



THE ROLE OF FAITH LEADERS IN FAMILY PLANNING AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Authors:

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BACKGROUND

An estimated 218 million women and girls in low- and middle-income countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, have an unmet need for modern family planning. This study was conducted in Kenya and Ghana, both countries have diverse religious populations and face challenges in maternal and child health outcomes.

Ghana

MMR: 308 deaths per 100,000 live births (2017)

Under-5 mortality rate: 46 deaths per 1,000 live births (2019)

Kenya

MMR: 342 deaths per 100,000 live births (2017)

Under-5 mortality rate: 43 deaths per 1,000 live births (2019)

METHODS

Operations research, with a qualitative and quantitative baseline study conducted before the start of the CoH training for FLs, which has four phases to inform, deliberate, disagree, and educate on healthy timing and spacing of pregnancy (HTSP) and family planning (FP), implemented as follows:

- **Phase 1-Preparing:** World Vision and Ministry of Health (MOH) staff and supportive FLs are trained as CoH facilitators
- **Phase 2-Catalyzing:** FLs and their spouses are invited to attend a four-day workshop
- **Phase 3-Strategizing:** FLs select a small group from their congregations or community to assist in sharing information on HTSP/FP
- **Phase 4-Empowers:** FLs and small group. Here, they reach out to community influencers to join the family planning conversation.

CONCLUSIONS

The study of 4,372 mothers in Kenya and Ghana showed substantial increases in contraceptive knowledge after engaging faith leaders, with the highest gains for implants (18.4%), injectables (12.1%), and pills (11.2%). The intervention changed faith leaders' views on pregnancy spacing and timing, demonstrating that their engagement effectively promotes family planning uptake and demand, providing valuable insights for scaling this approach in other contexts.

Engaging faith leaders increases positive health behavior and social transformation for demand and uptake of FP.

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RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the impact of engaging faith leaders through the Channels of Hope (CoH) methodology on healthy timing and spacing of pregnancy and family planning in Kenya and Ghana?

CHANNELS OF HOPE

CoH is World Vision's strategy to leverage the influence of faith leaders (FLs) in addressing critical community issues. It combines faith perspectives with factual information to drive positive behavior change. It begins by addressing faith leaders' beliefs and attitudes and progresses to equipping them to influence their communities. Its components are interactive workshops, religious scripture-based discussions, and action planning for community engagement. This strategy can be tailored to different religious contexts (e.g., Christian, Muslim) and is flexible enough to address various health and social issues.

“To be truthful, before the CoH workshop, I knew about family planning, but I never used it because of my belief as a Muslim faith leader. But when we went to the workshop and they educated us on family planning, I accepted it and added it to my daily life to help myself, my family, and those that I lead in the community.”

“I felt very happy to be a part of the CoH project because it will help me as a faith leader to better educate my people and especially the youth on how to space their children when they get married. It will also help our wives with regards to their health and afford the men the opportunity to take good care of the children. It will guide me personally on how to space my children...”