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Reevaluating the unmet need for family planning in the Philippines

Aurora E. Perez and James A. Palmore

For more than a decade, studies of unmet need for family planning have employed a standard definition of unmet need based on the existence of an apparent discrepancy between fertility preferences and contraceptive practice. According to this definition, women have an unmet need for family planning if they express a desire to space or limit births but are not using contraception. An analysis of results from the 1993 National Demographic Survey in the Philippines suggests that this definition may result in an underestimate. The authors propose a new definition that classifies women with unmet need into three groups: women with unmet need according to the standard definition, women with unmet need due to health risk, and women with unmet need due to poor contraceptive use.

The prevalence of unmet need in the Philippines is 26 percent based on the standard definition alone but increases to 48 percent when the broader definition is applied. Using the new definition, the report analyzes the effects of women's social, economic, and demographic characteristics on unmet need for family planning. For women with conventional unmet need, the policy implications are to provide appropriate contraceptives, which differ depending on whether the need is for spacing or for limiting births. For women with unmet need due to health risk, the appropriate policy stresses motivation. For poor contraceptors, policies need to emphasize education to use more effective methods or, at least, to use natural family planning methods more effectively.

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