

Men's interpretation of traditional and religious beliefs in support of family planning

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Introduction

Traditional beliefs have been used in many communities in Africa, especially by men to justify their lack of support for their partners to go for family planning. Fortunately, in these same communities, there are some men – though very few – who are found to be supporting their partners to take up family planning. We therefore, in this study, set out to determine how these selected men interpret these religious and traditional beliefs to support their partners to go for family planning in their communities.

Methodology

We conducted 18 in-depth interviews (IDIs) with men 15-54 years old who supported their partners to use modern contraception. Men were from four rural communities in Upper East and Upper West provinces. The IDIs were part of a community-based participatory research project. Participants were recruited by a local non-governmental organization (NGO) partner and with the help of a community advisory board (CAB) comprised of representatives from the communities involved in the research. The interviewers were men from the communities who were selected by the CAB and then trained by the researchers and NGO. Criteria for inclusion included written assent or consent, age and marital status. IDIs took place in a location with auditory privacy in local languages using a semi-structured interview guide.

The IDIs lasted approximately one hour and were tape recorded, transcribed and translated into English. The methods and procedures were approved by the Allendale Investigational Review Board, Allendale, USA and the Ethical Review Committee of the Ghana Health Service. All transcripts were read in English for initial code identification. After reading the transcripts, a codebook was created with codes and their definitions. All transcripts were uploaded to Atlas.ti and coded using the codebook. Codes were grouped into themes.

Preliminary results:

For men who support their partners for family planning, the argument is that traditional religion is not clear on family planning. For them since ancestors are called upon for good health the support for family planning is in order as it promotes good health especially for the children and the mother. As one man put it, "Tradition doesn't really say anything about family planning but when we pour libation, we ask for good health for our children and the whole family." Another added, "Since our grandfathers didn't know about family planning as it is now, they could not have taught us any taboos on it"

Conclusions

Religious and traditional considerations underpin reproductive health decisions of most men in our society, especially the rural communities, making lots of men not supporting their partners for family planning. This study has shown that these same religious and traditional beliefs can be used to promote support for use of family planning. Programs can develop messages and IEC materials targeting men from these findings for midwives to use in their health promotions.