CENTER ON GENDER EQUITY AND HEALTH

The state of postpartum contraceptive use in India: Descriptive lessons from nationally representative survey data

April **2025**

Postpartum contraception (PPC) is a key tool to delay or prevent subsequent pregnancy after birth. Though increasing the use of PPC has been the target of a number of policy initiatives both globally and within India, the postpartum user journey – deciding whether and what method to use, when to start, whether to switch methods, and whether to stop – is less well understood. Better understanding of when, how, and why contraception is used postpartum can inform more specific and person-cetnered interventions, policies, and support for women to exercise agency over their contraceptive decisions and ultimately achieve their reproductive goals.

Objective

We sought to examine the continuum of PPC use among women in India – including whether and when women start using, how long they use, when and why they switch methods or stop using contraception all together, and what characteristics are associated with these dynamic behaviors.

Methods

This study used nationally representative survey data from India, gathered in 2019-21 as part of the National Family and Health Survey. This survey asked women between the ages of 15-49 about their monthly contraceptive use in the five years prior to being interviewed. We analyzed these responses for the 149,518 women who gave birth in the one to five years prior to the survey. We used this data to calculate a range of measures of dynamic contraceptive use during the first year postpartum. We also examined sociodemographic and birth factors associated with PPC use using multivariate logistic regression models, and examined patterns of postpartum utilization for two populations of interest - adolescent mothers age 15-19 and first-time mothers.

Fig 1: PPC use by month postpartum, any method

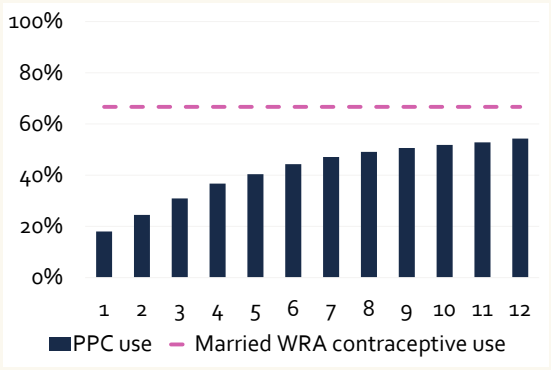
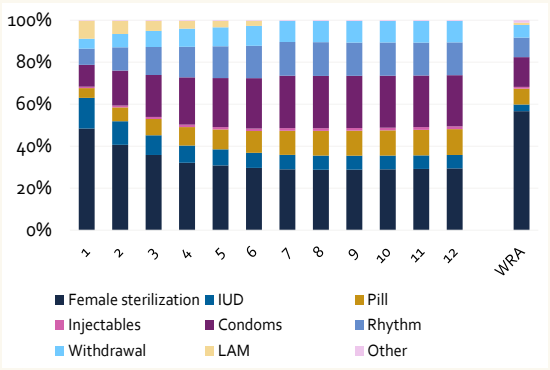


Fig 2: Method mix by month postpartum



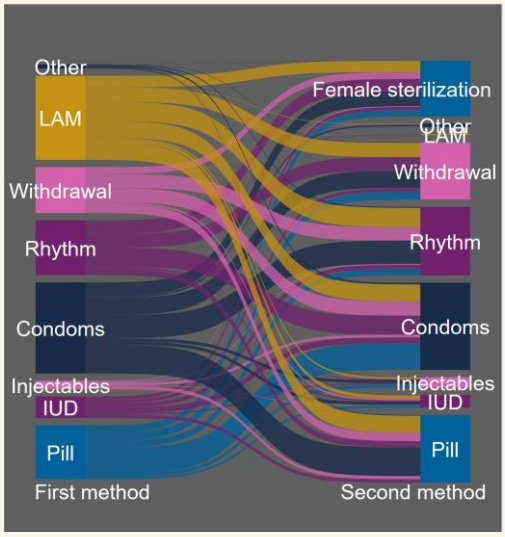
This brief summarizes findings from the following research paper: Johns NE, Singh A, Ambast S, Bhan N, Hay K, Patwardhan V, and McDougal L. The state of postpartum contraceptive use in India: Descriptive lessons from nationally representative survey data. *Reproductive Health* 22.1 (2025): 39.

Key Findings

PPC use increases over time but remains relatively low. 59% of Indian women used a method of contraception within the first year postpartum (Fig 1). Use increased from month 1 (18%) to month 12 (54%), though it remained below use rates for married women of reproductive age (WRA) generally (67%).

PPC method mix changes markedly over the first year postpartum. Among PPC users, condoms (17%) and female sterilization (15%) were the most commonly used methods, though the method mix varied substantially by month (Fig 2). Postpartum women were more likely to use reversible methods of contraception (particularly condoms, pill, rhythm method, and withdrawal) compared to the general population.

Fig 3: Contraceptive method switching within first year postpartum

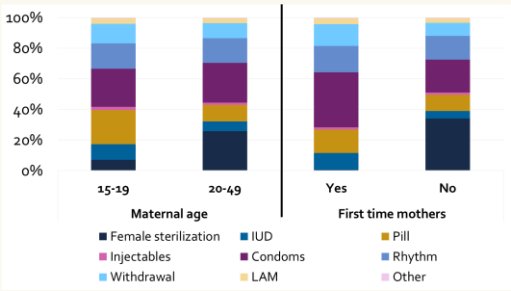


PPC use is dynamic. 9% of women who used PPC switched methods within the first year; most commonly switching from lactational amenorrhea (in part due to the time-limited nature of the method; Fig 3) and condoms. In addition to switching, 19% of PPC users stopped using contraception entirely, and 5% had another pregnancy within the first year postpartum.

Who uses PPC? A number of sociodemographic and birth factors are associated with PPC use, though these associations differed by specific method. Higher education, greater household wealth, higher parity, antenatal care visits, and facility delivery were all associated with greater likelihood of PPC use overall.

PPC use differs by subpopulation. Patterns of use – including initiation, method mix, and subsequent pregnancy - differed meaningfully for adolescent and first-time mothers (Fig 4). Both groups were less likely to use any PPC than their counterparts – driven largely by lower use of female sterilization - though were more likely to use pills or IUDs; both groups were also more likely to become pregnant again within a year.

Fig 4: PPC method mix by maternal age and first-time parent status



Conclusions and Implications

Postpartum contraceptive use is **highly dynamic**. This suggests limited value of static contraceptive use indicators and targets, whether for program planning or as measures of success. Because there is so much change in contraceptive utilization in the first year after birth, this time period presents a **unique opportunity to engage women in contraceptive decision-making** and ensure that they are able to exercise their agency in whether, when, and how to use contraception. Ultimately, these findings highlight **the need to center and to improve women's agency, empowerment, and access to contraception** throughout the full postpartum period in order to support women in achieving their reproductive and broader goals.

Suggested Citation: Johns NE, Singh A, Ambast S, Bhan N, Hay K, Patwardhan V, and McDougal L. 2025. The state of postpartum contraceptive use in India: Descriptive lessons from nationally representative survey data. San Diego, USA & Mumbai, India. GENDER Project, Center on Gender Equity and Health University of California and International Institute for Population Sciences.