

ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR WITH RESPECT TO SEXUAL PROMISCUITY AND FERTILITY: THE CASE OF THE BARBADIAN MALE

P. M. George, G. Edward Ebanks and Charles Nobbe

University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada

Résumé—On affirme souvent que les Antillais, ceux des classes socio-économiques inférieures en particulier, s'adonnent à la promiscuité sexuelle. Dans le cas du Barbadien, cette opinion était, en générale, soutenue mais dans une plus petite mesure qu'on avait anticipé. Les Barbadiens soutiennent l'idée de la promiscuité masculine dans une plus grande mesure que dans le cas de la promiscuité féminine. Ils acceptent leurs responsabilités en ce qui concerne la fécondité et la planification familiale. Ces conclusions sont basées sur un échantillon de plus de 600 Barbadiens interviewés en 1971.

Abstract—It is often asserted that Caribbean men, especially those of the lower socio-economic classes, are sexually promiscuous. In the case of the Barbadian male, this was in general supported, but to a lesser extent than was anticipated. These Barbadian men support the idea of male promiscuity to a larger extent than they do female promiscuity. They accept their responsibility in matters pertaining to fertility and family planning. These findings are based on a sample of over 600 Barbadian men interviewed in 1971.

Key words—Barbadian male, sexual behaviour, contraceptive pattern, promiscuity

In line with the traditional thinking, which in general, has associated fertility with women, family planning programmes all over the world from the very beginning have been female-oriented in their approach. This was true about Latin America (Hall, 1970) and the West Indies. The one-sided approach of most family planning programmes has been pointed out by several social scientists. For example, a dominant theme of the 1960 Geneva Conference was that the limited success of organized family planning programmes to that date resulted from reliance on female clinical methods (Freedman, 1965). Several social scientists have already noted the need for a more balanced approach in family planning (Harter, 1968; Chilman, 1968; Figa-Talamanga, 1972; Cernada and Huang, 1968; Stycos and Marden, 1970).

Since fertility is a product of joint action by both sexes, it is important, as Carl Harter (1968) has already noted, to direct surveys to men in order to obtain an adequate understanding of family planning. Moreover, men consider their role as an influential one in the matters regarding family planning (Hall, 1968; Stycos, et al., 1954). In fact, it has been noted in one study that if husbands and wives differ in their attitudes toward family limitation, the husband's preferences are more likely to affect the decisions made (Mitchell, 1972). It is likely that the relatively greater influence of the husbands over their wives, rather than vice versa, is limited to the so-called patriarchal societies. Within the context of the male role in limiting family size, it is important to keep in mind the rising popularity of male-oriented contraceptives such as condoms (Balakrishnan and Matthai, 1967; Hall, 1965; Adil, 1968) and the vasectomy (Krishnakumar, 1972).

The understanding of West Indian, lower-class, Negro male's sexual behaviour is often marred by both "scientific" and popular perceptions. The ideology of "machismo" has coloured both scientific and non-scientific works of Latin America as Kinzer substantiates (Kinzer, 1973). Caribbean "lady's man" is considered to be the equivalent of the Latin American "macho." Similarly, many social scientists have portrayed the sexual behaviour of

the lower class West Indian males as "promiscuous," as Rodman (1966) has noted. Thus, we get the impression that the lower class Negro male of the West Indies is interested in an "unlimited" sex life, which will continually prove his virility. Concurrently, it is suggested he is not in any way concerned with the responsibilities associated with family life and child-spacing (Clarke, 1957).

This paper examines the attitudes and behaviour of the Barbadian male with respect to sexual promiscuity. It explores also male fertility. The common assertions noted above regarding male promiscuity and fertility, which have heretofore been supported with little empirical validation, are examined in this work. The study, though based on a sample of lower socio-economic status Barbadian males may have implications for other English-speaking Caribbean societies.

Another claim that is often voiced is that Caribbean males subscribe to a double standard with respect to sexual behaviour. It is asserted that they allow themselves great freedom in sexual matters while denying women the same measure of freedom. The man can and should spread his affection freely and widely while women should remain faithful to a single male sexual partner. It is argued that this attitude is translated into action. Men are more promiscuous than women. Therefore, following this line of reasoning, it is often asserted that men in seeking unlimited sexual contacts and denying the same to women are largely responsible for the high fertility of these islands. Thus Caribbean men in addition to their promiscuity, would appear to be irresponsible in terms of contraception, procreation and child care. Arising from this is the expectation that male fertility is higher than female, especially in light of the low sex ratios which have been, due to emigration, a feature of these societies (Marino, 1970).

The aim of this paper is to probe the extent of these attitudes and behaviours utilizing survey data from a sample of lower socio-economic status Barbadian males. These attitudes and behaviours are perhaps changing under the impact of socio-economic development and a study such as this can provide a benchmark against which to measure the impending change.

I. Methodology

1.1 Sampling

The authors took a one in three systematic sample of 54 enumeration districts used for the main (female) study. The main study, carried out in 1971, was based on a probability sample, for the details of which see Ebanks, et al., (1974). No attempt was made to obtain men who were partners of the women in the main study since in a country like Barbados where visiting sex unions are highly prevalent, locating sex partners would not be an easy task. Any male between 18 and 50 years of age in the selected enumeration districts was eligible to be included in the sample. Sixteen years of age was chosen as the lower limit for females, since the males tend to enter into sex unions at higher age levels than do the females. Data were collected from 650 Barbadian men. The sample is not strictly of a probability type, being better defined as a quota sample which allows us to describe rather than explain.

1.2 Selection of interviewers

The authors discussed the need for male interviewers with some high government officials as well as the manager of the Family Planning Association of Barbados. These men knew not only the nature of the research, but also had been working with the authors as consultants for the research project. At the initial discussion, it was decided that the interviewers had to be male, over 25 years of age, highly motivated for the job, psychologically mature, capable of communicating with others, possess at least a secondary school education, and, preferably, be

married. Thus, six candidates were referred to the authors on the basis of the consultants' personal knowledge of the candidates. All the candidates had worked as enumerators for the government, so they were somewhat familiar with the processes of field work and data collection.

Before the interviewing started, the candidates were asked to go through the entire questionnaire to make certain that they understood the nature of the information requested, and that they would not hesitate to collect the kind of personal information that was requested from the male interviewees. During the interview, the authors gave particular attention to the potential interviewers' emotional stability, level of motivation, ability to create a climate of trust and communication skills. On the basis of the impressions gathered during the interview and of the references made by the consultants, five candidates were selected.

1.3 Training of interviewers:

The goal and the rationale of the research project was explained to the interviewers thus increasing their own motivation and interest in the research project. In addition, the methodological principles (guidelines) were discussed with the interviewers. They are: (1) ethical neutrality: The interviewers were emphatically told that they had no right even to imply any moral judgment on the responses of the interviewees, regardless of how unethical some of the responses might sound. The inhibiting nature of the interviewers' moral judgments on the responses of those being interviewed was emphasized. (2) Confidentiality: The interviewers were asked not to disclose the personal information collected from the people to anyone except the authors of the study. The confidential nature of the respondents' material was emphasized; not even the spouses of the interviewees were to have access to the privileged information. (3) Motivation: It was explained that people have to be motivated to disclose personal information. In other words, the interviewers had to earn the trust and respect of their interviewees. Some suggestions were given to motivate people, such as emphasizing that the information collected in no way would reach the government of Barbados. It was essential to stress the non-governmental role of the investigation, particularly since the interviewers were government employees. (4) Consistency: The interviewers were alerted to pay special attention to some of the areas (e.g., attitudes and behaviours) where contradictions could easily occur and be discovered.

1.4 Collection of data:

Questionnaires were handed out to the interviewers in small quantities (no more than five at a time) to ensure frequent contacts with the authors who supervised them. A daily check was made to ensure the quality of data. Thus, we were able to "reconstruct" or "correct" a significant amount of information with the aid of the interviewers who were still very familiar with the information gathered. Under each interviewer's name, an account was kept regarding the quality of his work. A relative rank order on the quality of work was established. As a result, "poor" interviewers were forced out with the result that most qualified interviewers did the major bulk of the interviewing.

In general, Barbadian men (both the respondents and the interviewers) were found to be quite open when discussing the topic of sex with other men. This was, in part, due to the educational work done by the Barbados Family Planning Association. Thus, the interviews resulted, for all practical purposes, in a "smooth" interaction.

II. Socio-Demographic Characteristics

First, in this section the male sample is compared with the female sample and then with the 1970 Barbadian male population derived from the 1970 Census of Population. Thus, we

TABLE 1. COMPARISON AMONG THE BARBADIAN MALE SAMPLE, THE 1970 MALE POPULATION AND THE FEMALE SAMPLE ON AGE, EDUCATION, RURAL-URBAN RESIDENCE, SEX-UNION STATUS, AND RELIGION

(a) Age	Male Sample	1970 Barbadian Male Population	Female Sample
	%	%	%
18-19	12.0	13.3	11.1
20-24	28.3	25.5	24.8
25-29	14.5	14.8	15.7
30-34	13.7	12.4	12.7
35-39	9.9	11.1	12.3
40-44	11.1	11.7	13.8
45-49	10.5	11.2	9.6
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	593	38,674	3,802
(b) Education			
Primary	59.6		59.3
Secondary and above	40.4	NA	40.7
TOTAL	100.0		100.0
N	628		4,110
(c) Residence			
Urban	63.1	67.2	69.3
Rural	36.9	38.8	30.7
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	628	110,470	4,170
(d) Sex Union Status			
Legal (married)	27.1		33.2
Non-Legal domiciliary (common-law)	19.7	NA	17.7
Non-Legal, non- domiciliary (visiting)	29.0		25.6
None (single)	24.2		23.5
TOTAL	100.0		100.0
N	628		4,186
(e) Religion			
Anglican	63.3	54.2	51.5
Roman Catholic	6.4	3.6	5.3
Others	30.3	42.2	43.2
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	548	110,470	3,965

can examine the representativeness of the sample and give some perspective to the ensuing discussion.

Selected socio-demographic characteristics for variables available also in the 1970 Census are shown in Table 1. The age distributions of the above three groups are roughly comparable, with the exception of percentage differences occurring in the age-group 20-24. The correspondence between female and male samples on education is much closer although census data were not available. By dichotomizing residence into urban and rural it is seen that the differences are small for the three groups. Small differences are also observable between the males and females when their present sex union status is considered. The greatest differences among the three groups are indicated when comparisons are made with regard to religious affiliation. The male sample is over-represented among Anglicans and Roman Catholics and under-represented among the other religions. Overall, however, it seems reasonable to conclude that our male respondents make up a fairly representative group of lower socio-economic status Barbadian males. In Table 2 information regarding income per month is presented. The average monthly income for the sample is considerably below the national average. The national average according to the 1970 Census, is above \$250, whereas the average for the sample is less than \$200. These provide further evidence for the assertion that the male sample is drawn from the lower levels of the socio-economic status hierarchy.

TABLE 2. MONTHLY INCOME OF THE MALE RESPONDENTS

Income Per Month	%
\$100 or less	9
\$101-150	29
\$151-200	30
\$201-300	18
\$301 or over	14
TOTAL	100
N	628

III. Analysis of Data

3.1 Sexual promiscuity

Although many social scientists have portrayed the sexual behaviour of the lower class Negro male as "promiscuous," (e.g., Rodman, 1966; and Schlesinger, 1968) findings here question these claims. To the question, "Some men go around with more than one woman at a time. Has this ever been true in your case?" 43 per cent said "yes," whereas 57 per cent said "no." In other words, the majority have not been sexually promiscuous. Moreover, an overwhelming majority of men are against both male and female sexual promiscuity. However, it is quite clear from the data presented in Table 3 that men are far more against female promiscuity than they are against male promiscuity. This finding remains basically unchanged even when the study controlled for age, union status, and education of the respondents. Similar findings are noted in the West Indies by many (Clarke, 1957; Rodman, 1971). This might very well be true about other parts of the world too. The sexual behaviour of the men was found

TABLE 3. PERCENTAGE OF THE MALE RESPONDENTS WHO APPROVE OF PROMISCUITY AMONG MEN AND WOMEN BY PRESENT UNION STATUS, AGE AND EDUCATION OF THE MALE RESPONDENT

(a) Union Status	O.K. For Men	O.K. For Women	N
Married	22	5	170
Common-Law	22	1	124
Visiting	34	1	182
Single	30	6	152
(b) Age			
<19	36	6	83
20-24	29	2	168
25-29	33	2	86
30-34	25	2	81
35-39	20	2	59
40-44	29	3	66
45-50	17	5	83
(c) Education			
Primary	28	3	371
Secondary	28	3	240

consistent with their anti-promiscuity views. Seventy-seven per cent of men in the sample have impregnated only one woman or none. Thus, there is no reason to believe that the Barbadian men are out to produce an undue number of offspring to prove their virility.

In any society in which 43 per cent of the adult males admit to sexual promiscuity, however, one can, in spite of the absence of comparable data from other societies, conclude that this represents a departure from the Western ideal of monogamous relationship. A double standard emerges when we look at that of which these men approve and hence what is normative. Only 27 per cent of these males approve of men engaging in more than one sexual relationship at the same time, yet 43 per cent of them have engaged in more than one such sexual relationship concurrently. This type of contradiction is generally resolved by those who deviate from the societal norms through rationalizing that particular or unique circumstances justify their behaviour. The argument generally runs as follows, "Oh well, in my case it is different since. . . ." The above-noted inconsistency was seen also by other social scientists working in the West Indies (Blake 1961; Nag, 1971).

Two culturally accepted norms with regard to the above inconsistency should be noted. First, being "unfaithful to one's partner" does not have quite the same meaning in the West Indian context (Greenfield, 1966) as it does in the context of Western culture. That is, a male's lack of fidelity to his partner is not as serious in the West Indian society as it is in the Puritan-influenced Western culture. Secondly, Barbados has been a meeting place of two cultural traditions — the African and the Western. This results in unique inconsistency patterns between values and behaviour.

3.2 Contraceptive knowledge, attitudes and practice

Various studies have already indicated that the man's position is, in general, favourable to the problem of limiting family size. For example, men tend to want smaller families than

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TABLE 4a. NUMBER OF CHILDREN CONSIDERED FOR AN IDEAL FAMILY
BY THE RESPONDENTS

<u>Number of Children</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
0	79
1	43
2	182
3	144
4	91
5	10
6	14
7	1
8+	9
<hr/>	
Total	573
Mean	2.47

TABLE 4b. NUMBER OF CHILDREN THEIR PARTNER WOULD LIKE TO HAVE
ACCORDING TO THE RESPONDENTS

<u>Number of Children</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
0	39
1	17
2	125
3	99
4	59
5+	30
<hr/>	
Total	369
Mean	2.72

women (Blake, 1970; Division of Statistics, Government of Morocco, 1970). From Table 4a, it is clear that the men in Barbados consider a small family the ideal. Most of them desire a family of three or less than three children. The average for the sample is 2.47, an average which is slightly less than the 2.60 of the female sample. It is important to note here that the ideal held by the Barbadian men is lower than the number of children they think their female counterpart would like to have. According to Table 4b, the average number of children they think their partners would like to have is 2.72 which is slightly above the 2.60 given by the women themselves. Moreover, the general attitude of the men toward birth control is highly favourable. Out of the 626 men, 79 per cent favour, 13 per cent are neutral and eight per cent oppose the use of birth control.

Though the men, in general, have favourable attitudes toward fertility control, this does not mean that they are in favour of it regardless of the birth control methods employed. For example, there is widespread disapproval of abortion. Out of the 628 men, only six per cent approve of abortion, whereas 64 per cent are against and 30 per cent are ambivalent. The above-noted general disapproval of abortion as a birth control method is consistent with the findings regarding the attitude of Blacks in the United States (Furstenburg, 1972). The general

disapproval of abortion is likely to be related to the typical family structure in the Black community of Barbados, a structure which easily accommodates the so-called illegitimate or unwanted children. Perhaps, even more important is the "unhealthy" or "unsuccessful" experience (direct or indirect) which the lower class people have had with illegal abortion.

The men in Barbados are strongly against vasectomy. Ninety-three per cent of the men would not undergo a vasectomy. They are not, in general, in favour of their wives (partners) being sterilized either. Only 17 per cent of the 514 men would permit their wives to be sterilized. As expected, they are more in favour of their wives undergoing a tubal ligation than themselves undergoing sterilization. It is very likely that their very strong disapproval of vasectomy is related to their misconceptions about it. A sizeable minority does not know that vasectomies are possible while a sizeable majority does not believe that a normal sex life is possible after a vasectomy. Only 53 per cent of the men believe that vasectomies are possible and only 40 per cent believe that a normal sex life is possible after a vasectomy. This finding is no doubt a reflection of the female-oriented approach of the Barbados Family Planning Association.

It has been noted that men are highly knowledgeable about contraceptives (Stycos, et al., 1954; The Government of Morocco, 1970; Roberts, et al., 1965). In the sample, only 56 men out of 614 did not know any method of contraception. The average number of contraceptive methods is 3.49. As expected, the male-oriented method, condom, is the most well known method followed by vaginal methods, pill, IUD, volitional methods (withdrawal, abstinence and rhythm), sterilization, diaphragm, and injection (refer to Table 5). The men tend to know less about the newer and more reliable methods, a finding which is likely to be the result of the lower class men being less in touch with the middle class-oriented medical profession.

TABLE 5. CONTRACEPTIVE KNOWLEDGE OF THE RESPONDENTS

<u>Methods</u>	<u>Known</u>		<u>Don't Know</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	<u>N</u>	<u>(%)</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>(%)</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>(%)</u>
Condom	496	(81)	119	(19)	615	(100)
Vaginal Methods	450	(74)	162	(26)	612	(100)
Diaphragm	142	(23)	471	(77)	613	(100)
Rhythm, abstinence, withdrawal	201	(33)	412	(67)	613	(100)
IUD	200	(33)	413	(67)	613	(100)
Pill	397	(65)	216	(35)	613	(100)
Injection	70	(11)	542	(89)	612	(100)
Sterilization	159	(26)	454	(74)	613	(100)

The active participation of men in the limitation of their family is well documented (Mitchell, 1972; Hall, 1965). The majority of men in the sample (57 per cent) have taken precautions to avoid pregnancy. The contraceptive knowledge is closely related to practice. The condom, which is the most known method, is also the most used method (51 per cent) by the men. In their popularity of use, the condom is followed by vaginal methods (31 per cent) and withdrawal (11 per cent). The other methods are used very seldom. Moreover, among the 360 men who have purchased contraceptives, an overwhelming majority of them, 263 (73 per cent) have purchased them from a drug store, whereas only 79 (22 per cent) have received them

from a family planning clinic. The remaining five per cent obtained them from other sources. It is clear that relatively more male-oriented approaches should be taken by the Barbados Family Planning Association, as in the case of most family planning associations in the world, if fertility is to be drastically controlled.

3.3 Fertility

The men in the sample are responsible for, on the average, 2.4 pregnancies and 2.1 live births. Excluding the men who have not so far begun reproduction, the remaining 383 are responsible for an average of 3.4 pregnancies and the 364 men who are fathers of living children have an average of 3.3 living children. The men in marital unions have an average of 3.6 living children and are responsible for an average of 3.8 pregnancies (Table 7). They are followed by the common-law men, then visiting, and then the single men. This is similar in pattern to the well documented relationship between sex union types and fertility among Caribbean women.

As would be expected, fertility increases with age. Men in the age group 45-50 are responsible for 4.6 pregnancies and four live births. Their fertility though not low is not high either, and represents what is happening to societal fertility. In spite of the apparent promiscuity of the Barbadian males their fertility is not unusually high.

The significance of one's education in fertility control is clear from the data presented in Table 6. Though more men with higher education (secondary school level) have been involved

TABLE 6. PERCENTAGE OF MEN REPORTING a) BEING SEXUALLY INVOLVED WITH MORE THAN ONE WOMAN AT THE SAME TIME AND b) HAVING MORE THAN ONE WOMAN PREGNANT BY HIM AT THE SAME TIME BY PRESENT UNION STATUS, AGE AND EDUCATION OF THE MALE RESPONDENT

(a) Union Status	More than one woman at the same time		More than one woman pregnant at the same time	
	%	N	%	N
Married	38	170	7	170
Common-law	42	124	14	124
Visiting	47	182	4	182
Single	46	152	1	151
(b) Age				
< 19	34	83	4	82
20-24	47	168	1	168
25-29	51	86	9	86
30-34	43	81	9	81
35-39	48	59	5	59
40-44	44	66	9	66
45-50	35	83	10	83
(c) Education				
Primary	40	371	7	371
Secondary	50	240	5	240

concurrently with more than one woman, fewer of them have been responsible for making more than one woman pregnant at the same time. This stands in contrast to the activities of the less educated (i.e., primary school education) men. Forty per cent of these men claimed to have been sexually involved with more than one woman at a time and seven per cent admitted having had more than one woman pregnant for them at the same time.

The females have higher fertility than the males (Table 7). The difference between male and female fertility is difficult to explain. We can only speculate that part of the fertility of the female population is due to those Barbadian males who have emigrated. Moreover, marital status and age differences between our sample of males and females and even the different degrees of representativeness of the two samples might account, to some extent, for the difference between male and female fertility on the island. In addition, it is quite likely that there is some under-reporting of fertility on the part of men in Barbados. Men who have been promiscuous may not know and/or may not want to know the exact degree of fertility for which they are responsible, whereas women cannot escape knowing the number of children born by them.

TABLE 7. AVERAGE NUMBER OF PREGNANCIES AND LIVING CHILDREN FOR BARBADIAN MALE AND FEMALE SAMPLES BY PRESENT UNION STATUS, AGE AND EDUCATION

(a) Union Status	Average Number of Pregnancies				Average Number of Living Children			
	Male Sample		Female Sample		Male Sample		Female Sample	
	\bar{X}	N	\bar{X}	N	\bar{X}	N	\bar{X}	N
Married	3.8	109	4.8	1386	3.6	169	4.3	1246
Common-law	3.2	116	4.0	742	3.0	116	3.4	689
Visiting	1.0	136	1.9	1074	0.9	135	2.5	644
Single	0.5	114	1.7	980	0.5	114	3.0	443
(b) Age								
19	0.3	56	0.6	751	0.1	55	0.4	751
20-24	0.6	125	1.5	945	0.5	125	1.3	945
25-29	1.7	80	2.9	599	1.7	80	2.5	599
30-34	2.4	75	4.3	482	2.4	75	3.6	482
35-39	3.1	56	5.1	468	3.0	56	4.2	468
40-44	4.3	63	5.3	522	3.9	63	4.2	523
45-50	4.6	78	5.5	413	4.0	78	4.2	416
(c) Education								
Primary	2.9	333	4.2	2435	2.5	333	3.4	2413
Secondary	1.8	187	1.6	1669	1.6	186	1.3	1669

IV. Summary and Conclusions

The majority of Barbadian men are not promiscuous in their sexual relations with women, though a sizeable minority have sexual relations with more than one woman at a time. The Barbadian, and for that matter the Caribbean, lower socio-economic status population might be considered promiscuous if compared with the middle and upper class values. The men do have a double standard in the sense that more men approve of promiscuity on the part of men than on the part of women. The Barbadian men, in general, have a positive attitude toward

family planning; yet they are not willing to accept any method of fertility control. Most men are not in favour of abortion or sterilization. The strong disapproval of abortion is likely to be related to the men's unpleasant experiences, direct or indirect, with non-medical abortion. Abortion is still illegal on the island and a fair number of illegal abortions are performed by "quacks." The strong disapproval of vasectomy is related to their fear that normal sex life would be impaired by such surgery. The men, in general, tend to know and practice only the less reliable methods of birth control, e.g., withdrawal, condoms, foams and jellies. The Family Planning Association in Barbados has successfully propagated the idea that people have a responsibility to limit the number of children they have. They now face the challenge of having to educate the public regarding the effectiveness of various methods of birth control.

The Barbadian lower class men appear to have lower fertility than their female counterparts. This might be mainly due to the under-reporting of fertility on the part of the lower class Barbadian men who do not know their exact fertility rate due to the relative short duration of many of their sex unions. The significance of education in controlling fertility is clear even in the case of lower class Barbadian males.

The Barbadian male like his contemporaries in the other Caribbean islands is an important factor who cannot be bypassed in studies dealing with sex, contraception and fertility. Research efforts that ignore him and programmes of fertility control addressed exclusively to females can at best be partial in their conclusions and effectiveness. It is clear that the role of the male in family planning can no longer be ignored.

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