

**CULTURAL BARRIERS TO BIRTH SPACING AMONG KREUNG  
INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN RATANAKIRI  
PROVINCE, CAMBODIA**



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PENCHEN SHERER, PhD., ASSIST. PROF. VEENA SIRISOOK, Dr.P.H**ABSTRACT**

The World Health Organization encourages birth spacing and family planning to improve mother's reproductive health and health of their children. This research investigated birth spacing practices among Kreung indigenous people in Tong Kropu village in Ratanakiri Province in Cambodia. This is an ethnographic study of perceptions, cultural beliefs, and social norms about birth spacing practices among people living in the Kreung community. The data collection methods were ethnographic interviews and participatory observations.

The findings suggested that Kreung women believe in birth spacing and would like to practice birth spacing. They attempted to utilize traditional remedies such as herbal drinks and local food to birth space, but they had historically been unsuccessful. Kreung women refuse to use modern contraceptive methods due to their perceived harmful side effects. The women had never actually used modern contraceptives despite their availability. Yet, they strongly perceived that the contraceptives could be fatal if they decided to use them. The *Culture of Sharing* among Kreung indigenous people is an extremely powerful cultural means that prevents Kreung women from access to modern contraceptive methods, despite their availability. Kreung women's decision to turn away from modern contraceptives resulted in their having an average of seven children per woman and an average of 18 months between each of their children. These women are between the ages of 28 – 40 years old. Some Kreung women use modern contraceptive methods, but they are socially condemned by the *Culture of Sharing*.

To achieve Millennium Development Goals, the Cambodian government must take into account its indigenous populations and their cultures. The National Reproductive Health Program must be designed to accommodate cultural differences within the country. Kreung indigenous women would like to practice birth spacing. They are willing to use modern contraceptive methods, only if the methods are introduced responsively to their indigenous cultures.

**KEY WORDS: BIRTH SPACING/ KREUNG/ CAMBODIAN INDIGENOUS  
CULTURE/ ETHNOGRAPHY/ CAMBODIA.**

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