

# Male Engagement Bylaws: Unintended Consequences Impacting Care for Single Pregnant Women in Rural Tanzania



Dismas Matovelo<sup>1</sup>, Boniphace Maendeleo<sup>1</sup>, Wemaeli Mweteni<sup>3</sup>, Victoria Kanuti<sup>1</sup>, Rose Laisser<sup>1</sup>, and Jennifer L Brenner<sup>2</sup>

1. Catholic University of Health and Allied Sciences, Tanzania, 2. University of Calgary, Canada 3. Bugando Medical Center, Tanzania

## Background

- Promoting health facility attendance for antenatal care (ANC) in low-resourced settings is critical to target maternal and newborn mortality reduction<sup>1,2</sup>.
- In low- and middle-income countries, men are the decision makers in families.
- To address gender and equity issues in Misungwi district in rural Tanzania, we conducted a qualitative study to better understand barriers to ANC services.



## Objective

- To understand the challenges of increasing male attendance to ANC visits through lived experiences.

## Methods

- Trained facilitators used semi-structured guides to gain insight into experiences and perspectives on ANC services through:

1. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

2. In-depth Interviews (IDIs)

3. Key Informant Interview (KIs)

- Participants were purposively selected to represent communities, health providers, and decision-makers.
- Discussions were audio-recorded, transcribed, translated, then coded into NVivo 12 to analyze key and emerging themes.

## Results

- Data from 12 FGDs, 10 IDIs, and 10 KIs revealed important barriers to care-seeking such as:

A common belief that pregnancy is normal

"...she knows how to cut the umbilical cord; we have never seen any problem she just gives birth safely" – husband (IDI)

Pregnant women can only attend ANC appointments when accompanied by a male

"Health care providers do not allow a woman to go without her husband, she has to get a letter from the hamlet leader indicating that she has not been married. If she says that the husband is traveling, health care providers will demand that she wait until he returns" – women (FGD)

A fear of learning HIV status

"They are worried to be tested for HIV. They just say you go alone, if you are HIV negative am also negative, they are afraid to be tested" – pregnant woman (IDI)

Perceptions of poor treatment at health facilities

"There was one man who came with his wife with one pair of khanga, and when that woman gave birth that man was forced to give his shirt in order to evacuate his wife's blood, that man was embarrassed" – woman (FGD)

## Discussions

- Male accompaniment is enforced in most health facilities in Misungwi district<sup>2</sup> – in some cases, women need written permission from local leaders to seek services alone.
- However, men often fear attending ANC visits or do not feel welcome at the health facilities.
- These practices highly impact women, especially single women, by considerably delaying access to ANC.



## Conclusion

In order to increase male involvement in ANC and reduce maternal mortality:

- Health facilities must work closely with communities to address concerns of both women and men regarding ANC visits.
- In additions, policy makers must engage health facilities in increasing male involvement in ANC services in a way that does not create barriers for women.

## Acknowledgements

Mama na Mtoto implementation was undertaken with the financial support of the Government of Canada provided through Global Affairs Canada. Mama na Mtoto research was also carried out with the aid of a grant from the Innovating for Maternal and Child Health in Africa initiative, a partnership of Global Affairs Canada, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, and Canada's International Development Research Centre.

## References

- Dudgeon MR, Inhorn MC. Men's influence on women's reproductive health: medical anthropological perspectives. *Soc Sci Med.* 2004;59:1379–1395.
- Penezaa AK, Malukaba SO. Unless you come with your partner you will be sent back home': strategies used to promote male involvement in antenatal care in Southern Tanzania. *Global health action.* 2018;11: 1449724