

Vasectomy death brings into focus money involved in govt's sterilisation programme

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Vadodara, March 26 The death of a young man during a vasectomy operation in Bharuch has again brought into focus the money involved in the government's sterilisation programmes as part of its family planning initiative. The issue also rocked the state Assembly on Wednesday.

The numbers of vasectomy operations remain quite low compared to tubectomy— the female sterilisation operation, even though the financial incentive for the former is quite high as compared to the latter. A reason that leads to forced vasectomies, is the better financial incentives on offer for the health workers as also the touts.

A woman who opts for tubectomy gets Rs 600, if she is from a BPL (Below Poverty Line) family and Rs 250 otherwise. On the other hand, a man who opts for a vasectomy operation is offered Rs 1,100 by the state government irrespective of his financial status. Doctors also admit that unlike tubectomies, vasectomies are easier to perform and are also reversible.

But statistics reveal an altogether different picture. In Bharuch district, from March 2007-2008, 1265 vasectomies took place, while 7,335 tubectomies took place in government hospitals. According to a National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-III, in 2005-06, male sterilisation was just 0.6 per cent of the total contraceptive method, while female sterilisation stood at a whopping 42.9 per cent.

To remedy the situation, the policy planners felt that more money both to the man opting for the operation and the motivator — the health worker — could change the situation. A health worker gets Rs 250 for motivating a man for vasectomy, compared to Rs 150 for tubectomy.

Bharuch based social worker Ayub Vali Kara admitted that health workers or even touts force vasectomies because of the amount involved. Quite often the unsuspecting man does not even gets the full amount, with the health worker or the touts misappropriating some portion of it. N P Das, the director of Population Research Centre, M S University said that vasectomies are still resisted due to attitude problems, with quite a few fearing impotency and others believing it would lead to weakness. The reason for not accepting male methods according to District Level Household Survey (2002-04) in Gujarat, states 1.5 per cent fear method failure, 1.2 per cent fear due to impotency, 2.0 per cent lack of sexual pleasure, 2.0 per cent fear of operation, and 31.8 fear of weakness.

Mirroring the nationwide trend, Gujarat too scores quite low on vasectomies as compared to tubectomies, with women continuing to face the brunt of the family planning operations. District health officials while refusing to come on record following the Bharuch controversy admit that even the lure of money does not help much, even though there is pressure from the policy planners to increase the number of vasectomies.

Dr Rana Vats, family planning consultant, state health department says, "Under the new policy, the focus of family planning is also to reduce maternal mortality rate. In the new incentive scheme, the beneficiaries get money for medicines as well if they opt for family planning."

