

IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON UPTAKE OF FAMILY PLANNING SERVICES IN FAMILY PLANNING CLINICS OF KORANGI, KARACHI”

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

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Family planning (FP) services play a crucial role in empowering individuals and couples to make informed choices about the timing and number of children they want, promoting optimal spacing between pregnancies. These services encompass a range of information and options, including contraceptives like pills, implants, intrauterine devices, and injectables. The COVID-19 pandemic introduced significant challenges for FP services and especially the urgent need to ensure continuous access to these services despite the crisis situation. In 2019, out of 1.9 billion women of reproductive age (15-49 years), 1.1 billion expressed a need for family planning, with 842 million using contraceptive methods and 270 million facing an unmet need for contraception. Pandemic induced lockdowns have disrupted healthcare services, affecting the provision of family planning assistance. Fear of contracting the virus has led many women to avoid visiting health facilities and stay at home due to movement restrictions. Consequently, access to healthcare, particularly for FP services, has been affected. The United Nations Population Fund has issued warnings that the global number of unintended pregnancies may soar, potentially reaching up to 7 million. This projection includes estimates of 900,000 unplanned pregnancies, 1.5 million unsafe abortions, and over 3,000 birth-related deaths.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES / QUESTIONS

The primary objective of this research is to examine the effect of COVID-19 on the uptake of FP services availed by the female clients in clinics in Korangi Industrial Area in Karachi. during January 2020 to December 2020 period. The Study is also meant to assess the Satisfaction level of women clients about the quality of care of FP services provided by selected Health care providers in the Korangi area.

This would help to facilitate private health care sector by:

- 1) Adequately determine the demand dynamics of contraceptives
- 2) Help formulate and devise strategy useful for public and private sector to provide adequate FP education, awareness and services especially during the emergency situation.

MATERIALS & METHODS

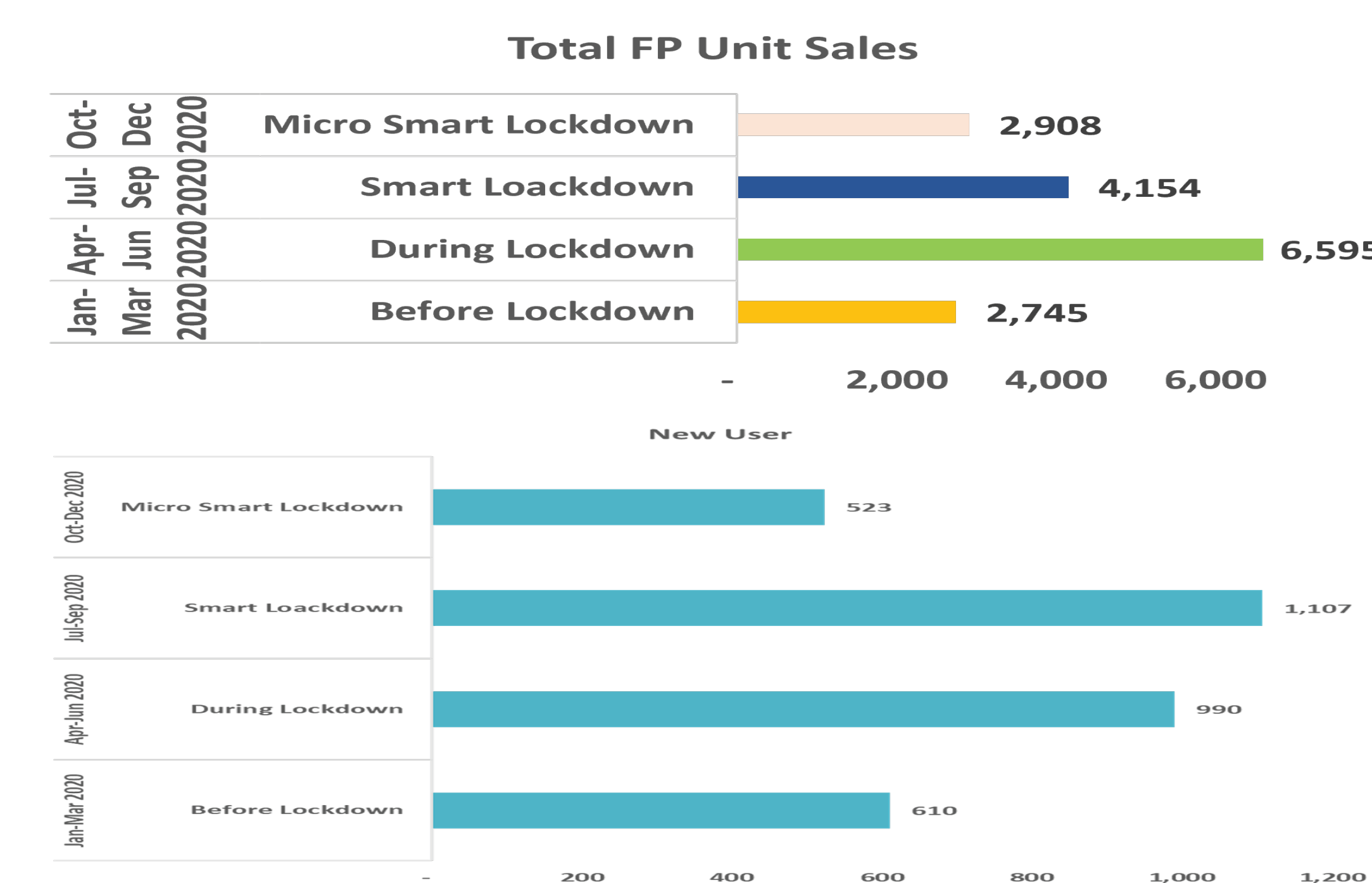
A cross-sectional study was conducted in private health care facilities in Karachi, from January till December 2020. This study was a result of accumulation and generation of a mix of primary and secondary data. Data has been distributed in 4 Stages: one, Jan-March 2020 Pre-Lockdown stage, during lockdown (April-June 2020), smart lockdown (July-September 2020) and micro-smart lockdown (Oct-Dec 2020) stages. Primary data was collected through client exit interviews from a sample of 40 clients, using a structured questionnaire to get in-depth information to gauge their satisfaction level and quality of care. Written consent was obtained prior to the interview. All respondents were married women of reproductive age (MWRA) with an average age of 30 years, with either no or very low literacy levels. Secondary data was acquired from a well-known NGO Greenstar Social Marketing, and 177 health care providers were picked from the database. This was used to see trends in FP services and uptakes via FP methods. Descriptive analysis, frequencies and percentages were conducted through SPSS software.

RESULTS

Amidst the challenges posed by COVID-19 and the associated stigmas, our study highlights the impact on women's healthcare access during lockdowns. Results indicate a significant number of patients opting to stay at home due to pandemic fears and logistical constraints. The study emphasizes the potential to save lives with necessary facilitation from both public and private sectors. In response to these challenges, the pandemic has spurred positive initiatives in family planning, necessitating innovative approaches in both public and private sectors, particularly in a developing nation like Pakistan. It is crucial to appreciate the efforts of NGOs like Greenstar Social Marketing (GSM) to address pandemic-related challenges ingeniously. This GSM study points a way forward to future planning, offering insights to reduce mortality rates during pandemics in Pakistan for eventually building a more resilient healthcare system. During Covid, 34% new clients were generated for each provider. Sales seen during the lockdown period include 40 % (6,595) and 25 % (4,154) during smart lockdown period. These sales includes injectable, IUCD, Pills and Implants.

Magnitude of client satisfaction of FP services during COVID-19

Overall, clients have expressed satisfaction with the quality of services. They appreciate efficient clinic services, particularly short waiting times due to scheduled appointments. Clients are happy with accessible helpline numbers for convenient information and counseling at home. Despite time constraints, service providers effectively communicate contraceptive methods and their side effects to female clients.



CONCLUSION

Amidst the challenges posed by COVID-19 and the associated stigmas, our study highlights the impact on women's healthcare access during lockdowns. Results indicate a significant number of patients staying home due to pandemic fears and logistical constraints. The Study emphasizes the potential to save lives with necessary facilitation from both public and private sectors. In response to these challenges, the pandemic has spurred positive initiatives in family planning, necessitating innovative approaches in both public and private sectors, particularly in a developing nation like Pakistan. It is crucial to appreciate the efforts of NGOs like GSM to address pandemic-related challenges ingeniously. This GSM study points a way forward to future planning, offering insights to reduce mortality rates during pandemics in Pakistan for eventually building a more resilient healthcare system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Practicing of Mobile Service Units to provide related care to the women of the areas in lockdown areas.
- More Helplines to provide awareness to the women and their spouses and other family members about FP benefits.
- Govt can promote FP referral numbers or their helpline number according to the area by buying ad space in utility bills since they reach out to a large number of urban and semi-urban consumers.
- Departments including related NGOs must invest in augmenting their inventory building to avoid stock-outs.
- Collaboration between National Command Operation Center (NCOC) and related NGOs.
- All Health care workers from Public and Private sectors must be impart greater amount of training so that they could perform better especially during emergency times.

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