

## **Assessing men's willingness to be included and involved in family planning in Nsanje district**

**Authors:** Catherine Goba, Dr Matembo Gondwe, Wilson Botha {MSc}, Kenneth Lemmson {MSc} **the presenting author**

### **Introduction**

The study was set out to find out if men are willing and ready to be involved in their wives sexual reproductive health {SRH} services in Nsanje district.

### **Methods**

Quasi-statistics were used to analyse data which were collected through individual household questionnaire. Cross-sectional study targeting 200 men aged 18 and above was also sampled from 10 urban and rural areas were involved.

In-depth interviews were used with 20 health facilities staff from 20 randomly selected facilities to collect data. SPSS was used to analyse data and simple random and other structured sampling technologies were also used. Men were asked questions covering a variety of topics on gender equality, parenting, sexual and reproduction health services and legislation on gender equality. The study targeted married women and men. Semi-structured interviews targeting Key informants {n=40} females=20, males=15 } and community members {n=70} females=40, males 60 } were involved in focus group discussion, participant direct observations and interviews content analysis was used to come up with themes from the data sets.

### **Results**

The study found that men are willing to be involved in their wives' family planning and maternal and neonatal {MN} health despite the continued ministry of health {MOH} women centred policy and strategies in dealing with MN health issues in the district. Around 85% of men did not provide any support to their wives during the birth of their last child and over half of the respondents said that family planning is the responsibility of their wives. Although around 60% of men are aware of the maternity leave policy, only less than 20% know about the paternity leave and most of them {over half} don't agree that this policy should be guaranteed by law. There is lack of deliberate engagement with men on the practical involvement expected of them as information is usually women centred. 45% of the men can be involved in supporting wives FP choices, usage and seeking alternative family planning methods. 30% of men were ready to be part of the wife's antenatal clinic {ANC} visits, knowledge of danger signs, and meeting needs like blood donation arrangement, support provision, and arrange for competent providers, even on supporting wife on Anti-Retroviral Therapy {ART}. Men can support nutritional needs of wives before and after delivery, help baby nursing among others.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

It is recommended that men's willingness to participate should be capitalised and hence MOH and other partners need to equip men with practical information and skills on the level of their involvement as through this, the high MN death rates in the district may be reduced. On the other hand, despite formulation of policies to promote men engagement in reproductive health, their involvement is still minimal and most of them are not aware of the said policies. Therefore, there is a need for a bottom up approach in policy formulation and we recommend community awareness campaigns for existing policies.