

Effectiveness of Available Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) Materials for Male Involvement in Reproductive Health

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BACKGROUND

Male involvement in sexual and reproductive health is key to ensuring the well-being of men and their partners and children; and it contributes to prevention of HIV and AIDS infection.

STUDY OBJECTIVE

The objective was to obtain men's views regarding the available Information, Education, and Communication materials which target men. These views will inform the communication approaches to improve men's sexual and reproductive health.

ANALYSIS DESIGN AND METHODS

- 15 focus-group discussions were conducted in 3 provinces (North West, Mpumalanga, and Free State) with 118 men ages 18–74.
- The groups contained 51% unemployed men including pensioners and church elders, 43% employed including professionals and self-employed, and 6% students. Most men were able to read and write in their own languages.
- Themes discussed included sexual and reproductive health awareness and knowledge, men's perception of HIV risk, multiple concurrent partnerships, voluntary counseling and testing, prevention of mother-to-child transmission, antiretroviral treatment, care and support for men, and condom use.
- The effectiveness of available materials was assessed by questions concerning men's current knowledge, practices, and beliefs; the sources of information; and the types of communication that could encourage behavior change.

RESULTS

The findings indicate that there are limited IEC materials specifically targeting men, hence the limited awareness of their own reproductive and sexual health needs, PMTCT, and ART. Many men indicated that general information regarding HIV and AIDS is available in the media and at health centers. However, men frequently perceive that information found at health centers is targeted to women. This finding highlights that most public health facilities do not cater to men's reproductive health needs. Awareness and knowledge of condom use for pregnancy and HIV prevention was high, however; men also reported that practices are influenced by social issues such as alcohol abuse and partner expectations. The findings were supported by some of the following statements made by the participants:

PERCEPTION OF HIV RISK

Alcohol and not being able to control your alcohol intake. The same girl you ignore when you walk into the bar would be the same girl you walk out of the bar with. —man in North West

After seeing an exotic dance in a club, you then desire a woman and end up taking any woman. You also perceive that older women are clean and you don't use a condom with them. —man in North West

VOLUNTARY COUNSELING AND TESTING

If I want to know that I am HIV-negative, I will first make my woman pregnant and take my other one for testing. If she is pregnant obviously she will be tested for HIV. Unless I suspect anything from both of them I will go for testing. —man in Free State

SEEKING REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES IN PUBLIC HEALTH FACILITIES

Most of the nurses and caregivers in the clinics are women. It becomes difficult for men to undress in front of a woman. That is the reason they do not go to clinics. —man in Mpumalanga

SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND PREFERRED METHOD OF COMMUNICATION

I will do away with national events where they invite Mandoza with his "Nkalakatha." Those are not HIV-related information. What happens is that people will go and listen but after the event they drink and get exposed to the virus. We should attract political leaders to talk about HIV. The union should also take a stand and educate people because anything they say it is a go. —man in North West

Men like what we call "in your face communication." That is why things like campaigns don't make impact on them. Men are not detail-oriented. —man in North West

CONCLUSION

The study showed that men's behavior is more influenced by peers, role models, and self-discovery and less by media information. Men prefer the type of communication that is engaging such as men's forums, and they welcome information from their peers or someone they respect rather than from women or young people.

"If we have more of top people and politicians speak positively about these issues and lead, men will respond."

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Communication targeted at men concerning sexual and reproductive health should take the following into consideration:
 - Language
 - Location (rural vs urban)
 - Traditional and religious beliefs
 - Age
- Public health facilities should introduce male-friendly services:
 - Recruit more male nurses
 - Make service hours flexible to cater for working men; e.g. have an after-hours or weekend male clinic
- Male role models such as political leaders, unionists, celebrities, and traditional leaders should play an active role in taking sexual and reproductive health messages to men.
- Men should be targeted at places they frequent, such as sports fields, taverns, and workplaces.

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