

# Family planning programs involving men, empower women

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In a society where women often lead very restricted lives and men are the primary household decision makers, new research suggests women are empowered when men are included in family planning programs. A study, from the Institute for Reproductive Health at Georgetown University Medical Center, suggests that addressing the dynamics between husbands and wives can result in women making more financial decisions and having more control over their social interactions, while at the same time meeting their family planning needs.

"Our study is one of the first to suggest that a relatively small adjustment in family programs can change perceptions about women's rights," says study author Rebecka Lundgren, MPH, director of research at IRH.

"Our study is about changing expectations—a woman's and those of her partner—about who is responsible for family planning by opening communication between them."

The study was conducted in rural India where community attitudes about masculinity and femininity have translated into deep-rooted discriminatory practices against girls and women. Street theatre and puppet shows provided information about contraceptive methods, couple communication and decision-making related to family planning and women's reproductive rights. These activities were designed to engage men in family planning.

Worldwide, family planning programs overwhelmingly focus on women alone rather than on men or couples. Since many women similarly lack

the decision-making power of the women in this study, whether due to cultural norms or lack of education or resources, these research findings may be applicable across a variety of settings.

The family planning options in this study were made available through Ministry of Health clinics and facilities operated by non-governmental organizations. One such method included in the program was the Standard Days Method®, a couple-centered family planning option developed and extensively tested by IRH.

The Standard Days Method, shown in previous studies to be easy to use and comparable in effectiveness to pills and condoms with typical use, requires agreement by the couple rather than the woman alone and continual female-male communication.

"We found that when women and their partners learned about the Standard Days Method, the method was readily adopted, resulting in women being able to meet their need for [family planning](#) and, rather surprisingly, to meet self-efficacy needs beyond reproduction—such as being able to leave the home to visit friends or shop—a dual effect," says Victoria Jennings, Ph.D., director of IRH, and professor of obstetrics and gynecology at Georgetown University Medical Center. She is a co-author of the new study and a co-developer of Standard Days Method.

The study, "Increasing literate and illiterate [women's](#) met need for contraception via empowerment: a quasi-experiment in rural India," appears online in the peer-reviewed journal *Reproductive Health*.

Provided by Georgetown University Medical Center

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