and fear of instruments. As a result she conceived for 4<sup>th</sup> time unwontedly. She reports,

*"When I got pregnant for the 4th time, then I did not inform my husband or anybody else in the family. I just told my husband that my son was not well. I am taking him to Chinhat to bring medicine."*

*"At Chinhat (4-5 kms away from the village), I consulted a nurse in Nursing home to terminate the pregnancy. She explained me that it can be done by using some equipments. I asked her why equipments are required when my pregnancy is only 1½ months pregnancy? I requested her to give some medicines. Then she told me no such medicines are available. Also she was demanding Rs.400/- for this. Then I came back. After 10 days again I went to Chinhat and consulted Dr. Srivastava who runs a private clinic. That day also I did not inform anyone in my family."*

*"There I first asked the doctor that I am not getting MC for 2 months. You give me some medicines or injection to regularize it. He gave me 4 injections and charged Rs.150/-. First he gave me 2 injections on alternate day, then after a gap of 4-5 again he gave two injections. But by taking injections nothing happened I finally had to accept the pregnancy."*

Shashi, 30 years, has 1 son and 1 daughter. She has studied up to 5th class and claims to know her husband's intention.

*"When I conceived last time, I went to Nishadganj government hospital alone without my husband's knowledge to get the pregnancy aborted. There the lady doctor had given me one injection but it did not help. That time, it must be around 1½ months pregnancy."*

*"When injection did not help, I went to medical shop and brought medicine for this. I was given 5 to 7 capsules, which were red in colour. Twice or thrice I had taken those 5 to 7 capsules but it was also not effective. By that time it was quite late and I was left no option, but to accept it."*

*"I never asked my husband for abortion. Because I knew he would not allow me. When husband and wife lives together then they know each other."*

The analysis shows that decision to accept abortion very much depend. On the two concerned partners. Husband plays a significant and dominant role in taking final decision. If the women is literate, even up to primary level, the husband-wife power equation is relatively more balanced and women could agree and convince their husband to accept abortion of unwanted pregnancy. In case of illiterate women, the authority lies exclusively in the husband's hand and he finally decides what to do in such cases.

Age is observed to be another factor, which has influence on decision-making by women. Middle aged women who generally know how their husband will react to the suggestion of abortion of unwanted pregnancy, ready to take the authority in their own hand



and decide to abort it without informing their husband. However, such, 'daring' initiative was mostly taken by middle aged women (30 years and above) alone. They were so much fed-up with the repeated pregnancies that they are left to choose between two evils-anger of husband, if he comes to know about the abortion and having one more birth. Some chosen the first while the remaining left it their fate.

## **ROLE OF HUSBAND**

Living in a largely patriarchal and therefore male dominated society like ours, man naturally plays the most significant role, when it comes to 'decision-making' in almost any matter. Fertility intentions, reproductive goals and abortion seeking process are some of the issues where role of husband is relatively less understood though considered to be critical. In the previous section, while discussing decision-making process, husbands dominance and authority in deciding all such matters was vividly reflected in the statements given by the informants. In the present section, this issue has been investigated and discussed in more detail.

Earlier, the analysis showed, that out of 49 pregnancies (reported by 33 women) in 32 pregnancies, husbands were the first ones to be consulted by their wives. In 8 pregnancies, husband alone took the decision either in favour or against abortion and in 23 pregnancies both husband and wife took the decision jointly. Analysis of these case studies carefully revealed their participation in the following manner.

- Husband suggested abortion
- Readily agree on wife's suggestion
- Initially opposed but later agreed with reluctance
- Totally disapproved
- No role as wife did not inform them about unplanned pregnancy

The analysis shows that out of the 49 cases in 22 cases (45 percent) the role of husband in general was supportive and acted as facilitator in the whole process. This percentage will increase to 65 percent if the percentages are recalculated after suppressing those case in which husband were not informed about the unwanted pregnancy and abortion was conducted or attempted. In the following paragraph, examples from each of the above categories have been discussed.

**Husbands themselves suggested:** In the case of 8 pregnancies out of 49 (16 per cent), husband himself suggested the wife to go for abortion. In such cases, husband efficiently played the role of a facilitator and caretaker. In one pregnancy out of 8, husband was prepared to extend all his support but the wife left for her mother's house with her brother. Therefore, he could not help her much. According to Guddi's husband, working with Telco as an assistant earning Rs.3,000/- per month,

*"I wanted my wife to delay her second pregnancy. When she told me about her pregnancy I got worried. It was still an early stage. Around 15-20 days must have passed on top of her scheduled date for MC. I thought I would go to Dr. Anil and get*

*tablets that would help in abortion. Doctor gave me 3 tablets, which were to be taken three times a day by my wife. It was only a one-day dose. The total visit cost me Rs.20 or Rs.30. He said that the tablets would lead to bleeding within 3 to 4 days but nothing happened. Unfortunately, the very next day, Guddi's brother came to take her and she went to her mother's house with him. I could do nothing further."*

When Bitti Devi, a 36 years old, illiterate woman got pregnant for the sixth time, her husband Ram Senak thought he ought to take advice and help from someone regarding termination of the pregnancy. He approached the Gram Pradhan who suggested him to take his wife to PHC Sarojini Nagar, where she could both be aborted and sterilized. Ram Senak explains,

*"I thought when Bitti has to undergo abortion, she might as well have the sterilization too. I tried to persuade her for it but she would not agree. Seeing her reluctance I even told her that I would try to request the doctor at the PHC that they should only perform abortion for you and I, being your husband would offer myself for male sterilization (if accepting family planning was the precondition for abortion)."*

On Friday morning, Ram Senak Yadav took his wife on cycle to the PHC (15-16 kms away). It took one hour to reach the PHC. They reached there around 11 a.m. He was very supportive to his wife throughout her stay at the PHC for MTP.

He left the PHC that day with his wife at 4.30 p.m. by tempo. He left his cycle behind since his wife was not in a state to travel on it and thought he would collect it the other day.

**Table 3: Involvement of Husband in Abortion Seeking Decision-making**

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Percentage*</i>
Husband themselves suggested	8	16.3	23.5
Readily agreed on wife's suggestion	14	28.6	41.5
Initially against but later agreed with reluctance	5	10.1	14.7
Totally against	7	14.3	20.6
No role as not even informed of unplanned pregnancy	15	30.6	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>34</b>

\* Percentage is calculated after suppressing husband who were not aware of pregnancy

**Readily Agreed:** In the case of 14 pregnancies out of 49 (29 per cent), husbands readily agreed to their wives' wish to terminate their unplanned pregnancies and tried to extend all support. Pregnancy was successfully aborted in six cases while in eight the attempt to abort was unsuccessful. In the case of the remaining 2 pregnancies, the doctor had declared that 'it was too late'.

A 35 years old, illiterate, scheduled caste woman, Kamla, is a mother of six children. When she was pregnant for the seventh time, her husband called a doctor at home twice and also attended her for 8 to 10 days when she was suffering from side effects of medicines. In her words,



*"This time I discovered my pregnancy very late. I told my husband about it and begged him to do something."*

Kamla's husband who earlier himself considered abortion 'a sin' readily agreed this time to get his wife aborted.

*"I think at this point he also felt we could not afford to have another (seventh) child. He asked me to rest for a while. He went on cycle and called the doctor at home. He said he would give me injections which were expensive and very effective and that he had bought them from Lucknow."*

*"I laid down on the cot as he gave two injections one on each side of the waist. I also took some tablets along with it. My husband also stood by my side watching."*

*"The next day again my husband brought the doctor over and I was given two more injections that he said would now cause bleeding. My husband gave him around Rs.200/- which included the cost of injections, tablets and the doctor's fee."*

*"Within three hours of the second dose of injection, the bleeding started which continued for 8 to 10 days. I became bed-ridden with high fever and weakness. My husband consulted Dr. Dwivedi again who said they were only some of the side effects and gave some medicines."*

Says another 26 years old, illiterate, Paasi woman, Rampati, talking about her 6th pregnancy,

*"Neither our income nor my health would allow this. My husband was also concerned and readily agreed for abortion. We decided to go to the PHC. It was the month of April/May. I even wanted operation after MTP. We met the doctor at the PHC but were told that it was going to cost around Rs.500-600. We thought 'why would we go to a hospital if we had to pay so much.'"*

The doctor then suggested them to go to Chandan Nagar hospital.

*"My husband at that time, was working with Dr. Santoshi in Haider Colony. He suggested that I should go with the doctor's wife to Chandan Nagar hospital so that I may get better attention, but I refused to do so. Then my husband went and called the dai over who conducted the abortion. My husband and mother-in-law remained outside."*

**Initially Against but Later Agreed with Reluctance:** As shown in Table 3, in the case of 5 unwanted pregnancies, the husbands initially were against the idea of abortion but finally agreed to their wives' requests. In 3 such cases, the pregnancy was aborted while in two cases the attempt was unsuccessful.

In one case though the husband hesitantly allowed her to go for abortion, he did not

help or support the wife in any way. In another case of Hansa, the husband had reluctantly approved for abortion but when Hansa went alone to the doctor on her own, the husband refused to pay any attention to her.

Says, Manjulata, 25 years, Inter passed, Brahmin woman,

*"When I came to know that I was pregnant, I told my husband that I wanted to abort the pregnancy but he said since I had conceived I should keep it. When I insisted that I did not want to continue with the pregnancy, my husband finally agreed, but with reluctance. He bought me 5 capsules from Bhamani medical store. But they did not help."*

Saraswati, 29 years, educated up to Class X, Kayasth woman, narrates,

*"When I got pregnant for the 6th time, I thought I should get it aborted before it got too late. Some women in the neighbourhood whom I first consulted had suggested that there is no life, in a foetus of 1 - 1½ months. So I would not be committing sin if I aborted pregnancy soon. If I had tried to abort a pregnancy of 3 months and above, then it could be called a `murder'."*

*"When I told my husband I was pregnant and did not want to keep the child, he said `now that you have conceived, give birth to the child, do not commit a sin. I repeated what I had been told by the woman and said that it would not be a sin at this stage, he finally agreed."*

He first went to a medical store and got some capsules, which did not help. After that he took her to the PHC where MTP was done with sterilization. Her husband attended her throughout the day.

**Totally Disapproved:** In the case of 7 out of 49 (14 per cent) pregnancies desiring abortion, husbands were totally against their wives going for abortion and therefore did not provide support or help in any way.

In 3 pregnancies since the husbands were totally against, women did not take any step to abort their pregnancies. However, in the other 4 cases in spite of their husbands being totally against, 3 informants secretly tried to attempt abortion though they were not successful.

Says a 38 years old, illiterate, scheduled caste woman,

*"When I told my husband that I was pregnant and that I wanted to abort it, he firmly said that this is wrong and do not commit this sin."*

*"In spite of this, I once again thought of trying the same concoction I had tried earlier. One day when there was no one around, I mixed lime (choona), jaggery (gur) and ground bamboo keel in water and boiled it till it became thick and hot. I tried to drink*

*it, but it was all in vain."*

When 18 years, Meena, metric pass, Naayi (scheduled caste) told her husband that she was afraid that she might be pregnant since she had missed her periods and requested him to get some medicines to abort the pregnancy, he said,

*"Is it not mine? Is it out of wedlock that you want to abort it?"*

Hurt at this she thought she would not speak to him or discuss with him again and decided to do something on her own at which she succeeded and was able to abort her pregnancy.

Husbands played no role at all in rest of the 30 per cent (n=15) pregnancies in which the women did not even consult their husbands, mainly out of fear that they would be refused.

### **PATTERN IN THE RURAL SETTING**

The study revealed that abortion is widely practiced in the village through both legal and illegal sources as reported by the doctor, village health practitioner, health worker (PHC), dai, nurse and village women as well.

A qualified doctor practicing in the village on the roadside stated,

*"A number of quacks are sitting on road sides and providing abortion services in the village. They are moving around by cycle and you would not even easily identify that they are quacks."*

Further he added,

*"Women are getting medicines for abortion very frequently and easily from the medical stores. They just go there and tell, "I am not getting MC from 2 months/1month/15 days, etc. Give me medicine to regularize it".*

One of the staff nurses working with the PHC said,

*"A number of abortion cases come to us. Many times, before coming here women take help from untrained abortion providers and when they face some problems then they come to us."*

One of the chemists running his medical store since 6 months reported,

*"We easily get around 10 to 15 abortion seekers a month. I will say the number is on increase."*

Almost similar answer had come out from one another chemist,

*"There are several abortion seekers coming to my shop in a month. 20 to 25 come with*

*doctor's prescriptions and more or less similar number come without prescriptions."*

One another chemist who is well established and is working for more than five years stated:

*"Both male and female come to me to get the medicine to terminate the pregnancy. I do not have any record that how many people come to me for this purpose but I can say it will be 100-125 in a month and also I can say in all the medical shops situated in this line on the road side this number will be 25-30."*

Dais are also performing abortion very frequently which they reported only to some extent but it was confirmed from the villagers. One qualified doctor practicing in the village mentioned:

*"In my knowledge, there is a **dom** (sweeper) family residing in the village. Gauri, women of that family provide services during delivery and if anybody asks for abortion then they provide that too. They are doing this business for several generations."*

### **GENERAL PERCEPTION OF COMMUNITY ABOUT ABORTION**

During the study period of 5 months, the researchers seized the opportunity to talk with a range of village dwellers about various issues revolving around abortion. They also attempted to capture the people's perception about abortion. The study reveals that abortion, though practiced in abundance in village, is yet considered a taboo and sin by the maximum, particularly the elderly group. An old lady, around 50 years of age having two married sons and a daughter stated,

*"I am not at all in favour of abortion. I never consider it good. After all the foetus, which is growing in the stomach, there is a life in that. Killing of any life is a sin."*

Another elderly woman of the same age, whose all children are married except the youngest one, expressed,

*"Abortion is a big sin (**mahapap**). I am not at all in favour of it. If I am not able to give life then I do not have any right to destroy anyone's life. Nobody knows anyone's fate. What will happen in future? Supposing this time somebody is getting rid of the pregnancy then she might be not having chance (opportunity) to see the face of child in her next life (rebirth)."*

Similar expression had come out from another informant,

*"There can be no bigger sin than abortion. Those who have committed this sin in this life will definitely have to repay in their next life."*

Another informant also had similar opinion and was reluctant even to talk about this. She said,

*"Abortion is the biggest sin. Do not even talk about it to me."*

Even the lady doctor who is trained in MTP and also performing it had mentioned,

*"As a human being I will also say that it is not good but I am doing it because it is my profession."*

One of the PHC staff (dresser) had also supported the others' opinion,

*"I think, being an Indian, nobody will be in favour of abortion from within. Even if this question will be asked to you, then you will also not support it. We are doing it because it is our duty. We have to bring the cases for sterilization, so if anybody is ready for sterilization after abortion, then we cannot leave the case."*

Young women or those who had attempted to abort their pregnancy and who had actually experienced abortion, they also did not support it openly. However, neither did they regret for attempting or undergoing MTP. As cited by an illiterate woman, 25 years, who had experienced five pregnancies and attempted to abort her second pregnancy said,

*"I consider abortion a sin though I had myself tried for it once. But that time I did not have much idea. That time, I did not realize what I was doing."*

Another 39 years, 5th pass, informant mentioned,

*"Once I had attempted to abort the pregnancy but now I think I should have not done it. When I am not able to give life then why should I take life? Whatever is in fate that will happen, then why should I take this sin on me."*

Here an example can also be cited among those women who experienced abortion. From this group, a 35 years, Inter pass mother, having three sons and experienced abortions during her fourth pregnancy contended,

*"It is not good to get the abortion done. But what could I do? I did not have any option, so I accepted an abortion."*

One of the informants never tried for abortion said,

*"I neither experienced abortion nor tried to abort. Why should I commit this sin when I have my husband with me."*

The study indicates that though abortion is considered as sinful act but if it is occurred within 2-2½ months pregnancy (in some cases, it was reported 3 months), then it is accepted in the community. As mentioned by an elderly woman who experienced multiple abortions because of ill health:

*"Thrice I experienced abortion, but all three times it was 1 - 1½ months of foetus. If it is more than 2½ months, then one should not undergo abortion. Because by that time, there is existence of life. Hence, above 2½ months, abortion is sinful. Nobody knows*

*whether it is son or daughter. If it is daughter then it will be doubly sinful. Because daughter is someone else property."*

One abortion provider, retired from PHC as dai said,

*"Till 2½ months abortion is not sin because by that time, it will be only blood. By the third month, it starts taking shape. So, after that time, going for abortion is sinful. When God is giving life and you are destroying that, is it not a sin?"*

Nandu had undergone abortion during her sixth pregnancy though her fifth pregnancy was also unwanted. She did not undergo abortion during her fifth pregnancy since there was delay in taking the decision. She mentioned,

*"It was a three months pregnancy. How could I commit a murder? Life starts to exist in a foetus of three months."*

Apart from this strong beliefs (explained above), during the study it was found that some people did not allow abortion because they perceive, it affects on health. As it was mentioned by a 39 years old, 5th pass woman,

*"Abortion is harmful for health. It leads to infection, which causes cancer later on. There is no treatment available for cancer."*

Another elderly woman also had similar view,

*"Abortion is not good for health. By having an abortion, sometimes woman can even die. I have heard about a woman who underwent abortion and died because of excessive bleeding."*

Another instance in which abortion is not accepted because of health is of 35 years, 7th pass Kapi,

*"I did not wish to go for abortion because I know one woman who got tetanus after abortion and eventually she died."*

During the study, it was observed that abortion is not an issue to be discussed openly, specially before mother-in-law. Although women who had undergone abortion they provide information without much probing. However, to some extent probing was made to get the information in the case of woman attempted to abort by using medicine/injection/home preparation, etc.

## SUMMING UP

The in-depth interviews with 132 informants reveals interesting results and the dynamics that plays in the decision-making process in the acceptance of abortion for unwanted pregnancy. Most women consider pregnancy as a natural phenomena. Therefore, women neither plan their pregnancies, nor do they take proper care during their pregnancies. Women also do not try to prevent from getting pregnant, if they do not want any more children. Concept of planning a family is not given much importance. Children are considered as a God's gift and pregnancy a natural process. Therefore, many do not feel it necessary to plan their pregnancy either with respect to timing or number. Only a few want to plan their families, but they do not know about family panning methods in detail, or the accessibility to the supply of contraceptives is different.

The paper also reveals that if women with fewer number of children experiences unwanted pregnancies, she is more likely to accept the unplanned pregnancy and deliver a child rather than go in for abortions. Programmatically it is important to provide both information and family planning services to young mothers with fewer pregnancies by identifying couples with unmet need for family planning. This segment could be the potential users of non-terminal contraceptives.

However, having experienced repeated pregnancies women are more determined to seek abortion services to limit their family size. Many women who have achieved their desired family size and do not want any additional child, do not use any contraceptives because of non-availability or poor access to the contraceptives. When they become pregnant unwontedly, they readily go for abortion, with or without the consent from husbands or other household members. Such women having undergone repeated pregnancies and faced hardship often take decision to seek abortion services on their own.

In majority of the cases, the decision-making power to abort unwanted pregnancies remained mainly with the husband. Husbands were the first to be communicated about the unwanted pregnancies and are the one to finally decide about seeking abortion. They also helped in arranging for terminating the unwanted pregnancy and paying for the cost incurred.

The study also reveals that there is no major role of the other family members in decision related to seeking abortion services. The issue of aborting an unplanned pregnancy is usually not discussed openly with mother-in-law or sisters-in-law. Thus, the women and their husbands play a major significant role in seeking abortion services of unplanned pregnancies. All efforts should be made to inform and involve young couples and men in reproductive health matters considering the gender inequality within the conjugal relationship.