

# Spouse Communication and Attitudes towards Contraceptive use among Married Women in Morogoro Municipality

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**Abstract:** *This study was conducted with the purpose of determining whether spouses communicate on matters related to reproduction in the study area and tried to find out whether there is any correlation with contraceptive behaviour. The study was conducted to a sample of 135 randomly selected married women aged between 15-49 years from Morogoro Municipality. It was found out from this study that, majority of respondents do have positive attitudes towards spouse communication on reproductive matters though in actual sense the number of those who actually communicate is low. Contraceptive use was found to be high among respondents with high and neutral attitude towards spouse communication and the same pattern was observed to those who reported to communicate with their spouse. Surprisingly, respondents with low levels of communication had also high current contraceptive use indicating that they use contraceptive covertly. The study recommends that, it is important that policy makers should emphasize on the strategies that encourage discussion between husband and wife about family planning. Furthermore, more effort should be made to make sure that continuation rate is also high as the current use and intention to use contraceptives is high in the study area.*

**Keywords:** Contraceptives, spouse communication, married women, family planning

## **INTRODUCTION**

The amount of communication that occurs between partners is positively associated with contraceptive use. A common assumption is that communication lead to family planning, but the reverse could also be true (Sharan, 2002). Many men and women fail to protect themselves against unplanned pregnancy and partly it is because they find it difficult, if not impossible, to discuss with their partners subjects related to sexuality (Kim, 2002).

Lack of communication about family planning may be associated with misperception about spouse view on family planning, which in turn, may inhibit mutual decision-making. In a study conducted in Zambia, revealed that the odd that a woman used contraceptive method covertly, rather than using no method were about four times as high among those who were not comfortable talking to their spouses about family planning (Sharan, 2002). Other factors include fatalism, perceived worthlessness of such discussions, dominance of relatives such as mother-in-law in reproductive related decisions and embarrassment about discussing family planning (Sharan, 2002 and Korra, 2001). These characteristics have been outlined as the major factors inhibiting fertility in most sub-Saharan African countries.

There is paucity of information in Tanzania regarding communication behaviour on contraceptive use and other reproductive matters. This study was therefore conducted to elucidate contraceptive behaviour mainly on the extent to which married couples communicate on use of various contraceptives and other reproductive matters in general.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

A cross sectional survey was conducted comprising of 135 randomly selected married women aged between 15-49 years in Morogoro Municipality. The choice of this age group was basically due to the fact that women in this group are in their reproductive age and are sexually active. Married women were used in this research as they are the ones who bear the brunt of birth and hence affected directly by not using contraceptives. A multistage sampling procedure was employed where by Morogoro Municipality having one division, three wards were then selected purposeful in order to apprehend respondents from various socio-economic conditions. The selected wards were Kihonda, Kilakala and Mazimbu and the sampling unit was households where these women live. Morogoro Municipality was chosen in order to cut research costs as the researcher was residing in Morogoro by the time this research was conducted. A structured questionnaire comprising a series of attitudinal questions was the main tool used to collect the data. The questionnaire was supplemented by focus group discussion (FGD). The FGD comprised 3 groups of 8-10 married women. The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as mean, frequency and percentages were computed to find distributions and magnitudes of individual variable among respondents.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Attitude towards spouse communication about reproductive matters**

The respondent's attitude towards spouse communication about family planning was derived by asking a series of attitudinal questions related to spouse communication on different aspects of reproduction. In all the items respondents were positive about the statements that encouraged communication and negative about those that discouraged spouse to have communication as displayed in Table 1. This indicates that respondents were willing to discuss with their partners different aspects related to family planning though, talking about reproductive health alone does not ensure that couples will take the next difficult step of making permanent behavioural changes that protect them against reproductive health dangers (Best, 2002).

**Table 1: Attitudes towards partner communication about family planning**

Attitudinal Statement	Responses (%) ( n = 135)					Total
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Husband and wife should discuss about a number of children they should have	56.3	39.3	0.7	1.5	2.2	100
Husband and wife should have joint decision about contraceptive use	51.9	45.2	0.7	2.2	0.0	100
Planning for a family is the responsibility of a husband	1.5	9.6	2.2	51.1	35.6	100
Communications between husband and wife should exclude family planning	5.9	11.1	1.5	45.2	36.3	100
Communications between husband and wife on postponing child bearing is not beneficial to the family	5.2	13.3	3.0	37.0	41.5	100
It is important to the spouses to communicate with each other on matters of family planning	59.0	37.3	0.7	3.0	0.0	100
Husband and wife should Discuss together if they want to delay child bearing	51.9	47.4	0.0	0.7	0.0	100
Men should be less involved in discussing about family planning with their wives	0.0	2.3	0.8	42.1	54.9	100
Communication between husband and wife about family planning should be encouraged	62.2	34.8	0.7	2.2	0.0	100
Husband and wife should never communicate about issues related to family planning	3.0	2.2	0.7	28.1	65.9	100

Examination of individual positive items in Table 1 implies that couples discussed about a number of children they should have (95.6%), decided jointly on contraceptive use (97%), and acknowledged the importance of husband and wife to communicate about family planning (96.3%). The respondents also strongly rejected the negative statements on absence of male involvement in discussion with partners on family planning matters (81.5%), and that family planning is the responsibility of the father (86.6%). This confirms their positive attitudes towards spouse communication.

These results conform with those of Mwangeni (1996), who alluded that decisions about reproductive matters are actually group discussions; at the lowest levels they involve one man and one woman. A study done in Nepal reported that, couples who communicate may perceive their spouses to be more supportive, feel less fatalistic about child bearing and more in control of their reproductive decisions, and be less embarrassed about discussing these issues (Sharan and Valente, 2000). In addition, communication between partners may symbolize social interactions and encouragements between them. Further more, inter-partner communications may denote egalitarian relations among partners.

***Index of attitude towards spouse communication about reproductive matters***

The respondent’s attitude towards spouse communication about family planning was derived through asking a series of attitudinal questions. Responses were grouped into three categories namely; agree, uncertain and disagree. In all positive statements every ‘Agree’ response was represented by 3 while ‘Uncertain’ was represented by 2 and ‘Disagree’ was presented by 1. For all negative statements every ‘Agree’ response was represented by 1, while ‘Uncertain’ was represented by 2 and ‘Disagree was represented by 3.

**Table 2: Frequency of index of attitudes towards spouse communication on reproductive matters**

Scores	Percent (n= 135)
18	0.8
20	0.8
23	1.5
24	1.5
25	0.8
26	12.1
27	2.3
28	20.5
29	5.3
30	54.5
<b>Cumulative index on level of attitude towards communication</b>	
Positive	98.4
Neutral	0.8
Negative	0.8

From the results cumulative indices were derived for the levels of attitudes. The scores ranged from 10 to 30. The scores were further categorized into negative, neutral and positive, where by cumulative score of less than 19 was considered as negative, 19-20 neutral and 21 and above, positive as indicated in Table 2.

Results in Table 2 show that majority of respondents had positive attitudes towards husband and wife communication on reproductive matters. This implies that women acknowledge and value involvement of both sexes in communication on reproductive matters. Unfortunately men were not interviewed to give their opinion in this aspect, though Peter, Ebenezer and Ayotunde (2009), reported that, most men who have low education and reside in rural areas could make own decisions on reproductive matters (even if the matters were discussed with wives). Such attitude can be explained by the man's desire to boost his ego by showing that he is in control.

### **Attitudes towards communication and contraceptive use**

Attitude towards communication were further related to contraceptive use. The results in Table 3 reveal that the current use of contraceptives is high for respondents who have positive and neutral attitude towards communication (76.6% and 100%) respectively, as compared to those with negative attitude (00%). This is not surprising as it is expected that positive attitude towards communication may lead to contraceptive use though it is not a guarantee of actual contraceptive use. Generally intention to use contraceptives was equally high in all levels connoting that majority of respondents have positive attitude towards partners' communication.

**Table 3: Attitudes towards communication and contraceptive use (%)**

<b>Attitude</b>	<b>Current use</b>	<b>Intention to use</b>
Positive	76.6	66.4
Neutral	100	100
Negative	00	100
<b>All</b>	<b>75.9</b>	<b>67.7</b>

### **Spouse communication on reproductive matters**

Levels of spouse communication as reported by respondents are presented in Tables 4. Generally it can be noted that spouse communication is practiced in the study area although a reasonable number of women do not discuss with their partners on several issues related to family planning. Analysis by specific items shows that women are likely to have talked about number of children they should have (69.6%), as well as family planning including the use of specific contraceptive methods a year before the survey (54.1%). Discussion on family planning matters a month before the survey was less common (31.2%). Numerous studies show that the amount of communication that occurs between partners is positively associated with contraceptive use (Peter, Ebenezer and Ayotunde, 2009) but still spouse communication concerning contraception, especially in developing countries, remain rare (Sharan and Valente, 2002). In a study conducted in Kenya, it was pointed out during focus group discussions that cultural beliefs, ignorance and

men's lack of cooperation are the main barriers to communication between partners on contraception (Bauni, et al., 2003).

**Table 4: Percentage distribution of Spouse discussion about reproductive matters**

Type of discussion	Percent	
	Yes	No
Discussed with partner about the number of children they should have	69.6	30.4
Discussed with partner about family planning in the past year	54.1	45.9
Discussed with partner about family planning in the past month	31.2	68.8
Discussed with partner about using a contraceptive method in the past year	57.1	42.9
Discussed with partner about using a contraceptive method in the past month	44.6	55.4

Results also showed that, there was little variation between respondents who discuss family planning in general and those who talk about using a specific method. While about 54% of respondents reported to have discussed family planning with their partners a year before the survey, about 57% reported to have discussed about using a specific method in the same period. This suggests that the majority of respondents reported to have discussed family planning they also discussed the use of specific contraceptive method. The results conform to those of Sharan and Valente (2002) in a study conducted in Nepal, where 66% of respondents who discussed about family planning they also made a joint decision on contraceptive use.

Furthermore, the results revealed that, there is a drop in the proportion of respondents who discussed family planning in the previous year (54.1%) as compared to the past month (31.2%). On comparing these results and those presented in Table 4, it implies that most married women are willing to discuss family planning matters with their husbands, however, the reality paint a different picture. Perhaps a better explanation for this is due to inferior position of women as compared to men, which makes them unable to spark such discussions given their social and economic vulnerability (Sharan and Valente, 2002). An index was prepared to test whether there is communication between husband and wife on reproductive matters.

A set of questions were asked to respondents. For each variable, every 'Yes' response was given a value of 1, which indicate that there was communication, and 'No' response was given a value of 0, meaning there was no communication. The indices ranged from 0-5. Arbitrary categories were assigned whereby an index of less than 2 was assigned low, 3 medium and high 4 to 5.

The majority of the respondents were in low category accounting for about more than a half. This means, though the majority of respondents had positive attitudes towards communication, in actual sense only a quarter did communicate. These findings are also supported by Sharan and Valente (2002), who reported that spouse

communication concerning contraception; especially in developing countries remain rare. This is mostly because women social and economic vulnerability nihility to express and argue for their own interest with their husbands (Sharan and Valente, 2002).

**Table5: Frequency of index of communication on reproductive matters**

Scores	Percent ( n =135)
0	21.5
1	19.3
2	11.9
3	22.2
4	13.3
5	11.9
<b>Levels of Communication</b>	
Low	52.6
Medium	22.2
High	25.2

A study conducted in Tanzania revealed that, participants understood that family planning is a means for spacing or limiting births for the welfare of the mother and child. However, according to the focus groups, men consider it a responsibility of the women and women consider it a responsibility of both partners. It was also pointed out that cultural beliefs, ignorance, and men’s lack of cooperation are the main barriers to communication between partners on contraception (Riwa and Ngirwamungu, 1998)

***Communication on reproductive matters and contraceptive use***

Communication on reproductive matters was farther related with contraceptive use to find out whether there is any relationship between the two variables, and the results are as presented in Table 6.

**Table 6: Communication on reproductive matters and contraceptive use**

Communication level	Current use	Intention to use
Low	72.5	75.8
Medium	73.3	62.1
High	85.3	56.3
<b>All</b>	<b>75.9</b>	<b>67.7</b>

As regards this aspect, the results of this study show that the current use of contraceptives is generally high, and it is highest among the respondents with high levels of communication as expected. A common assumption is that communication leads to contraceptive use, but the reverse could also be true (Sharan and Valente, 2002). Surprisingly respondents with low levels of communication had also high current contraceptive use. This suggests that some women feel uncomfortable about discussing family planning matters with their spouse. This may reflect their conservatism or ignorance, which largely prevailed in past in most traditional

African societies. Intention to use contraceptives was slightly lower than the current use and much lower for those who have high levels of communication. This could be that those women are aged and hence they don't need contraceptives.

### **Frequency of communication about reproductive matters**

Respondents were asked whether they have discussed about family planning in the previous month. Results in table 7 revealed that more than half of respondents (54.8%) reported that they did not discuss. Respondents who reported to have discussed about reproductive matters with their partners were further requested to state the number of times they had done so a month before the survey. The results show that, majority of the respondents they did discuss about family planning and contraceptive use once or twice a month before the survey.

**Table 7: Respondents communications about family planning in the previous month**

<b>Frequency</b>	<b>About family planning ( n=60)</b>	<b>About using a method ( n=60)</b>
1	47.5	21.4
2	39.3	28.6
3	4.9	7.1
4	1.6	7.1
5	1.6	2.4
6	0	9.5
7	0	11.9
8	0	00
9	1.6	00
10	1.6	00
11	1.6	00
15	1.6	4.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

### **Index of communication about family planning and contraceptive use**

In order to get detailed information, index of communication about family planning was related with contraceptive use in order to see whether there is any relationship with contraceptive use as shown in Table 8. Results show that, current use of contraceptives is relatively high to respondents in all levels of communication about family planning. It is much higher for those with higher level of communication as it is expected that communication about family planning may lead to contraceptive use. These results were also supported by a study conducted by Fikree Khan, Kadir, Sajan and Rahbar (2001), who found out that low level of communication between spouses about reproductive matters are correlated with women's low levels of contraceptive use.



**Table 8: Index of communication about family planning and contraceptive Use**

<b>Contraceptive Use</b>		
<b>Category</b>	<b>Current use ( % )</b>	<b>Intention to use ( % )</b>
Low	74.6	65
Medium	75	100
High	100	100
<b>All</b>	<b>75.9</b>	<b>67.7</b>

Surprisingly the current use is also high even for those with low levels of communication. This means, even when communication is low, women do use contraceptive covertly. In a study conducted in Uganda, it was found out that some women preferred to use injectable forms of contraception because it allowed them to prevent further pregnancies without their husband's knowledge. It was also revealed that many women preferred to keep the records at the health centre so that their use of the services could be kept discreet (Nattabi, Jianghong Li, Thompson, Orach, and Earnest 2011). A similar study done in Tanzania, reported that some couples, do discuss issues such as childbearing and fertility regulations. Nevertheless, when it does not happen, women use contraceptives secretly (Riwa and Ngirwamungu, 1998). The same pattern appears to the intention to use contraceptives in future. The intention is high to all levels but much higher to those with medium to high communication as expected.

## **CONCLUSION**

It was found from this study that spousal communication is one of the determinants of contraceptive use. Generally respondents showed a great need for communication though only a quarter reported to communicate about reproductive issues. Majority of those who reported to communicate they are also using contraceptives. Strangely great number of those who reported not to discuss they are also using contraceptive but covertly. This means for a good number of respondents their contraceptive use is influenced by factors other than discussion with their spouses.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study recommends that:

- More effort should be made to ensure that continuation rate of contraceptive use is also high as the current use and intention to use contraceptives was high in the study area.
- Different approaches should be sought apart from the present ones of husband and wife to attend clinic. It was found out during focus group discussion that majority of men were not ready to attend clinics with their wife as it is a “woman thing”
- Family planning programmes should find strategies that will encourage exchange of ideas between husband and wife on family planning matters. Encouraging husband and wife to talk about family planning and use of specific contraceptive methods will not only lead to more contraceptive use but also improve the status of women in the country
- National Family Planning Programme (NFPP) in Tanzania should take actions to encourage involvements of men in family planning as they have their

contribution on the use of contraceptives. During focus group discussions, respondents pleaded for involvement of men in family planning especially through educating them so that they become part and parcel of contraceptive use, and this will give women peace of mind as they will use contraceptives without fear of being caught using it.

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