

RESUMO - BIOÉTICA

OPENNESS TO LIFE AND FEAR: SAFETY IN ADHERENCE AND PRESCRIPTION OF NATURAL METHODS FOR CATHOLIC PHYSICIANS AND PATIENTS

Ana Victoria (anavic1902@gmail.com)

Bianca Mayumi Sediya Lelis (bianca.m.s.lelis@gmail.com)

Isabella Arruda Rodrigues (isabella.arruda27@gmail.com)

André Metzker Ferro (andremferro2@gmail.com)

Introduction: Natural family planning (NFP) is advocated by the Catholic Church for respecting the natural order of human sexuality, preserving the unitive dimension of the conjugal act and openness to life, while promoting self-knowledge and spousal communication. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines NFP as including fertility awareness-based methods, which identify the fertile window through biological markers such as cervical mucus or cycle tracking. The Billings method, based on daily cervical mucus observation, shows effectiveness rates of 97–99%. NFP use is influenced by religious beliefs and concerns about adverse effects of artificial contraception, requiring adequate counseling and respect for patient autonomy. Objective: To analyze the issue of insecurity among Catholic physicians and patients regarding the adherence to

and prescription of natural family planning methods. Methods: The descriptors “Natural Methods of Family Planning (NFP)” and “Catholic” were entered in the advanced search tab of the PubMed platform, combined using the Boolean operator “AND.” A total of 166 results were found. Eight articles were selected, which were published in the last 10 years that addressed natural methods were included, while systematic reviews and studies addressing other health conditions were excluded. Results: NFP methods demonstrate high effectiveness and may be considered when pregnancy poses maternal risk, although their success depends on self-regulation and spousal communication. Despite recognition by the WHO, NFP remains underrepresented in scientific discourse, often subsumed under broader contraceptive categories and influenced by institutional and industry partnerships. A study with Catholic obstetrician-gynecologists showed variability in practice, guided by non-maleficence or autonomy, and revealed conscience-related conflicts and fear of professional repercussions. Coping strategies included spiritual guidance, specialization, and value-aligned workplaces. Among couples, NFP use is primarily driven by moral and religious beliefs and by the absence of adverse effects, underscoring the importance of understanding patient motivations. Conclusion: This review indicates that safe adherence to NFP depends on adequate knowledge of monitoring techniques and the couple’s ability to structure their sexual life, including periods of abstinence and openness to life. Physicians’ prescribing decisions are influenced by religious and moral alignment, as well as by the perception of lower risks of adverse effects. Non-prescription is associated with conscience-related conflicts shaped by the work environment and the principle of patient autonomy. Overall, concerns among patients and healthcare professionals may be mitigated through improved technical education, strengthened physician–patient relationships, and better integration of moral values into clinical practice.

Palavras-chave: fear; natural family planning methods; treatment adherence and compliance;.