

Male Involvement in Reproductive Health

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Reproductive health in its broader sense should be a concern for all, not just that of women, and reproductive health matters need the attention of the entire family and the society at large. In patriarchal society where decisions are largely made by men the need to include men in all matters that require joint spousal decisions is crucial in achieving key reproductive health goals though that is not a simple task that can be achieved in a short-run; it requires a sustained engagement and commitment by all stakeholders.

A study among married men about their contraceptive use and fertility preference by Tuloro et. al. (1) reported interesting findings concerning male involvement in family planning decisions. The report revealed that over two third of the men involved in the study claimed that they have discussed using family planning method with their spouse and over half reported joint decision making process. The report also revealed that majority of the men have supportive attitude towards contraception use and recommended to strengthen efforts to convert the positive attitudes to positive behaviors to achieve greater success in family planning programs. The study by Haile and Enqueselassie indicated couples openly discussing about family planning are more likely to be current users (2).

Reasons for involving men in reproductive health matters are multifaceted. First of all men have their own reproductive health concerns and their involvement should not be seen only as a means to achieve better women's reproductive health. Secondly, men's sexual and reproductive well being and behaviors directly affect their partner. Third, decisions on matters of reproductive health occur within relations that affect both men and women (3).

The involvement of men in reproductive health matters should be seen as an important step to

achieving key millennium development goals including reduction of maternal mortality and reducing the prevalence and impact of HIV/AIDS. Although consensus was reached on involvement of men and the policy environments generally support that notion in many countries including Ethiopia, the health service organization for reproductive health is still largely female-oriented. Much of the efforts in implementing men involvement were made by small scale programs. As more evidences indicating the effectiveness of male involvement are made available, health managers and service providers need to take measures to implement the policy and actually develop large-scale implementation programs.

In order to encourage men involvement a number of practical steps need to be implemented beginning from developing a practical implementation guide. Health awareness and communication programs need to practically engage men and also encourage health facilities to develop more men-friendly services. Health providers need to get proper orientation on the role of men involvement. Pre-service training programs need to emphasize the need for men involvement and actually demonstrate the implementation of men-friendly services in their training facilities so that trainees can acquire the theoretical understanding as well as the practical skills in promoting men involvement.

The Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey (EDHS) conducted in 2005 revealed that overall 15% of married women are using some kind of contraception, which is a significant achievement compared to the 6% in 2000. However, the fertility rate did not show significant statistical difference yet (4). It was also noted in the report that the urban fertility rate declined while the rural remained unchanged. These facts indicate the relatively better decision making power of females in urban areas as well as to better access

to family planning methods. With increasing involvement of men it might be possible to bring changes in the rural areas as well as maintaining the achievements obtained in increasing contraception use over the past several years.

A greater integration of reproductive health matters with the millennium development goals such as poverty reduction and increasing school enrollment is believed to produce synergistic effects. The involvement of the growing private sector in providing men-friendly reproductive health services can not be overemphasized but deserve due attention.

Reference

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4. FAO, WHO, ILO and UNESCO. Male involvement in reproductive health: Incorporating gender throughout the life cycle. *Technical Support Services System: Occasional Paper Series No. 1* June 1998 (available: <http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/x0257e/x0257e00.htm>).