

# Women in Rajasthan Are Choosing Health Over Harmful Norms



In the heart of Rajasthan, where societal norms shape family lives, change is taking root in unexpected ways. Across villages, it is not just young women but their mothers-in-law who are stepping forward championing reproductive rights, challenging age-old expectations, and securing a healthier future for the next generation.

As we mark the launch of the 2025 State of the World Population Report, 'The Real Fertility Crisis', we honour the journeys of women like Peepon Devi, Sayar Devi, Sagar and Deshot Kanwar—women who prove that change does not skip a generation; it begins with one.

## Peepon Devi's 'Shot' at a New Beginning

Amid the golden sandstone homes of a village in Rajasthan, where courtyards open into the stillness of the desert and Khejri trees offer generous shade, 70-year-old Peepon Devi and her daughter-in-law Sayar Devi sit together, sharing a quiet laugh and looking back at a journey they once never imagined taking.

For years, life here has been playing out by an unwritten script: a woman's worth is measured by the children she bears, particularly the number of sons, while her own health is a distant afterthought. Conversations about family planning are rare, often whispered and usually delayed until the "right number" of sons arrive.



Peepon Devi had lived through those expectations herself. But when she saw Sayar Devi, barely in her twenties, already frail after the birth of two children, she knew something had to change. She remembers the silent fear in her daughter in law's eyes back then: the fear of another pregnancy too soon, the fear of being trapped in the same cycle.



So, stepping beyond the realms of social norms, Peepon Devi made her way to the village health centre, a place few women her age visited alone. There, she learned about Antara: a single injection offering three months of protection and a chance to reclaim her health. It seemed to offer exactly what Sayar Devi needed: time....time to heal, regain her strength, and focus on raising her two young children.

Determined herself and encouraged by her mother-in-law's resolve, Sayar Devi decided to take the contraceptive injection. It was not just a health decision but a small, defiant act of agency. Today, as they sit next to each other, Peepon Devi's face glows with quiet pride. She still reminds Sayar Devi of her next doses. She still guards that space they fought to carve out: a space where health and choices matters more than tradition, and love means protecting not just the family's future, but also the woman's future.

### **When Courage Found Its Way Home....**

Hundreds of kilometres away, in another village, another verandah holds the echoes of a different, but familiar, struggle.

Sagar Kanwar, 50, and her daughter-in-law, Deshot Kanwar, 33, often sit together after the evening chores, talking about how far they have come. In their community, strict customs keep daughters-in-law behind closed doors, with little access to the outside world, and even less to healthcare. Basic information about family planning rarely reaches them. One expectation remains firmly in place: women are expected to keep expanding their families.

Deshot, already a mother of two, was reluctant to undergo sterilisation. Neither she nor her mother-in-law knew of alternative contraceptive options, and hospital visits for daughters-in-law were uncommon in their community. But neither she nor Sagar knew about other contraceptive options. Seeking answers, Sagar and Deshot reached out to their local ASHA (community health worker), who introduced her to Chhaya- a contraceptive pill that women can take. It was a simple decision on the surface, but it changed everything.

Today, Deshot follows a regular Chhaya routine. There's no longer a silent cloud of anxiety hanging over her days. There's more laughter in the house, more peace in their lives, and for Sagar, there's the quiet satisfaction of having chosen empathy over empty, outdated customs.





## **Looking Beyond Old Scripts**

Rajasthan is witnessing a powerful shift. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), the modern contraceptive prevalence rate among currently married women aged 15–49 jumped from 53.5% in 2015–16 to 62.1% in 2019–21.

But behind this statistic are women, often mothers-in-law, who are leading this change. One that arrives with a grandmother's walk to the health centre. With a mother-in-law's quiet reassurance. With two women sitting side by side, choosing health over harmful tradition, choice over silence, and futures where women: daughters, daughters-in-law, mothers, can not only survive- but thrive.

These women remind us that real transformation just holds space. It sits down beside the next generation, meets their eyes, and says: you can choose differently.

## **Boilerplate**

UNFPA India is supporting the Government of India in advancing choice and rights-based contraceptive choice across the country. By enhancing the accessibility, affordability, and quality of family planning services, the aim is to contribute to the realisation of reproductive rights and empower individuals to make informed choices regarding their reproductive health.

As a co-convenor of the FP2030 partnership, UNFPA supported the development of India's FP2030 vision and is actively engaged in helping achieve the country's national commitments. A key area of support has been the expansion of the contraceptive basket. Building on this success, UNFPA is now supporting the government in the procurement and rollout of two newer contraceptive methods— Subcutaneous DMPA (SC DMPA) and subdermal implants (SD Implant), in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha, with the goal of scaling access to a wider range of options nationwide. In Rajasthan specifically, the state government—under its FP2030 commitments—has partnered with UNFPA to advance rights-based contraceptive choice, bodily autonomy and ensure marginalized communities can make informed reproductive decisions by introducing SC-DMPA and subdermal implants across multiple districts.

**[Read the full State of World  
Population Report here](#)**