

Male Provider Reproductive Health Training Program in Afghanistan

Background: One of the most critical, deeply-rooted obstacles in Afghan women's ability to regulate their fertility is uninformed men. In Afghanistan, a strongly patriarchal society, many women require men's permission to leave the house or seek health care. Since men literally control women's fate, involving men opens doors to women's use of reproductive health services. Recognizing the significance of male involvement, Family Health Alliance (FHA) designed a program titled, "Training male health providers in family planning/reproductive health as a portal to women," to promote/expand birth spacing and contraceptive use among male patients in rural areas. In 2007, this program was implemented as the first family planning/reproductive health training program for male health providers in Afghanistan. Due to its success, the program was expanded in 2008 and FHA conducted two additional training programs.

Design and Evaluation Methods: With the cooperation of the Ministry of Public Health, the program has trained a total of 89 male doctors and nurses (47 in 2007, 42 in 2008) from rural areas. Program objectives were to promote male involvement in family planning; increase contraceptive knowledge (particularly condoms/vasectomy); improve detection/treatment of sexually transmitted infections (STIs); and expand STIs/HIV education for men. The program employed an empowerment model of teaching, role models, self-reliance and teamwork strategies to address numerous challenges trainees face in a post-conflict environment. Evaluation: program conducted a pretest/posttest; and trainees were monitored for 60 days after the completion of the program.

Results/Outcomes and Challenges/Solutions: Program evaluation found a significant increase in trainee knowledge in both programs (mean pre- and post-scores 47 percent and 85 percent in 2007, 42 percent and 89 percent in 2008). Monitoring data indicates that male providers demonstrated a clear effort to provide counseling to their male patients. They counseled 3,200 male patients in 2007 and 4,470 in 2008 across five subcategories. 2007/2008 data: 92/93 percent of patients received counseling in birth spacing, 84/85 percent in male involvement, 87/91 percent in HIV/AIDS, 80/73 percent in condom as prevention, and 86/63 percent in referring wife to family planning clinic.

Conclusions: While originally considered controversial by some members of the Ministry of Public Health, FHA's male health provider training program has found that educating Afghan male health providers in family planning/reproductive health leads to their active participation in counseling their male patients on family planning to address low contraceptive use and high maternal mortality. The success of this program led to its expansion in 2008 and prompted policy changes to include training of male providers. In 2009, this program is to be incorporated into Afghanistan's national reproductive health training program.