

ABSTRACT

Experience suggests that the integration of gender approaches into family planning and reproductive health programs may increase their impact and sustainability, but further work is needed to examine the interactions between gender norms and family planning and to incorporate this understanding into behavior change communication in specific social contexts. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the role of gender norms in reproductive decision-making and contraceptive use among young married men and women in Tanzania. Study methods consisted of open-ended, in-depth interviews with 30 young currently married men, 30 young married women and 12 older people who influenced family planning decisions. Six focus group interviews were also conducted. The findings suggest that gender factors, such as men's dominance in decision-making do function as barriers to the use of modern contraceptives, but that fear of side effects, by both men and women, may be even more important deterrents.



OBJECTIVES

1. Characterize the role of gender norms in reproductive health decision-making and contraceptive use
2. Make recommendations for behavior change interventions for gender-related barriers to effective FP choices in Tanzania.

METHODS

The results presented in this paper are based on in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with women and men in two sites:

- Temeke District, Dar es Salaam Region (Urban)
- Mbeya and Mwanza Regions of Tanzania (Rural)

Data Collection Plan	Site one	Site two	Site three	Total
I. In-depth interviews (72 total)				
Young married women				
Recent adopters	6	6	6	18
Never users	4	4	4	12
Young married men				
Recent adopters	6	6	6	18
Never users	4	4	4	12
Key decision-makers	4	4	4	12
II. Focus group interviews (6 total)				
Women	1	1	1	3
Men	1	1	1	3

FINDINGS

Definitions

Masculinity



- Head of the household
- Provider for the family
- Able to have sex and satisfy a woman
- Able to have children
- Able to participate in society

Femininity



- Supporter of the husband
- Caregiver of the family
- Able to have children
- Respondents spoke about the economic roles women were increasingly taking on

Perceptions about contraceptives

- Perceived side effects: caused cancer, weight gain or loss, continuous bleeding or total stoppage of periods, barrenness, and could get lost in the body (implant)
- Fear of side effects main reason for not adopting contraceptives
- Strong stigma attached to condoms and rarely used among married couples

Couple communication

- Common for husbands and wives to discuss family
- Men were final decision-makers on contraceptive use (for/against)
- Low likelihood for women to use contraceptives in secret?

"[Telling my wife to use contraceptives] was a command, not a request. I told her that it was a must for us to use it." – male user

"She did not question me nor ask the reason why [I wanted 4 children]. She told me that I'm the one who makes the decisions and that she cannot decide anything for me." – male non-user

Gender Norms

Sex

- Men need sex more than women
- Men decide when to have sex
- A woman should not refuse to have sex with her husband

Childbearing and family size

- Only when a man/woman has a child is he/she 'complete'
- A real man has many children
- Large families give men social prestige

Communication and decision-making

- The man makes the final decision in the household
- It is disrespectful for a woman to disagree with her husband
- A woman should obey her husband
- The man decides family size and spacing

Contraceptive use

- The man decides whether or not to use family planning
- A woman should not use family planning without her husband's consent, and should not use FP in secret
- Women who want to use contraceptives want to have affairs
- Men who use condoms are having affairs

Violence against women

- It is alright for a man to beat his wife if she refuses to have sex with him
- It is alright for a man to beat his wife if she disagrees with or speaks rudely to him
- It is alright for a man to beat his wife if she uses contraceptives secretly

DISCUSSION

- Gender functions as barrier to contraceptive use in combination with other factors
- Men's dominance in decision-making only a barrier to contraceptive use insofar as men want large families
- Fears about side effects more powerful deterrent to contraceptive use than inequalitarian gender norms

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Interventions should address BOTH inequalitarian gender norms AND fears and misconceptions of contraceptives
- Targeted interventions to reach men and women with information on modern contraceptive methods
- Strengthen capacity of clinics and other sources of contraception to provide accurate information



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