

RESEARCH BRIEF

Involving men and boys in family planning is effective in increasing contraceptive use

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It is important to involve men and boys in ways that support women's and girls' choices, as well as men's own family planning needs

Why involve men and boys in family planning?

Around 300,000 deaths occur every year among women and girls due to childbirth or pregnancy-related complications, including unsafe abortion. Almost all these deaths occur in LMICs. Family planning is central to helping people avoid unintended pregnancy, attain their desired number of children and/or determine the spacing of pregnancies.

Involving men and boys as both users and supporters of family planning is now considered essential for maternal and child health. It is recognised that men are the primary decision-makers on family size in many countries and may control or inhibit women's use of family planning. Men may also have unmet needs in relation to family planning. Evidence on how to engage men and boys to meet family planning needs is therefore important. It is equally important that family planning programmes and services engage men and boys in ways that support women's and girls' choices, as well as men's own family planning needs.



The Research

This systematic review of programme evaluation studies is about how to enhance future programming with men and boys to better meet the needs for family planning for women and men in LMICs.

We included 127 papers which examined the effectiveness of programmes that included men and/or boys in LMICs as programme participants using experimental or quasi-experimental methods.

We also included 23 qualitative studies and process evaluations which reported why and how some programmes might have been effective.

The studies were conducted worldwide in LMICs, over half in Africa. A third of the studies were conducted on programmes that made a special effort to engage men and/or boys. Less than a quarter of the studies addressed gender inequality as part of the programme.

We used a novel method called causal chain analysis to focus on the content of interventions that may work better than others. This involved developing a picture of important programming components with stakeholders and testing how these components affect the impact of different interventions on family planning outcomes.

What is the aim of this research?

This systematic review assesses the strength of the evidence for programme interventions to involve men and boys as users and supporters of family planning. The review also aims to uncover the effective components and critical process- and system-level characteristics of successful interventions.

What are the main findings of this research?

When considered together, the programmes included in this review were effective in increasing contraceptive use. The most effective interventions are community-based educational programmes offered in schools, communities and homes or community facilities, and interventions involving multiple components, delivered by professionals, trained facilitators or peers to both males and females for more than seven months. Brief programmes of less than three months are also effective.

Added to this, implementation studies identified the importance of promoting gender-equitable attitudes and social norms for women and girls among men and women at the individual, wider family, community, health service and societal level as part of family planning programming.

Some studies also emphasised structural factors such as the importance of widening women's access to education and labour markets.

The full review has been published by the Campbell Collaboration and can be found [here](#).

What do the findings of the research mean?

A wide range of family planning interventions which involve men and boys in LMICs have been shown to increase the use of contraceptives.

The success of family planning programmes that involve men and boys is most often measured by contraceptive use to the relative neglect of other outcomes, such as met need for family planning, equitable family planning decision-making, or gender equality. Our analysis indicates some promising intervention characteristics, which are likely to make programmes more effective in promoting contraceptive use.

Our qualitative analysis also highlights the under-used strategy of addressing gender equality attitudes and norms, from the individual to the structural level.

The findings of this review will be of interest to policy makers, family planning practitioners and programme designers wanting to increase male engagement in family planning in gender-equitable ways. The review can also help in measuring programme efficacy beyond contraceptive use, to also include gender equality and met family planning needs.

Recommendations for practice and policy

- The evidence suggests that existing effective programmes of male engagement in family planning should be adapted and implemented across LMICs where there is unmet need for family planning.
- While approaches to involving men and boys in family planning are complex, the research indicates that practitioners should use multi-component programmes and choose from a variety of different components depending on the population and setting in which these will be delivered.
- Policy and practice should promote gender equity in family planning and reduce the negative impact of harmful masculinities by involving women as well as men in programmes and implementing interventions that use gender transformative elements.
- Practitioners should harness the power of positive role models by empowering trained peer mentors and facilitators and professionals to implement culturally adapted programmes. They should also use community-based educational approaches that change attitudes towards family planning among the wider social network and positively impact restrictive social and cultural norms.
- Policies that aim to improve women's education and opportunities for employment outside the home, as well as the provision of free or subsidised family planning services and contraception, would go some way towards encouraging uptake of family planning and addressing unmet need in LMICs.

