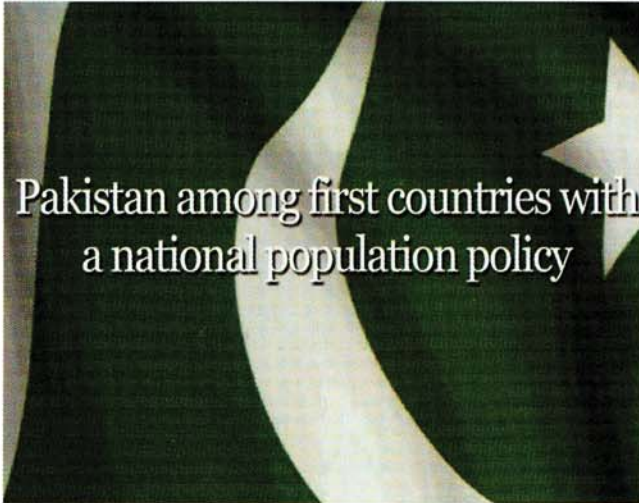




# Generations on the Rise

## Improving the health of Pakistan's families



Pakistan was among the first countries with a population policy and program, and it was viewed by many as a model program.

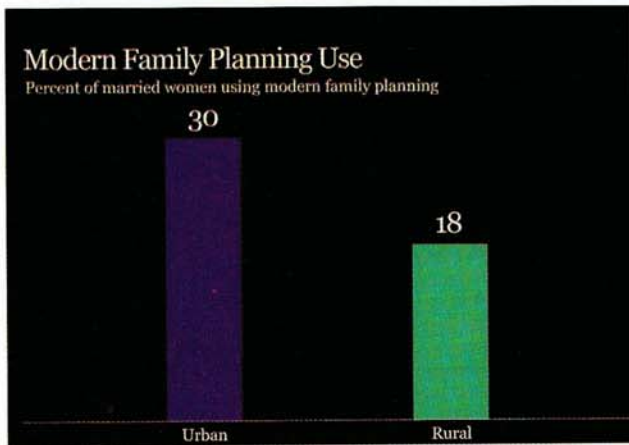
Because of these early policies and programs, family planning use in Pakistan has been on the rise for many decades.



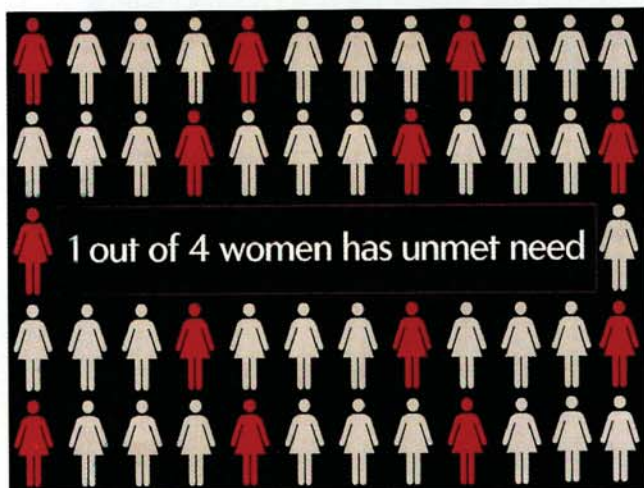
The percent of married women using family planning increased from 9 percent in 1985 to 30 percent in 2007, tripling over 20 years.<sup>1</sup>

However, over the last several years, family planning use has stalled at around 30 percent, and this 30 percent includes both modern and traditional methods.

Only 22 percent of married women are using modern methods of family planning, which are generally more effective.



Looking at the difference in modern family planning use between urban and rural areas... while 30 percent of women in urban areas use modern family planning, only 18 percent of women in rural areas do—which is about half the amount.<sup>2</sup>



About 25 percent of Pakistani women would prefer to stop having children or wait two or more years before having another child, but are not using family planning. These women have an unmet need for family planning.<sup>3</sup>

As a consequence of this high unmet need, one out of three pregnancies in Pakistan is unplanned.<sup>4</sup>

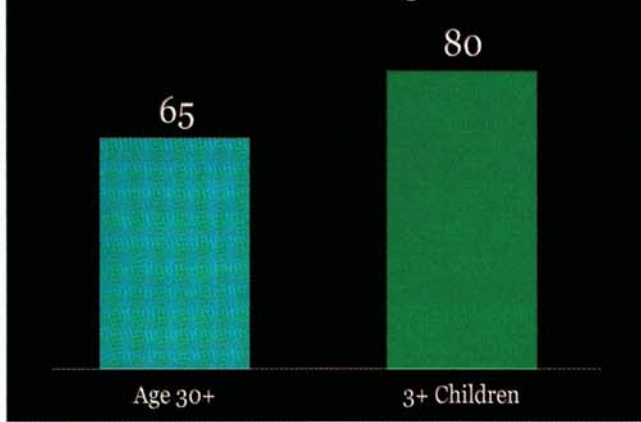
Unplanned pregnancies can lead to high-risk births: women having children too young (before age 18), too old (after age 35), too close (spaced less than 3 years apart), and women having too many children.

Every year...  
almost 900,000 abortions in Pakistan

Unplanned pregnancies can also lead to abortion, and if safe abortion is not available, unsafely performed abortions.

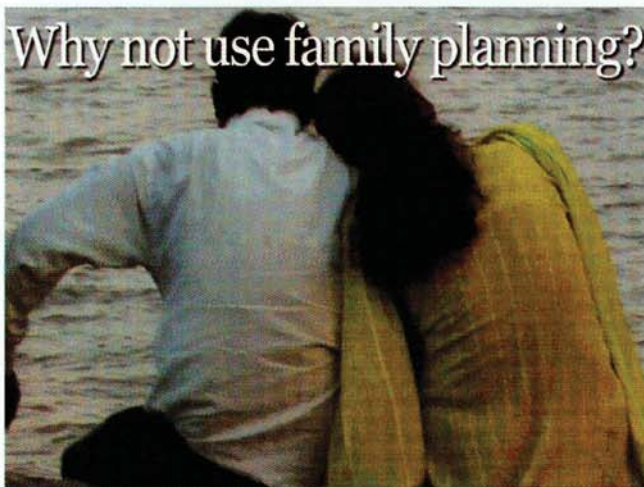
In Pakistan, every year there are about 900,000 abortions, most of which are unsafely performed.<sup>5</sup> These numbers are high, and they indicate that abortion is a significant means of preventing unplanned births in Pakistan.

## Percent of women having an abortion



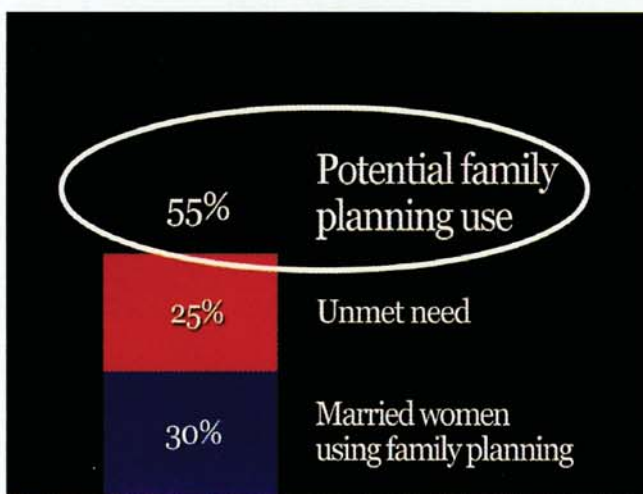
Most women who have abortions in Pakistan are age 30 or above, and they already have three or more children.<sup>6</sup>

The two most common reasons for seeking an abortion are that couples already have the number of children they want and that it would be very difficult to afford another child.



Why are so many couples turning to abortion instead of using family planning to prevent these unplanned pregnancies?

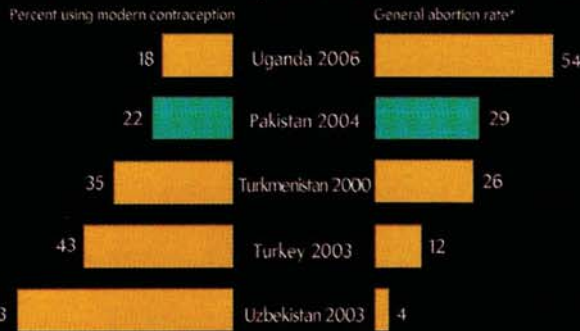
Many couples who opted for an abortion said they didn't believe contraceptives were effective and felt that they had detrimental side effects. In some cases, women reported that their husbands disapproved of using family planning. Another reason was cost. Although the cost of an induced abortion was high, it was a one-time expense, and one that couples felt more comfortable managing. All of these issues are further compounded by inadequate services.<sup>7</sup>



One of the objectives of the new draft of the Population Policy of Pakistan is increasing family planning use to 70 percent by the year 2025.<sup>8</sup>

If Pakistan could fulfill the unmet need for family planning, it could increase family planning use to 55 percent, and this would also reduce the number of abortions by preventing unplanned pregnancies.<sup>9</sup>

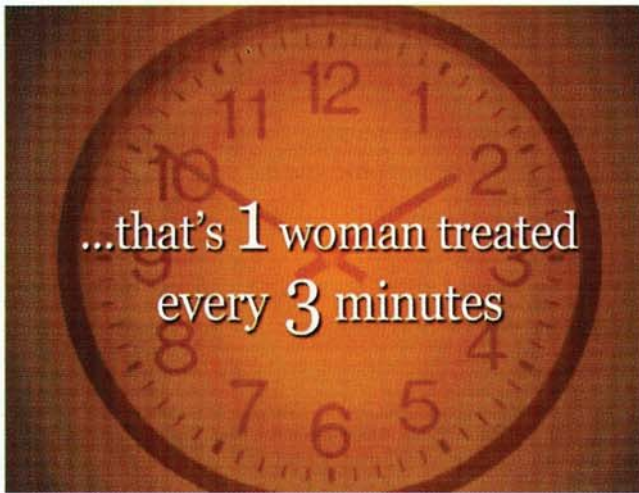
## Modern Contraceptive Use and Abortion



\*The number of abortions per 1,000 women ages 15-44 or 15-49

Comparing family planning and abortion across several countries, one can see that as the percent of women using modern contraception increases, the general abortion rate does go down.<sup>10</sup>

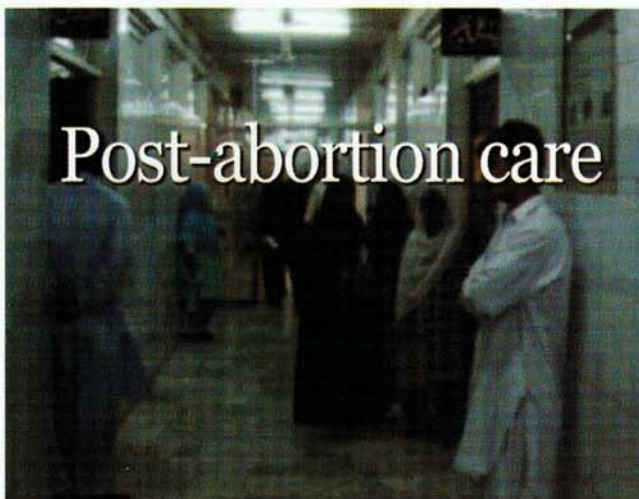
Pakistan stands out with a relatively low level of family planning use and a relatively high rate of abortion.



Because most abortions in Pakistan are unsafely performed, almost 200,000 women are treated in hospitals every year due to complications.<sup>11</sup>

That means a woman is treated for post-abortion complications every three minutes. And there are many more cases that do not reach hospitals.

Not only do unsafely performed abortions have an impact on women's health, but they also place a burden on the healthcare system, which is not adequately equipped to handle so many cases.



Consequently, the quality of care provided for post-abortion complications is poor due to inadequate training, limited female staff, and lack of equipment.<sup>12</sup>

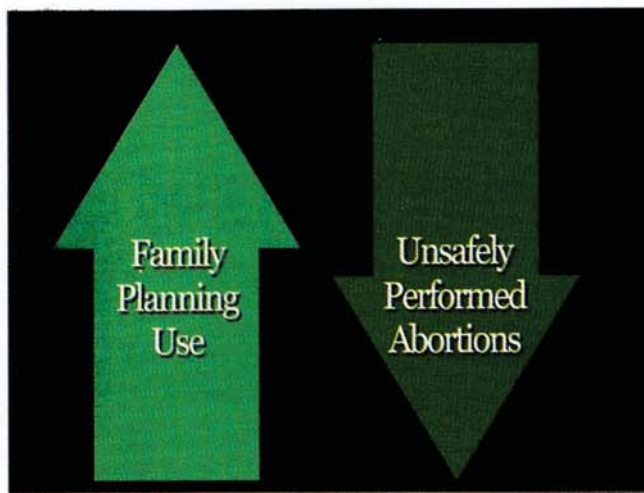
Most providers who perform abortion-related services do not use newer and safer methods recommended by the WHO, such as manual vacuum aspiration and medication abortion, which are less invasive.<sup>13</sup>

# Current abortion law

Pregnancy can be terminated if carried out in good faith during the early stages of pregnancy in order to save the life of a woman or to provide “necessary treatment”

Clearly there are gaps in implementation, but we can do better.

It is important that women have access to abortion-related services when the need arises in accordance with the law, so women do not suffer from death and disability due to complications from unsafely performed abortions.



Additionally, by increasing the use of family planning, Pakistan could meet the needs of couples who would like to plan and space their children.

And this would significantly reduce the number of unsafely performed abortions taking place every year.



Pakistan has made some progress in increasing family planning use and meeting women’s desires to limit their family size, but not enough and not nearly as much as other Asian countries.

In Indonesia and Iran, over 50 percent of women are using modern family planning, and they are having between 2 and 3 children each, while in Pakistan, only 22 percent of women are using modern family planning, and they are still having 4 children each.<sup>14</sup>

Iran and Indonesia have progressed further because they made a political commitment and financial investment towards family planning.



What does the future look like for Pakistan?

By investing in proven and effective interventions, like family planning and abortion-related services, we can improve the health of Pakistan's families, and keep future generations on the rise.

### Recommended Actions

- Expand access to family planning services, especially in rural areas by using our outreach workers more effectively.
- Ensure that more facilities are equipped to provide newer and safer methods for abortion-related services.
- Engage men as clients, partners, fathers, and agents of change for family planning and abortion-related services. One way to do this is by ensuring that couples receive adequate counseling from providers, especially about modern family planning methods.

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- <sup>1</sup> Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2006-2007.
- <sup>2</sup> Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2006-2007.
- <sup>3</sup> Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2006-2007.
- <sup>4</sup> Estimating the Incidence of Abortion in Pakistan, *Studies in Family Planning*, 2007, 38(1).
- <sup>5</sup> Estimating the Incidence of Abortion in Pakistan, *Studies in Family Planning*, 2007, 38(1).
- <sup>6</sup> Unwanted Pregnancy and Post-abortion Complications in Pakistan: Findings from a National Study, October 2004, Population Council.
- <sup>7</sup> Unwanted Pregnancy and Post-abortion Complications in Pakistan: Findings from a National Study, October 2004, Population Council.
- <sup>8</sup> Draft of National Population Policy 2010.
- <sup>9</sup> Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2006-2007.
- <sup>10</sup> Demographic and Health Surveys; Unintended Pregnancy and Induced Abortion in Uganda: Causes and Consequences, Guttmacher Institute; Estimating the Incidence of Abortion in Pakistan, *Studies in Family Planning*, 2007, 38(1); DHS Analytical Studies 8: Recent Trends in Abortion and Contraception in 12 Countries, 2005; Legal Abortion Worldwide: Incidence and Recent Trends, *International Family Planning Perspectives*, 2007, 33(3).
- <sup>11</sup> Estimating the Incidence of Abortion in Pakistan, *Studies in Family Planning*, 2007, 38(1).
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- <sup>13</sup> Unwanted Pregnancy and Post-abortion Complications in Pakistan: Findings from a National Study, October 2004, Population Council; Safe Abortion: Technical and Policy Guidance for Health Systems, World Health Organization.
- <sup>14</sup> Demographic and Health Surveys; World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision.

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The ENGAGE Project is implemented by the National Committee for Maternal and Neonatal Health in collaboration with the Population Reference Bureau.