

## Men must be involved more in family planning

The 11th report of the Common Review Mission of the National Health Mission (NHM), which was released on Monday, has once again pointed out that the entire burden of family planning continues to be on Indian women and men are loath to participate in it. The latest NHM data shows that women account for more than 93% of sterilisations in the country, even though male sterilisation is safer, quicker and easier. There are several reasons for the apathy of Indian men towards contraception: a lack of awareness of sexual and reproductive matters; a paucity of knowledge about appropriate contraceptive methods; myths and misconceptions (sterilisation leads to loss of virility); and poor access to services, information and counselling on available methods of contraception, their benefits and side effects and management. Moreover, health workers at the village level are usually women and they find it difficult to discuss the socio-culturally sensitive issue with men.

A recent United Nations report says India's population will go beyond 1.44 billion by 2024, and we will overtake China as the most populous country in the world. Although India's fertility rate, which measures the number of children born to a woman, has fallen from 4.97 during 1975-80 to 2.3 in the current 2015-2020 period, India needs to do a lot more for population stabilisation. In 2017, the Union health ministry initiated a fresh push to revive family planning measures, and the ministry of women and child development wanted a shift in focus from female sterilisation to male sterilisation. The draft National Policy for Women says that "a gender transformative health strategy which recognises women's reproductive rights with shifts such as family planning focus from female sterilisation to male sterilisation will be developed and utilised".

While the PMO nod for the policy has not come yet, there must not be any delay in beginning a countrywide campaign to promote the adoption of vasectomy, including strategies to break gender stereotypes, dispel myths and position men as responsible partners. The government should also explore incentives, which can play an important role in sterilisation. More important, male sterilisation services, which are at present inadequate, must be improved across the country.

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